Chapter XI

Investigating Information in the Multiscreen Society:
An Ecologic Perspective

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Abstract

This chapter presents some new aspects to think about public service broadcasting, emphasizing the role of emotion and entertainment to the understanding of the television experience. Television is discussed in the context of the multiscreen society and technological devices, from an ecological point of view. This means to consider it in the context of the transformations produced by new media and their social distribution. These changes deeply impact on the consumption activity forcing it to assume new characters and modalities. According to this point, it becomes possible to discuss some aspects dealing with digital literacy.

Introduction

Let me start with a short personal story. More than 10 years ago, when I was about to discuss my PhD work on television in children's everyday life, I discovered the Internet. Using the popular browser Netscape, and the software Eudora for e-mails, I rapidly understood the radical innovation which was starting to happen in our world. And suddenly I discovered an enormous amount of new sources, the rapidness of contacts and the deleting of every kind of boundary, considering that since that moment my investigation had been based on a bibliography framed within the context of where I was working. A sort of order of time and space was fading, transforming into virtual space and time, with all its potentials made on nets and the multiplication of spots that, with relative simplicity, turned to be producers and receivers of information.

I easily remember that, overwhelmed by the multiplicity of doors that appeared to me as open, I experienced a sort of uneasiness that in some moments transformed into anxiety that can be described as follows: have I spent three years of my life studying a medium which in a short time was destined to disappear, sinking for the effect of Internet?

Ten years after the explosion of the phenomenon of Internet, this episode can be used to underline the meaning of a congress, organized by one of the most active international groups implied in communication and education, which has chosen television and the question of quality as study and debate topics. Television, despite the changes we have seen, seems to maintain an evident central position, especially as an institution and social medium of entertainment.

The history of ICT teaches us that a new medium do not displace previous existing media, but conquers its own place causing a recomposition of the main roles related to the previous media. As happening with the Web and the Internet, we are not simply in front of the emergency of a new communication medium, but also of an environment embracing and linking different logics.

It is clear, then, that my past anxiety had no reasons to exist. But, on the other hand, it was justified as it was based on the intuition that something new was going to happen.

Ten years later, we can affirm that everything has changed. At the same time, if we take a look beyond the foam of the day and we search for the answers to the main questions of existence, we can equally say that essentially we have not moved a lot. In the best hypothesis, we can count on a very wide variety of technologies that do not assure the fulfilling of all the promises normally advanced. It is not strange that this text, starting from the central topic of this congress, intends to focus on questions appearing not so in fashion, that in my personal opinion will be more vital and important. Within the frame of this discussion, I start with the definition of quality in television as the main attention of public service. Then I will reflect on the need

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