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Children Between Analogic and Digital TV: The Italian Case

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Abstract

In this paper I discuss the most interesting data resulting from an analysis of analogical television programs addressed to children. I will describe the satellite Tv offer targeting younger users, and I will analyze the responses, in terms of audience, of this category of media consumers. From the comparison of analogical and digital television stands out a new typology of media consumption, characterized by a greater choice and, consequently, by the very high critical ability of children, who appear to be “innovative” interpreters of media texts.

I notice that the Sky offer destined to children is definitely much richer than the present broadcasting available on analogical channels. I will show that the new pattern of digital programming proposes a “communication agreement” that is less binding than a common medium”.

In questo articolo analizziamo i dati più interessanti emersi dall’analisi della tv analogica destinata ai bambini; descriveremo, poi, l’offerta televisiva satellitare per i piccoli fruitori, esaminando naturalmente anche le risposte, in termini di audience, di questi consumatori mediali. Dal confronto dei palinsesti analogici e digitali emerge una nuova tipologia di consumo mediale, caratterizzato da un’ampia mobilità di scelta e da una conseguente spiccata capacità critica dell’audience dei piccoli, che si rivelano “intraprendenti” interpreti dei testi mediali. Di certo l’offerta che Sky riserva ai bambini è decisamente ricca rispetto ai pochi appuntamenti in chiaro su analogico da noi rilevati. Dimostreremo che il nuovo modello di offerta digitale propone un “patto comunicativo” meno vincolante rispetto al *medium* generalista.

Children Between Analogic and Digital TV: The Italian Case

Antonia Cava*

1. *The Theoretical Way*

“Electronic babysitter”, unfaithful servant” and “thief of time”¹ are only some of the names given to television in recent debates on the role this communication medium plays in the everyday life of young users. The dilemma between a television as the most diffused medium of the symbolic representation of reality which stimulates towards an imitative process (mimesis), or a television which, thanks to the spectacular representation of events leads to a critical far-sightedness that exorcizes the action (catharsis), regards, in particular, an audience of minors².

In reality, the debate on the relationship between television and children shows the features of the recognized classical dichotomy between apocalyptic and integrated³: on one side “a bad teacher television”⁴, which makes this audience a fatal victim of

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¹ Condry, J. (1993), *Thief of Time, Unfaithful Servant, Television and the American child*, DEADALUS, Vol 122, n.1, winter.

² For a more critical vision on concepts of mimesis and catharsis see Baudrillard, J.(1976), *L'Échange symbolique et la mort*, Gallimard, Paris; (English translation) *Symbolic exchange and death* (1993), London, Sage.

³Ref.: U.Eco. *Apocalittici e integrati*, Bompiani, Milan 1964; (english translation) *Apocalypse postponed* (1994), Indiana U.P., Bloomington.

⁴ According to Popper, television follows a process of continuous deterioration, its contents addressed to sensationalism are poorer and poorer, the philosopher's proposal recommends the surveillance over the tv product at the time of its creation. “[N]ow

media contents (taking into consideration the incapability of children to defend themselves from the messages broadcast by television), and on the other side “a television useful to children”⁵ which considers the young social actors as talented interpreters of contents, negating the hypothesis of a “media hypnosis”. TV, according to this point of view, exerts its effects in a special social context where enjoyment takes place and not in an interactive void.

In the international and national literature the apocalyptic standpoint prevailed during the seventies, giving way to a more articulated vision in the eighties. Obviously the characterization of these periods is an attempt to clarify a complex operation. In order to illustrate the evolution of research on mass-media effects on children, it is possible to create these *time frames* which if on one side reduce the relationships among the different approaches, that simultaneously mark the study of mass-media audiences, on the other are the key to simplify the interlacement where the theories on mass-media effects often converge.

In the seventies the research condemned violent and antisocial images, sexual and racial stereotypes, “appealing” commercials which made children passive and undefended video-dependent subjects.

Postman believed that television was the cause of the inhibition of children’s creative capabilities and imagination, considering the intense media fruition as

the point is that television be a part of children’s environment and it is a part of which we are obviously responsible, since it concerns an aspect of the environment created by man... Anyone linked to tv production must have an authorization, a license, a patent, which can be withdrawn for good if the holder’s behaviour is in contrast with certain principles“. Ref.: Popper K.R., Condry J. (1994), *Cattiva Maestra Televisione*, Reser, Milan. pages 19-22.

⁵ Morcellini underlines the interpretative competence of young audience. Moreover, by proving how much the passivity, always attributed to the youngest audience when watching tv, is an image which does not reflect the reality where, more and more evidently, the medium consumption takes the feature of polyhedral nature. Ref.: Morcellini M., (1999), *La Tv fa bene ai bambini*, Meltemi, Rome.

the cause of the reduction of their efficiency at school and of the decrease of the time dedicated to reading⁶.

Violence on TV and its effect on children is also the topic of Gerbner's research which leads to the formulation of the well-known theory on cultivation, which excludes direct and imitative effects on behaviour, but makes other assumptions as to the perception of social reality.

According to Gerbner, television cultivates, from the very beginning of childhood, choices and attitudes that in the past were acquired through other sources of socialization. In fact, since his or her birth the child is integrated into the dimension of television; and TV is the most important *storyteller* of life and of the world⁷.

Many researches, by using Gerbner's approach, tried to prove the harmful effects of intense TV watching⁸.

Only during the eighties did we start to consider the role of social and psychological elements in the relationship between television and its audience of children.

Gunter, for instance, in contrast with Gerbner's *Cultivation Theory*, asserts the presence of a *selecting-viewing hypothesis*. He criticizes the study model of the effects considering the audience as passively receptive. According to Gunter, viewers, even children, are active in selecting what they watch on television and their perceptions and misunderstandings of the objects

⁶ Postman N., (1982), *The disappearance of childhood*, Delacorte, New York.

⁷ Gerbner G., (1990) "Epilogue: Advancing on the Path of Righteousness (Maybe)", in Signorielli N., Morgan M., *Cultivation analysis. New directions in Media Effects Research*, sage Publications, Newbury Park, pages 249-262.

⁸ See Sprafkin, J. N., Liebert M.R., (1978), "Sex-Typing and Children's Television Preferences", in Tuchman G., Daniels A.K., Benet J., *Hearth and Home. Images of Women in the Mass Media*, Oxford University Press, New York; Morgan M., (1982), "Television and adolescent's sex role stereotypes. A Longitudinal study", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol.43, pages 947-955.

of their viewing could be often mediated by their inclinations which lead to the context of their fruition⁹.

This research underlines that TV consumption is not a one-way experience for young viewers, but a means through which it is possible to view a series of entertainment, fictional and informative programs that ever more often under the viewer's control¹⁰.

Television enjoyment is interpreted as an occasion for socialization, and we begin to understand that children's learning capabilities filter television contents. This research underlines the importance of studying children in the natural context of TV enjoyment, observing the interactions that take place during the viewing¹¹.

Therefore, the attention of the studies does not focus on the effects of television contents, but on viewer consumption.

Lull investigates the use and the type of satisfaction received by this particular audience from the vision of television programs, showing that children use television mainly in order to obtain information and amusement. He also underlines the social uses of this medium, as a way for the creation of relationships with companions or, vice versa, as a means to avoid moments of uneasiness¹². Dorr states that children are able to understand and select TV products, even though they have a poor knowledge of the world; in fact, according to this author's assumption, children-viewers construct the sense of media contents¹³.

⁹Gunter, B., (1986), *Television and sex role stereotyping*, John Libbey.

¹⁰Gunter B., McAleer, J.L., *Children and television, The one-eyed monster?*, Routledge, London.

¹¹ See Palmer, P., (1986), *The Lively Audience, A Study of Children around the Tv set*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney; Berry G., Asamen J.K. (edited by), *Children & Television, Images in a Changin Sociocultural World*, sage Publications, Newbury Park.

¹²Lull, J. (1980), "The social uses of Television", in *Human Communication Research*, vol. 6, pages 197-209.

¹³ Dorr, A.; (1986), *Television and Children. A Special Medium for a Special Audience*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills.

On an international level a work of Buckingham proposes a clear general view on recent changes in childhood and in the media world¹⁴. The author compares the so many theories of negative influence of media to the vivid optimism which supports the development of the “electronic generation”. Starting from the numerous research done in this field, he suggests once more the consolidated tradition of the studies on the effects of media on minors¹⁵.

Among the most known contributions of Italian research on the effects of television on children let us recall two works which focus on the analysis of use by children.

Manna underlines the crucial filtering role exerted by the family on the relationship between children and television.

The global and present environmental context in which the communication process takes place, the role of family and of school, individual features and personal tendencies, behavioural rules, which were previously internalized, in reality, favour models of “selective use” of the message, in a primary or secondary pattern, which make useless all attempts to force the communication phenomenon into a conceptual and totally comprehensive scheme¹⁶.

Even Statera, Bentivegna and Morcellini affirm the existence of an interactive process between children and television, studying in particular the contents of commercials. They underline the youngest audience’s ability to comprehend, select and criticize television

¹⁴Buckingham D.; (2004), *Né con la Tv, né senza la Tv. Bambini, media e cittadinanza nel XXI secolo*, FrancoAngeli, Milan.

¹⁵ See Buckingham, D., (1993), *Children Talking Television: The Making of Television Literacy*, London, The Falmer Press; Id., (1996), *Moving Images. Understanding children’s emotional responses to television*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York.

¹⁶ Manna, E., (1982), *Età evolutiva e televisione. Livelli di analisi e dimensione della fruizione*, Eri, Rome, page 24 (my translation).

messages: the effects of television are mediated by previous knowledge¹⁷.

In any case, both in Italy and in other countries, the importance of the study on the use of television by minors and the patterns of consumption through the various media is taken into consideration: television often does not prevail, but it is definitely very important, as proven by the aforementioned studies on fruition.

Therefore, among the several topics studied by researchers in the communication field, we find that the relationship between television and children is assuming special connotations: It seems that the debate slowly goes along the path of saturation, almost believing in the assumption that the observation of consumption behaviour by the youngest audience in comparison with other media is much more up-to-date. On the other side, over the years the multidisciplinary feature of the topic itself seems to have created more contrasts than occasions for co-operation, contributing to the formation of a frameset in which every single approach is so firmly confined to its viewpoint, without creating any progress in the study of the entire phenomenon. Thus, excellent research has been published, but it pays the price for having been elaborated in an unidirectional way. We think this does not allow one to focus on important variables and to correctly understand the changing of the media panorama destined precisely to children.

We briefly linger, closing our examination on Italian and international literature, on the developments achieved, in the most recent Italian publications, in the debate on children and television; we are then going to illustrate our line of research on programming and media consumption in the passage from analogical to digital.

We begin with a study by Squillaci, a sort of “self-defence manual”, as the author himself defines it. The attempt is to provide with some actual suggestions, to be

¹⁷ Statera, G., Bentivegna S., Morcellini M. (1990), *Crescere con lo spot. Pubblicità televisiva e socializzazione infantile*, Nuova Eri, Rome.

used in any family context, in order to enhance the positive aspects of television. In fact, the idea for the book came from meetings on this topic that paediatrician had with mothers and teachers, leading to the suspicion that an uncontrolled use of the remote control might cause some unpleasant consequences. Squillaci bases his theory on paleotelevision and neotelevision, underlining the entrepreneurial feature that characterizes today's television system, a monster, in his thoughts, which produces false needs from which one can defend himself by using some "golden rules". We consider reductive such a reading of these aspects of the relationship between children and TV. In fact, we do not believe in the existence of a guidebook effective in all circumstances. Even though teaching his own children on how to switch off the TV set, protesting any time a program either of poor quality or unsuitable, is aired during safe viewing times, stimulating schools to train children for a critical viewing of programs, not using TV as a reward or a punishment can sometimes be useful suggestions, we note, in the absence of the child's point of view, a structural scarcity in the analysis of the interaction between children and the TV screen¹⁸. In comparison with Squillaci's remark on the significant negative effects determined by an incorrect use of television, a definitely less apocalyptic position comes to light: in fact, Callari Galli carries out research, with an ethnographical approach, on children's television reception. The study highlights the relationship between children and TV which is very distant from the idea of passive reception that animates the pages of the aforesaid manual. A pathway among the images, messages and reception processes concerning children's television; a tribe, that of today's children, which provides us with new ways and original interpretations of the concept of the usage of the text of television, enriching with complexity and more nuances to the study of the media phenomenon. Callari Galli

¹⁸ Squillaci, A. T. (2004) *Bambini e Televisione. Piccolo vademecum per un uso consapevole della tv*, cittàcalabriaedizioni, Soveria Mannelli.

contributes to the valorization of young viewers who from the object of observation, become main characters of the interpretation of the media content¹⁹.

Halfway between the vision of TV as a spectre to be exorcized according to Squillaci's point of view and, in contrast, the benevolent look at the screen proposed by Callari Galli, we find Oliverio Ferraris' contribution, where television is considered neither a miracle box nor a devil's trap. The heart of the solution of the dilemma concerning television as a good or bad teacher stands, in the author's opinion, in learning how children can become more selective young viewers, in enabling them to understand the language of images and to manage this kind of communication for their own sake. Even in this case, we believe this type of user's manual, with actual examples, tables and exercises to be carried out together, cannot constitute a real guide for parents and teachers, valuable in any occasion of media viewing. However, in the book, the image of the television "monster" appears distant, rather reduced to a playful and instructive function²⁰.

With regard to the works that deal with television and education, as previously referred to, Arnoldi's research examines the phenomenon from another perspective: the interaction between the symbolic universe of TV, on one side, and of family, on the other, which is the chosen particular point of view. A book on television observed and analysed in its several dimensions in a manner attentive to the dynamics, exigencies and experience of everyday family life²¹. The attempt to understand the best use of TV that any

¹⁹ Callari Galli, M. (2004) *La Tv dei bambini, i bambini della Tv. Etnografia dell'esperienza televisiva infantile*, BUP, Bologna.

²⁰ Oliverio Ferraris, A. (2004), *Tv per un figlio*, Laterza, Rome-Bari

²¹ In the first part the author illustrates a brief history of the evolution of television; in the second he analyzes how television represents the family, highlighting the educational consequences of this "dissertation" that television makes on family and its values; in the end, in the third part, he describes how family uses tv. See Arnoldi, P. (2004), *La Tv risorsa educativa. Uno sguardo familiare sulla televisione*, Edizioni San Paolo, Milan.

family can make in the intimacy of the home is the goal of this path. Television can actually be, according to Arnoldi, an educational “resource”, taking into consideration both its capabilities and its limits. In our opinion the book is perfectly balanced, since it does neither intend to teach how to use TV nor does it condemn the medium or strenuously defend it. It is a “familiar” look at the “permanent guest” in the living room. Continuing the description of methods in which, during the last years, the debate on children and TV have developed, let us recall Salvatori’s work of 2005, in which we find several contributions from sociology, history, psychology, study of the media and anthropology; thanks to these disciplines the author analyses the single man both in his specific subjectivity and in his history as a social being. Even though the psychoanalytical trace, which deals with the intended ego is evident both as a bodily compulsion and as an adjustment to reality, the author’s intention is clear in contextualizing the topic of the investigation, when the social experience of television is treated.

According to Salvatori any debate must be taken back to its own cultural background, and in this way the focus on the culture of infancy is explained. The perspective of the text is definitely psychological, including both the analysis of the culture and of the differentiating elements which come from the biological, psychological, socio-cultural and temporal development of infancy. On the other hand, in Salvatori’s opinion, more than placing the young viewer in a context, it is necessary to help him/her to decipher the contents and the language of television of which, in the work, the function of social integration, as a means of contact among children, is underlined.

The web of the different points of view from which we examine the interaction between young viewers and television leaves the forefront, in this work, in favour of the psychological and pedagogic approach, but even in presence of this clear perspective, we must make a real effort to take note of the child-consumer dimension²².

²² Salvatori, C. (2005), *Bambini e televisione*, Liguori, Naples.

Now, we refer to a new point of view, Johnson's, which upsets the opinion that the majority of products of mass culture are harmful, and according to this approach, what they have in common is, above all, a progressive learning complexity, which continuously stimulates our capabilities, encouraging the "telescopic thought" characterized by the creation/production of learning links among the parts. At this point, the reference to children and adolescents extraordinarily skillful at technologies, who, thanks to the use of video-recorders, videogames and computers, have absorbed some abstract principles they can apply to any complex system, is necessary. Therefore, it is not important to know how a thing works, but to know how to understand its workings, and the very same principle is valid for learning skills.

In fact, Johnson invites us to see television not as a negative element in the development of a child's learning process, appreciating in this way, on the other hand, the positive aspects for the increasing potential of the possibility, in order to exploit the above aspects and make them explicit. This emphasizing look at the interaction between the youngest viewers and media stands on the line of our considerations about the relationship which binds minors to the magic screen²³.

The 6th *National Report on the Condition of Infancy and Adolescence*, carried out by Eurispes, treats media and communication, and in this report we can see the development of an analysis on the hours of a child's everyday life: in a statistic sample of 2500 boys, representing the Italian population of minors between 5 and 13 years of age, it appears that, on the average, every child has 4 hours and 37 minutes to devote to leisure. The activities, they devote more time to, are watching TV (29%, for about 1 hour and 20 min), outdoor soccer (17%, for at least 45 min) and going out (16% for about 44 min). Every day 15% of free time,

²³ Johnson, S. (2005), *Everything Bad is Good for You: Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter*, Riverhead Hardcover.

about 41 min., is devoted to study, whereas 12% to play at home. Taking into account the daily number of hours devoted to sport activities, 14 minutes a day are devoted to practice. The free time reserved to the use of videogames is 3%; the remaining 3% is equally shared among the use of computers, reading books and comics. Considering the investigation into television domain, the topic inherent to our research, even though the vast majority of children watches TV and even though there are those for whom watching television does not represent a daily habit, we noticed a remarkable percentage of very young viewers whose main daily interest is the enjoyment of television broadcasting²⁴.

We finally recommend the reading of D'Amato's recent work on children and TV, a reflection on the offer of programs and on the identity of the formulated infancy: the research is divided into two parts: the analysis of the content of the programs addressed to children and the representation of children on the screen. The investigation tries to capture the symbolic imaginary universe offered to children by media and the role of the child, who, at same time, is subject and object of the representation.

In fact, the topic of the research is to characterize myths, values and behavioural patterns on one side, and to understand how infancy appears in the media world on the other ²⁵.

²⁴ Eurispes-Telefono Azzurro (2005), *6° Rapporto Nazionale sulla Condizione dell'Infanzia e dell'Adolescenza*, Eurispes, Rome.

²⁵M. D'Amato (edited by), *Bambini multimediali*, Quaderni del Centro Nazionale di Documentazione e Analisi per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, Centro Stampa della Scuola Sarda Editrice, Cagliari 2006, page 28 (*my translation*). The research is the last and up-to-date stage of an investigation started on materials from 1954 from RAI Archives and carried out with the aid of the method of the content analysis, beginning from 1985. See M. D'Amato (1988), *Per amore, per gioco, per forza*, RAI-ERI ; Id. (1989), *Lo schermo incantato. La Tv dei ragazzi in Italia*, Editori Riuniti, Roma; Id. (1997), *Bambini e Tv*, Il Saggiatore, Milano; Id. (2002), *La Storia della Tv dei ragazzi*, Eri.

The results of the survey show an imaginary tele-broadcast world which refers to traditional schemes.

The lives of these characters takes place in the intimacy of the everyday life mainly spent at home, the most important value is sympathy, used, above all, as a behavioural strategy in the relationship with others. It seems that there is no power in this world if we observe that the vast majority of heroes fights against it and that evil is represented by those who are empowered. There is no future in these stories, nor a negligible past, everything flows away and happens in the present within smaller and smaller environments²⁶.

D'Amato's work concerns the careful monitoring of the contents broadcast by the *analogical medium* and destined to the youngest audience; this is a moment of profound analysis on the relationship between children and the media that is so often neglected by those approaches which underestimate the active role of these users.

This is the crucial reference point on which our research is focused.

Our study analyzes this audience, starting from a previous research which focused on the target of young viewers²⁷. If in our previous study we focused our attention on how the analogical programming interacted with children's preferences about the media, now we intend to investigate new aspects of TV consumption in comparison with digital alternatives.

We begin our work by synthesizing the most interesting data coming from our analysis on analogical television addressed to children; then we shall go on with the description of the satellite TV offer for young users, with an examination of the responses, in terms of

²⁶ My translation

²⁷ The research was the outcome of a new elaboration carried out by the interdisciplinary didactic laboratory "*La Tv per bambini e per ragazzi: modalità di ricezione e linguaggi*", at the Philosophy Department of the University of Catania. See. Sardo R., Centorrino M., Caviezel G. (2004), *Dall'Albero Azzurro a Zelig: modelli e linguaggi della tv vista dai bambini*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli.

audience, of this category of media consumers. Therefore, our goal will be the focus on important variables for the correct reception of the changing of panorama of media destined precisely to children. Finding links with the school of *cultural studies*²⁸ we focus our interest, in the first place, on the analysis of a special type of social process, with reference to the attribution of sense to reality, of shared social practices, of a common field of meanings²⁹. With regards to these assumptions and lifestyles, conceived as collective senses, mass media perform an important function since they act as active elements of the aforementioned meanings.

Similarly to *cultural studies*, which aim to focus on two different applications (on one side to the works on media production as a complex system of practices meaningful for the elaboration of culture and image of social reality, and on the other to the studies of the consumption of mass communication, considered as a point of negotiation place among the extremely differentiated communication practices), and, we shall try to explore the two perspectives at the same time, hoping to be able to offer a new panorama.

2.Children Interpret Television: Analysis of Analogical Consumption and Programs Presented

In our research on analogical television we tried to investigate our topic with the aid of an interdisciplinary analysis which would be able to perceive the numerous facets of the phenomenon, highlighting its historical

²⁸ The mediological theory, known under this name, takes its first moves in England between the mid-fifties and the early sixties, at the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham.

²⁹ In the concept of culture we can find both meanings and values which originate and propagate in social groups, and practices actually performed through which values and meanings are expressed and in which they exist. On this topic see Hall S. (1980) “Cultural Studies: two paradigms”, *Media, Culture and Society*. nr.2, pages 57-72.

aspects, the structures of text and language, studying the organization of the offer and the dynamics of the fruition by this special audience.

With reference to television, we confirm, that there are two simultaneous and contrasting images of the child which characterize the common imaginary universe³⁰. On one side the passive image of a child as a sponge unable of moving, who passively absorbs televisual stimuli, and, on the other side the active image of a child who interacts with television in a selective manner³¹.

It was our intent to overcome these two opposite positions through a vision “from behind”, being, in this way, on the young viewers’ side. The actual basis for the elaboration of the observations was in the “stories”, coming from about one hundred interviews to child-viewers, which is not a meaningful statistical sample, but gives us a sociological look which is useful for the analysis of the audience topic of our investigation. Therefore, we chose to describe the consumption practices of young viewers, putting together their stories about viewing.

Both children’s expectations on media and perplexities concerning the comprehension of televisual messages stood out very vividly.

Our attention then moved towards the present relationship between language and television in Italy, through the study on language and text patterns proposed by a corpus composed of programs, very different for their typology.

The historical excursus of the programs destined to the youngest viewers’ audience is a passage necessary for the understanding of the origins and growth patterns of television destined to children.

³⁰ See Puggelli, F.R. (2002), *Spot generation. I bambini e la pubblicità*, Franco Angeli, Milan.

³¹ Palmer, E.L., MacNeal M., “Children’s comprehension processes. from Piaget to public policy” in Bryant J., Zillmann D. (1991), *Responding to the Screen: reception and reaction processes*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New York.

This digression will not be a sterile examination, in terms of time, of the succession of television products for minors, but a temporal line through which the evolution of the offer destined to minors will stand out, along with the analysis of the transformation of formats, contents and broadcasting methods. We will remark how reduced the gap between the production of programs destined to adults and the programs offered for children's enjoyment is.

In fact, the early television destined to boys, as an emanation of “television for adults”, is still strictly linked to the latter. It would seem to be a miniature of a product destined for adults, trying to make it, in a simple way, within “children's grasp”. For instance, we could think of programs, in the variety show pattern, such as *Piccola varietà* (1956); later, the *Zurli il mago del giovedì* (1957), *Chissà chi lo sa?* (1961), *Telecruciverba* (1965) belonged to the quiz show category. We can find links to educational programs in *Il paese di Giocagiò* (1966); the “debate on a special topic” regarded programs such as *La bussola* (1959) and *Record* (1963).

The textual typology of cartoons, destined to become the main axis of TV programs for children in the years to come, started to penetrate into the paleotelevision programming, at the beginning through the animation movie review (*Le fiabe in bianco e nero di Lotte Reininger*), and then it went on to Walt Disney's production and to the broadcasting of *Carosello*: the TV program on commercials, on air from February 3rd 1957³².

In fact, from the very beginning, advertising experts resorted to animation movies – according to the cartoon pattern – thinking that it was absolutely necessary to appeal to the typical feature of national identity, deep love for children: directly, by talking to them in a way they could easily understand; indirectly,

³² It consisted of five different commercial short films, each one divided into two parts, the first destined to a mere show, whereas the second to pure advertising. See in particular Calabrese O. (1975), *Carosello o dell'educazione serale*, Clusf, Florence and Ballio L., Zancacchi A. (1987), *Carosello Story: la via italiana alla pubblicità televisiva*, ERI, Turin.

by reaching adults so that characters from commercials could stimulate their motherly care³³.

By putting together consumptions and slogans sung by millions of children at the same time, *Carosello* created a generational language.

During the seventies the pedagogical pattern of the two previous decades entered a critical period; *Uoki-Toki*, the first container of television destined to children, dates to 1975. The scene breaks onto cartoons, with Japanese production, from *Heidi* to *Atlas Ufo Robot*.

The end of the RAI monopoly and the birth of private TV networks set free the fruition choices of the persons who, before an expanded broadcasting time and a programming selection no longer oriented to teaching, increases his/her time destined to the medium and shows an extraordinary will to keep TV choices under control. The outcome is the fragmentation of the “audience” into more and more sectorial groups, endowed with remarkable communication competence and capable of moving quickly along the scheduled programs of all television networks, looking for something that satisfies them, at that very moment. Moreover, it is necessary for broadcasting stations to create a link to the life of the members of the audience, tapping into their tastes, their moods and their needs³⁴. Strategies of scheduled programs change one more time, imposing the container, already largely experimented in the programming addressed to the adult audience, as a means for the creation of a faithful and stable relationship with the young audience. In reality the container represents a televisual “home”, a close and protected place where different TV languages are proposed, kept together by a common management and common setting.

The prototype is *Tandem*, broadcasted on RaiDue from 1982 on, followed by *Big* and *Uno per tutti* on Raiuno. In Fininvest networks we can find *Bim Bum*

³³ Pitteri D., “La pubblicità. La via italiana.” In M. Morcellini, *Il Mediaevo italiano*, Carrocci, Rome 2005, page 311.

³⁴ Di Mario S., “L’esplosione dell’industria televisiva”, in *Il Mediaevo italiano*, see before, page 288.

Bam, on air from 1982 on Italia Uno, and *Ciao Ciao* (on air from 1985 on Retequattro).

From 1986 and during the nineties RAI and Fininvest, taking into consideration the importance and the potential of the young TV audience, started the production of their own programs: from the *Love me Licia* series (from 1986 on Italia Uno), which follows in *live action* the lucky series of the Japanese cartoon *Kiss me Licia*, to fictions such as *Arriva Cristina* (35 episodes from 1988, focused on the character of the singer/actress Cristina D'Avena), followed in 1989 by another 36 episodes (*Cristina*), and, later, by movies such as *Fantaghirò*, this last one being the first Fininvest production destined to the young audience in the early evening TV time (from 1981), and *Heidi* (1993).

L'Albero azzurro (from 1990, Raidue and Raiuno), which had its roots in the most interesting productions destined for children in the sixties, is a completely authorial program, a kind of situation comedy for children, based on three characters.

*La Melevisione*³⁵ and *Art Attack!*³⁶ come from *Albero azzurro*.

By observing the programming, so far described, it is possible to note how television destined for children fluctuates in a TV grey area where the meaning of terms such as “target” and “aimed programming” gradually loses its value.

Our empiric investigation on television programming devoted to minors began with the attempt to compare viewing times and the means of consumption modalities of the youngest viewers with the production of broadcasting stations, destined to this target group.

³⁵ The program intends to happily overcome the antinomy “container program/ fiction or comedy program” in tv production destined to infancy.

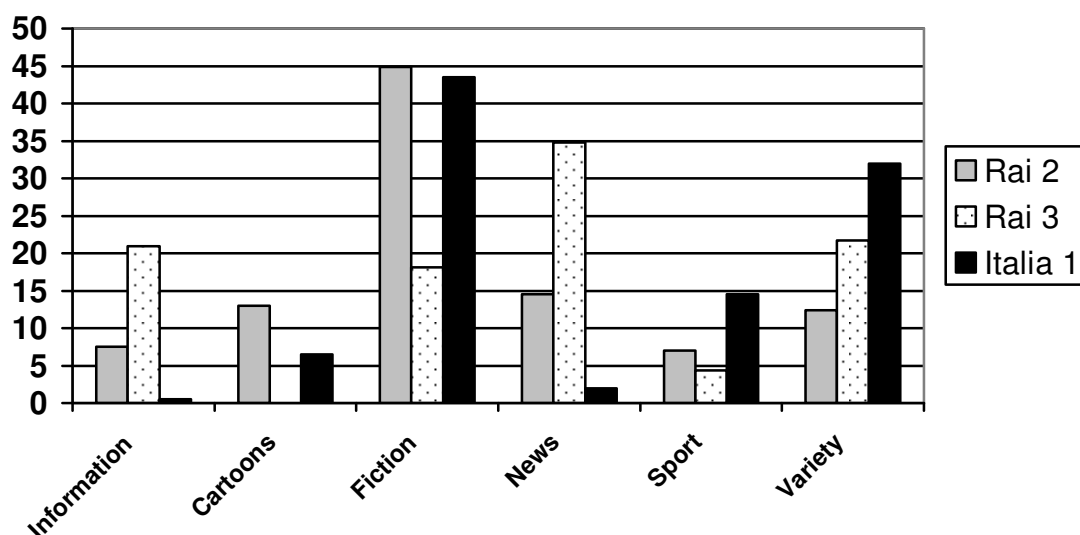
³⁶ The broadcasting target is the stimulation of young viewers' creativity and of their artistic capability: in other words, a program which encourages the artistic potential of the youngest audience.

We chose to neglect the simple number of the minutes spent by children watching TV programs, trying to primarily identify the will to choose shown, so that we could identify the hours preferred by them. For an actual understanding of minors' TV preferences, we opted for the identification of intersecting points between the programming proposed by broadcasting stations and the typical orientation of children in their choices of scheduled programs. We concentrated our attention on the selection offered by broadcasting stations in the hours during which, through a re-elaboration of March 2003 Auditel data³⁷, we noted the peak viewing of this audience³⁸, taking into account only three national broadcasting stations (*Italia 1, Rai 2, Rai 3*) which devoted their hours to scheduled programs offered – specifically – to a target group composed of children and kids. The most important types, monitoring the programming time during November 2003, showed the prevailing importance of fiction and variety shows, with the exception of *Rai 3*, which maintained its peculiarity of “different” broadcasting station, devoting more space to information and current news (see Graph 1).

³⁷ See Eurispes-Telefono Azzurro (2005), *6° rapporto Nazionale sulla Condizione dell'Infanzia e dell'Adolescenza*, see before.

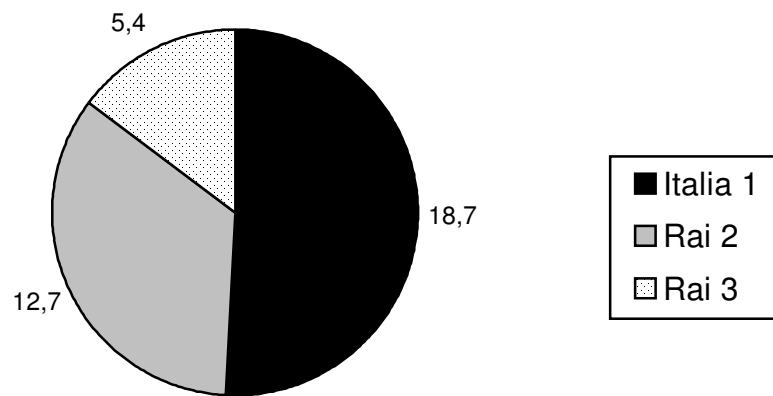
³⁸ Hours of maximum audience of children in front of a tv screen are from 7 pm to 11 pm. For further information on television consumption by children see A. Cava “Bimbi e televisione: il consumo televisivo dei bambini” and “Analisi delle emittenti” in Sardo R., Centorrino M., Caviezel G. (2004), *Dall'Albero Azzurro a Zelig: modelli e linguaggi della tv vista dai bambini*, see before, pages 145-163.

GRAPH 1 Comparison of the programming regarding 7 pm-11pm time (November 2003)



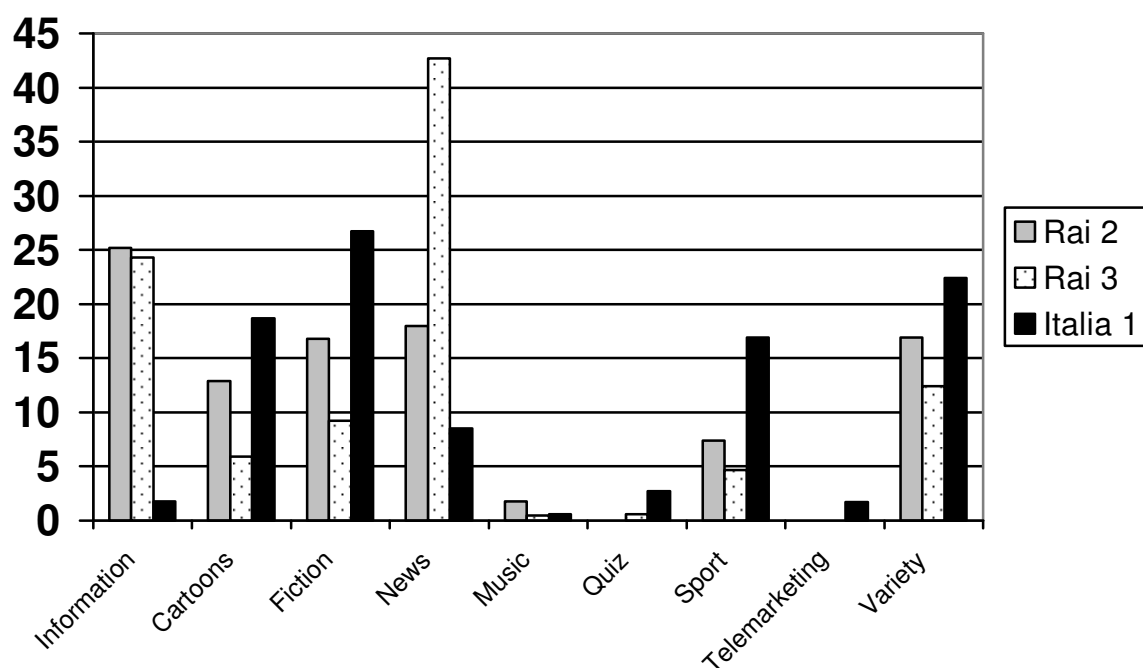
After visualizing the media programming during viewing times followed by children, we thought it would be interesting to dwell on programming segmentation for the children's target group; here we highlight only the percentage of the programs for children in the three broadcasting stations examined (see Graph 2).

GRAPH 2 *Visualization of programming destined to children with regard to daily scheduled programs (November 2003)*



Before illustrating the conclusions of our empiric research, we think that it is important to offer a general overall view of the actual relevance, with regard to scheduled programs, of television for children, by presenting the visualization of the entire mediatic offer, for each type, during the period examined, with regard to the sole networks which in 2003 had children and young people as a target group (see Graph 3).

GRAPH 3 Rai 2 – Rai 3 – Italia 1 programming (November 1st – December 1st 2003)



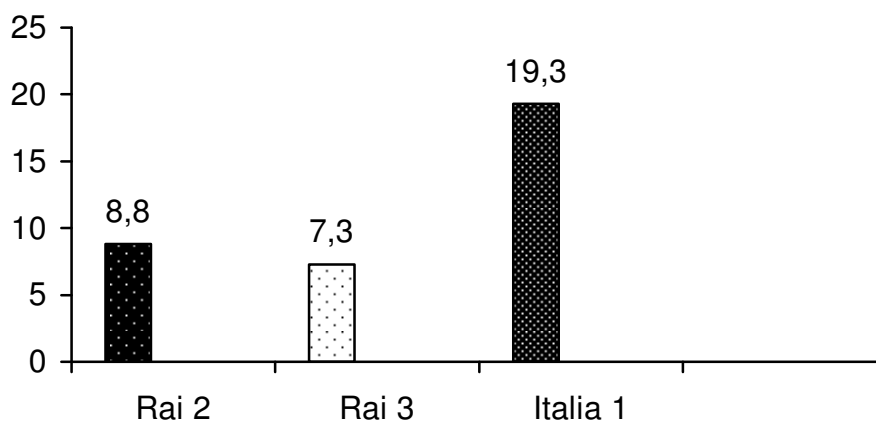
What appeared evident, from the overlapping of the data on children's media consumption and those concerning the offer by broadcasting stations, was that this audience does not watch, in a remarkable way, television programs destined to the youngest viewers; in fact, adults and minors make the same choices when before the TV screen: quiz, news, fiction, sport and variety shows entertain and satisfy the viewing needs of a transversal and multifaceted target group. During the hours when the maximum number of young viewers reported (7 pm – 11 pm) is at its highest, it is impossible to perceive any distinction in the modalities of the media

fruition. The remote control is the instrument for an identical selection, in the televisual flow, with no regard as to its use either by minors or by adults.

In order to complete the framework illustrated so far, we think that it is useful to examine today's view of the data regarding scheduled programs for children.

We monitored a 4-week programming (in March-April 2007), focusing this time exclusively on products for the youngest viewers: *Rai 2*, *Rai 3* and *Italia 1* stand out for being the only broadcasting stations which devote a space addressed to minors, as everybody can easily remark; in graph 4 we report the percentage of programs for children, in the three stations, with regard to the month's entire programming (see Graph 4).

GRAPH 4 *Visualization of programming for children (March-April 2007)*



So far, our present research studied the themes in their complexity (broadcasting station – message – recipient); the next paragraph will examine the passage from analogical fruition to satellite consumption. Children also become main characters of the change:

from broadcasting we go to narrowcasting³⁹. It is not a revolution, but a new way towards media consumption.

3. The List of Channels for Digital Children: The New Thematic Consumption

The spreading of new technologies has involved the world of young children over the last years. In fact, new technologies are spreading among children in a striking way, even though some sectors, such as Internet, show a very slow increase; the time spent in front of a TV screen is divided among land and satellite channels along with videocassettes and DVD vision.

Consequently, the pervasiveness of new technologies applied to mass media have had strong repercussions on society and, above all, on new generations that, differently from the previous ones, must interact with new technologies, living them and using them in a context of everyday life and continuity. As we can easily imagine, the question also concerns playful use of media, in which children find leisure, company, amusement and new stimuli.

Faced with the offer of satellite channels, developed during the last years, kids have begun to use the contents sent through the broadcasting increasingly; in particular, the Sky package, which is an articulated offer of a large numbers of channels, 24 hours a day.

Therefore, a new typology of media consumption stands out, characterized by a great choice and, consequently, by the very highly critical ability of children, who appear to be “enterprising” interpreters of media texts.

In reality, the new offer proposed by scheduled digital programs gives a sense of lightness in the

³⁹ With the first term we refer to the broadcasting of images and sounds to a very vast and undifferentiated audience; whereas narrowcasting is a transmission model addressed to special “audiences”.

selection of programs; this very new aspect was unconceivable during the analogical era, which was characterized, as we have seen, by reduced spaces destined to the target group examined in our research.

Satellite TV offers a very large number of programs so that, at any moment, the young viewers can add, to their own programming schedule, the products that form the package expressly designed for them.

Now we will try to provide a synthetic description of the list of channels devoted to children by Sky, followed by an analysis of Auditel data with regard to satellite channels, available since April 2007.

There are 15 scheduled satellite programming designed for children: each channel is aimed to very special age groups and each “babyviewer”, looking for a media amusement, can satisfy his/her needs in this “thematic cage”.

Jim Jam is a channel devoted to children belonging to the 2-6 year age group. The scheduled programming, unlike many other thematic channel destined to youngest viewers, is not exclusively cartoons, but, on the contrary, is organized with real programs divided according to several daily hours; the programming stimulates the child through entertainment and games. In fact, the scheduled programming is very rich with programs which offer moments of amusement and learning, during the day, expressly designed to introduce children, in a pre-school age, to shapes, colours and numbers⁴⁰.

Animal Planet is an international thematic TV network, on air on channel 609 of the Sky Italia digital

⁴⁰“English Space” , for instance, introduces children to English key words. There are also exclusive programs such as “The Wiggles” (a dynamic music band that entertains children enchanting them with the joy of their original songs and their choreographies), “Baby Triplets” (an original container where words and fundamental concept of English are presented in an amusing and recognizable way), and “Capelito” (a cartoon with a special connotation : even if none of its characters ever says a word, young viewers immediately understand how the whole story goes).

package, introducing children to programs devoted to animal life.

Cartoon Network is a series of digital TV channels specialized in cartoons; at the beginning its programming was based on Warner Bros and Hanna & Barbera productions, it has now started broadcasting its own original productions⁴¹.

Then, *Cartoon+1* broadcasts the very same *Cartoon Network* programs, but an hour later.

Boomerang is a *Cartoon Network* derivation designed for children from birth to 5 years of age.

Raisat yoyo addresses to children from 0 to 6 years of age and accompanies young viewers during the day with original formats and cartoons produced with the most recent animation techniques⁴². *Nickelodeon* broadcasts cartoons and live action series designed for children.

Raisat Smash is devoted to children from 6 to 10 years of age, the *tween generation* – the generation of passage between children and young people – with scheduled programs offering more than 6 hours a day of a new programming composed of fiction, TV movies and 3D animation series. The offer, showing a special concern for new technologies and multimedia languages, proposes daily, - from 6 am to 11 pm - ,TV series, cartoons, movies, TV movies and original productions⁴³.

Playhouse Disney, a channel entirely for children from 2 to 5 years of age, gives at the same time, the amusement and in the chance for learning, thanks to the educational approach which meets the curiosity and the creative needs of children in a pre-school age.

⁴¹Among other productions there are “What a Cartoon”, “Mucca e Pollo”, “Il laboratorio di Dexter”, “Ed, Edd & Eddy” and “Toonami”.

⁴² In fact, during the whole day it broadcasts cartoons, fiction, tales and original productions.

⁴³ From fantasy cartoons such as “Tweeny Witches”, animation series linked to the videogame world, such as “Di Gata Defenders”, telefilms such as “Snobs” a tv series like “Giblet Boys”, to a vast selection of the best Italian and foreign movies designed for kids.

Disney Channel offers original series, all coming from the Walt Disney Co. production. Another channel belonging to the Disney Channel is *Toon Disney*, composed exclusively of cartoons for children of any age.

Disney Ch +1, broadcasts *Disney Channel* programs, but an hour later.

Jetix broadcasts mainly cartoons for kids. *Jetix +1* proposes the same schedule, but an hour later, in order to give the chance to all children to watch their favourite programs.

In the end, *Culto*, a new channel devoted to “grown-up cartoons”, addresses, above all, to an audience from 18 to 35 years of age, but it proposes for young viewers Japanese classics and the most famous American titles⁴⁴.

From the short description of thematic channels, a completely new range of possibilities, proposed to the audience of media with regard to the offers of common tv, stands out.

How is it possible to intersect the offer of the satellite platform with the actual fruition practices of “digital consumers”?

Before concentrating on a children’s audience we think that it is useful to describe the general trend of the satellite TV audience.

Sky users have the chance to create their own scheduled programming by choosing from about 130 channels, there are about 14 million (subscribers are 4 million, but we must take into consideration that the entire family takes advantage of the offer). Therefore, what stands out is a reduced number of viewers with regard to the users of a common TV, but the meaning of this consumption is somewhat different. In fact, we must take into account that many channels satisfy multifaceted targets; the multidimensional aspect of the fruition is confirmed by the fact that *prime-time* hour, unlike what happens in the more common

⁴⁴ Among cult cartoons, for instance, “Captain Harlock”, “Conan il ragazzo del futuro”, “Cyborg 009”, “Kyashan”, “Daitarn III”, “Gordian” and “Fantaman”.

programming, does not necessarily reach maximum audience.

Sky obtains better results with sport and movies. During prime-time sport channels of the satellite platform broadcast to an average of 821,000 viewers (3.02% share); 353,000 subscribers (1,29% of share) are tuned in to Sky cinema channels with regard to the four evenings of the new Auditel era (April 1-4, 2007). The very rich offer of documentaries shows very low audience peaks: in prime-time *Discovery* channels totalize 31,000 viewers (0.13% share), a little more than the number reached by *History Channel*, *National Geographic* and *Adventure* (21,000 viewers , 0.08% share). These last ones belong to the Fox group, also present on Sky platform with four channels (*Fox*, *FoxLife*, *FoxCrime*, *FX*), designed for movie lovers, with series of the past and the present: in prime-time the above programs are watched by an average of 246,000 viewers (0.91% share).

FoxLife is the most watched channel, among the four abovementioned, during the period examined (102,000 viewers, 0.41% share), thanks to the new episodes from the “Grey’s Anatomy” and “Desperate Housewives” series⁴⁵.

There is a monthly publication for numbers relevant to channels devoted to children.

We noticed that the Sky offer destined to children is definitely much richer than the few actual appointments on analogical channels. Spaces on common TV are confined, indeed, to a target group with very differentiated needs and tastes.

On the other hand, Sky channels offered to minors can perfectly satisfy all age groups and meet multiple interests.

With reference to the number of subscribers, we could state that Sky is the satellite TV for children.

⁴⁵ An interesting data is also given by the fact that most watched series of the satellite platform increases their audience levels only after being programmed on common TV. In any case, it seems that programming definitively creates the events.

The scheduled programming that reaches the highest peak, according to our first data, is the *Disney Channel* (in all, Disney channels almost reach 4% of subscribers' audience); *Jetix* channels also reach a good target, even though not at the top.

With regard to the preferences expressed and according to different age groups, a particular data is very interesting: children between 4 and 10 years of age are mostly tuned in to *JimJam* and *Playhouse Disney*; on the other hand 11-14 year age group prefers the *Disney Channel* and *CartoonNetwork* programs.

Beyond quantitative data, which can certainly point out the trend in TV consumption (let us remember that the satellite platform cannot be had by a very large number of subscribers, so far), it is important – as we suggested – to read digital fruition, giving a new meaning to these practices of media reading.

“Digital revolution” determined important media offer transformations and changes in the fruition forms. Multiplication of channels and programming started a process leading us to a certain “personalization” of the offer. The concept that, in our opinion, characterizes young viewers' consumption could refer to any type of target having homogeneous features: tastes and specific preferences are satisfied by thousands of satellite channels.

In our opinion narrowcasting perfectly combines with the pluralization of time and rhythms, which is a crucial feature of post-modern viewers' life.

Even children's everyday life is scanned by different intertwining rhythms which manage, through a 24-hour a day satellite offer, to coordinate themselves, in a chosen moment, with the entertainment constantly offered on the screen.

Sky package non-stop programming devoted to youngest viewers can intercept, at any time, today's time fragmented into so many appointments (school, sport, outdoor practices, study ...). The added value of the thematic offer is in the certainty given to the consumer; at any time the channel list provides an appointment to satisfy a user's desire.

The continuity in the programming is offered in the form of a “do-it-yourself” of different contents, whose time features enter the free spaces of the audience. Thematic scheduled programming is not linked to social time, but it receives its strength by being always potentially available to young viewers who use the remote control of the satellite platform. In this way children emancipate themselves from temporal stiffness of analogical programming, they know that the contents designed for them are proposed again in different ways, in order to create an especially flexible fruition. They build their own schedule programming, taking sources from an immense archive of images and media messages.

That gap, as seen in our study, among moments belonging to the analogical schedule programming devoted to minors and the actual exposition to the medium with regard to children, disappears when the audience knows that the use of the decoder is not dependent on a particular time. On the contrary the viewer, either a child or an adult, creates his/her own media moment, by choosing times, modalities and contents of fruition.

In conclusion, the new pattern of digital programming proposes a “communication agreement” that is less binding than a common *medium*.

Notwithstanding the multiplication of options, the satellite platform, in our opinion, gives shape to a new dynamics of the consumption that coexists, without replacing it, with the analogical tradition. In fact, we are witnessing a transformation, *in itinere*, a growth process with a limited impact. Digital audience gives shape to new fruition practices, but *narrowcasting* (according to data on Sky subscriptions) still covers a peripheral role, compared to the “penetrating strength” of *broadcasting*.

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