

EDITORIAL

The history of media convergence, especially of convergent television, is a field that needs to be further investigated. Media convergence is often considered a taken-for-granted phenomenon, a kind of 'irresistible' force that has changed and is continuously changing media ecosystems. Furthermore, it seems to be mainly an American phenomenon because it has involved US politics and companies and because the most relevant reflections and publications on this topic come from American scholars. This issue of *VIEW* tries to counteract all these ideas, analyzing TV convergence from a historical and long-term perspective, considering symmetrical case studies of success and failures, concentrating on the European dimension through the lens of transnational, comparative, and national contributions.

One of the causes for the lack of studies in this field is the polysemy of the term 'media convergence' itself. This expression has an approximately 40 year long history, in which layers of significance have been added decade by decade.¹ During the late 1970s and early 1980s, this word was quite new and referred mainly to two key ideas. On the one hand, it referred to the technological overlapping among three sectors previously distinguished: telecommunications (or point-to-point media), editorial content (mainly transmitted by the mass media) and informatics.² On the other hand, during the 1980s, a political and shared idea of convergence started to spread among American and European countries; media deregulation was the main policy through which this idea was translated and implemented. During the 1990s, media convergence became a strong economic idea: media companies began longing for integration with telecommunication companies and different sectors started to overlap through integration and the creation of conglomerates. One decade later, this optimistic and irresistible economic vision, that saw mass media and telecommunication companies progressively merging into each other, started to be questioned and a phenomenon of industrial de-convergence started to emerge.³ At the same time, during the 2000s, media convergence became a cultural idea, a real buzzword for media studies. The era of convergence culture started and the focus was on the interplay between media conglomerates and grassroots practices,⁴ or on the impact on the whole media sector⁵ and particularly on television.⁶

It is not by chance that the term appeared to be rather confused and, among others, was defined as: "a dangerous word,"⁷ an "unclear term,"⁸ "one of those particularly hard-to-handle concepts,"⁹ an "umbrella concept" with a high degree of vagueness and intangibility,¹⁰ even "a hyped illusion" just because of its attempt to encompass many concepts and to be "everything."¹¹

This issue of *VIEW* tries to deal with this complex and polysemic concept from different points of view, adopting several theoretical and methodological frameworks. The articles you are about to read investigate TV convergence as a

1 Gabriele Balbi, *Deconstructing "media convergence": A cultural history of a buzzword, 1970s–2000s*, Paper presented at Deconstructing Media Convergence Conference, Salzburg, November, 2013 (publication forthcoming).

2 See Ithiel de Sola Pool, *Technologies of Freedom*, Harvard University Press, 1983 and Steward Brand, *The Media Lab: inventing the future at MIT*, Viking Penguin, 1987.

3 Jin Dal Yong, *De-convergence of Global Media Industries*, Routledge, 2013.

4 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, 2006.

5 Tim Dwyer, *Media convergence*, McGraw Hill/Open University Press, 2010.

6 Aldo Grasso and Massimo Scaglioni, *Televisione Convergente. La Tv oltre il piccolo schermo*, Link Ricerca, 2009; Michael Kackman et al., *Flow TV. Television in the Age of Media Convergence*, Routledge, 2010; Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni, *La Pyramide de la convergence. Une carte des pratiques de vision de la télévision numérique contemporaine*, Paper presented at the International Conference 'D'un écran à l'autre. Les mutations du spectateur,' INA Paris, May 2014 (publication forthcoming).

7 Roger Silverstone, 'Convergence Is a Dangerous Word,' *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 1, 1995, 12.

8 Anders Fagerjord and Tanja Storsul, *Questioning convergence*, in T. Storsul and D. Stuedahl, eds., *Ambivalence Towards Convergence*, Nordicom, 2007, 20.

9 Espen Ytreberg, 'Review article: Convergence: Essentially confused?,' *New Media & Society*, 13, 3, 502.

10 Christopher T. Marsden and Stefaan G. Verhulst, *Convergence in European digital TV regulation*, Blackstone, 1999, 3–5.

11 Michael A. Noll, 'The myth of convergence,' *International Journal on Media Management*, 5, 1, 2003, 12–13.

complex process, in which broadcasters' and productions' strategies, technological affordances, viewers' practices and habits, textual features and regulatory policies all interact in shaping the actual landscape of contemporary television. The general picture is therefore definitely ambiguous (as the terms itself): innovation and conservation, change and continuity are blended. This is not to add confusion, but to understand that complex phenomena require complex explanations.

This editorial aims to provide and suggest a different reading than the linear one you'll find in the table of contents. Indeed, there are at least four thematic areas that have emerged from the selected contributions. The first one adopts a historical or even archaeological perspective on TV convergence by focusing on a particularly challenging topic: convergence before or during the process of broadcasting digitization. As Vivi Theodoropoulou convincingly shows in her analysis of digital television among the first generation of digital audience in the UK, during the late 1990s and the early years of 2000s, many of the industrial discourses regarding the digitization of television turned out to be highly rhetorical, since the audience expectations and practices remained much more 'inertial' in considering TV as a 'screen entertainment medium.' The case study of the early days of DTV in the UK explains both the evolutionary nature of convergence and media innovation and the relevance of a historical and 'systemic' framework able to consider the negotiation and interplay of technological change, industrial strategies and audience practices. An 'archaeological' point of view, oriented to an investigation of convergence before digitization, is also relevant in showing the complexity of the processes that went beyond technological change. Tom Steward's article deals precisely with convergence of cinema and TV before digitization, mainly in the UK context. His analysis suggests that cinema and TV converged before digitization in at least four areas: in the practice of exhibitions, where the two media have influenced each other; in the development of common convergent spectatorship technologies; in the impact TV has often had on the cinematic forms; and, finally, in the industrial dimension because some key players established pre-conglomerate mergers between the two media.

A second area of analysis concerns case studies of media convergence, of both success and failures. Indeed, from the point of view of TV institutions, convergence represents both a challenge and a set of opportunities, an area of experimentation but also a possible *fiasco*. This is something clear to scientific research where, during the last 10-15 years, we have witnessed a transition from a more enthusiastic to a more realistic approach: convergence can be considered as a field of new opportunities to exploit, but also as an area where a 'trial and error' process takes place. Hanna Andrews, for example, focuses on a case of a failed convergence strategy: Channel 4, the UK Channel set up in the early 1980s, decided to embrace the convergence culture starting from the early 2000s. Becoming 'more than a television channel' required investments and even a mentality shift, but all the efforts undertaken turned out to be a failure for many reasons: the pyramidal management structure was not efficient for a convergent channel and Channel 4 was too small to compete with conglomerates. As Andrews shows, media and TV convergence is not an irresistible force, but there are many cases of failed attempt from an economic, political and even cultural perspective. On the contrary, in her article on 'The Scheinerdverse,' Helena Louise Dare-Edwards analyzes the example of the success story behind a specific genre, Kids TV, as it is affected by the dynamics of convergence. The case of the two popular Nickelodeon sit-coms (*iCarly* and *Victorious*, both created by the executive producer Dan Schneider and targeted at tween girls) are particularly interesting in showing the 'invitational strategies' developed by convergent TV texts in order to create a stronger and lasting relation with its audience. Using strategically television, internet and social media, these shows redefine notions and functions of TV authorship, the level of audience participation and the spaces between the real and the fictional. Kids TV is therefore a privileged area of inquiry since it shows a remarkable attitude to testing convergent textual features and new relations with interactive audiences.

The third topic of this issue is devoted to a transnational and comparative approach to TV convergence within (and beyond) Europe. A particularly interesting case from a transnational perspective is the one investigated by Anna Wiehl: her article focuses on the European cultural channel ARTE as an example of the promises and difficulties in European politics of convergence. The contribution tries to combine different perspectives and different fields of media studies: media politics, a media economics/media industries approach, format studies, and a user perspective. The final aim is to reflect on the meaning of convergence itself and on topics strictly linked with convergence such as transmedia storytelling, interactivity, networking. Convergence can be also considered as an opportunity for public service broadcasters: in a historical period when PBS institutions are constantly under attack, convergence could represent a chance to re-discover and redefine the values of public television. Oranit Klein Shagrir and Heidi Keinonen present a

comparative study of the convergent strategies adopted by public service TV in Finland and Israel. In both countries, PBS is struggling for a renewed public legitimacy in a digital media scenario.

From a national point of view, with case studies focusing on Italy, UK, Spain, and the Netherlands, the fourth and final thematic area of the issue deals with the complex scenario of contemporary convergent television: where relations between producers and consumers are transformed by the emergence and use of social media, new regulatory frameworks are needed and players other than broadcasters enter the field.

The 'social TV' label is an ambiguous term, since it can indicate both the practices of viewers that engage with a TV text and other spectators mainly via social networks, but also the strategies and textual features developed by broadcasters and production companies in order to exploit the interactive inclination of convergent audiences. Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni's article deals with this latter aspect, in considering how networks and producers have developed their approach to social TV and the second screen in Italy. This case study aims to establish a wider theoretical framework of convergent TV as a complex field where broadcasters' strategies and viewers' practices re-negotiate their roles. The question of social TV is also the central topic of Alberto Marinelli and Romana Ando's article, developed from an audience studies perspective. Based on quantitative and qualitative data related to the diffusion and use of 'connected and social television' in the Italian scenario, this paper shows how new practices of 'second screen' use (TV and laptop, TV and tablet, TV and smartphone) are more and more diffused particularly among young viewers and how a multi-screening consumption is changing viewers' habits. In his article, Michael Starks argues that convergence requires a degree of harmonization in terms of regulation and 'philosophical principles.' Specifically the convergence of broadcasting, press and internet journalism, especially in the UK and Anglo-Saxon context, requires a revision of taken-for-granted ideas such as: impartiality, public service, and self-regulation. The author argues that the regulation of converging fields should become more consistent and less state-based. As Samuel Negrodo outlines in the Spanish context, broadcasters face new competition on audiovisual production from online newspapers and digital-only news operators. Online videos, covering both current affairs and niche interests, require new production practices and textual characteristics: the analysis of this abundant audiovisual content shows that traditional categories of genres should be revised. All these reflections on TV convergence, as well as the abundance of 'ephemeral' audio-visual production (such as amateur films, commercials and company videos), open new questions for archive institutions. This is what Bas Agterberg claims in his article focusing on how Dutch audio-visual production has been preserved since the 1980s: he discusses issues of archiving that pose problems to studying the history of media and specifically, of audio-visual convergence. This is to conclude that historical and historiographical practices are crucial to the understanding of digital and convergent cultures,¹² as well as of the analogue cultures.

We really hope you will enjoy this issue of *VIEW*!

Gabriele Balbi and Massimo Scaglioni

Biographies

Gabriele Balbi, PhD, is Assistant Professor in Media Studies at the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI-Lugano) in Switzerland, where he teaches *Media History* and *Sociology of Mass Media*. He is also Study Delegate, Vice Dean and Director of the China Media Observatory at the Faculty of Communication Sciences. He was Visiting Scholar at Harvard University (USA) and Maastricht University (The Netherlands) in 2007, Columbia University (USA) and University of Westminster (UK) in 2011 and 2012. He received the Douglas Byrne Marconi Fellow Award in 2012 (Oxford University, UK) and he was a lecturer in media and politics at Northumbria University (UK) in 2012 and 2013. His main areas of interests are media and telecommunications history, with a recent focus on the history of digital media. He wrote four books, several book chapters and articles for scientific journals on these topics.

¹² For a reflection on this see Gabriele Balbi and Peppino Ortoleva, 'Plea for an un-natural history of digital culture,' *Contemporanea*, 3, 2014, 482–489.

Massimo Scaglioni, PhD, is Assistant Professor of *Media History* and *Media Economics* at the Catholic University of Milan. He also teaches *Television Communication* and *Transmedia Narratives* at Università della Svizzera italiana (USI-Lugano) in Switzerland. In addition, he is the author of several books on media and broadcasting history in Italy, and many scientific articles published in English, French, Spanish and Italian. He is Coordinator of the Research Centre for Television and Audiovisual Media at the Catholic University, Director of Studies of the Masters course “*Fare Tv. Analisi, Gestione, Comunicazione*” at ALMED (the University’s postgraduate media school) and a member of the editorial boards of the scientific journals *Bianco e Nero*, *Comunicazioni Sociali*, *Series. International Journal of TV Serial Narratives*. In 2012, he was a Visiting Professor at Carleton University, Ottawa (Canada). He is also a regular contributor to *Corriere della Sera* newspaper.