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### Communicative Modes after the Coherent Media – Orientation within as semiotic space

Mass communication as our familiar mode of a medial organised public is integrated into the current cultural change of society. The following article takes a look at one aspect of this change, which comes along with a shift in the function of the recipient with regard to medial texts. Reception takes over essential functions of text production, which until then has been left to the authors and broadcasters. Already Stuart Hall<sup>1</sup> pointed out this development. He described the interfering of «decoding» and «encoding» in mass communication according to the laws of reading modes, which no longer have to be subdued by or correspond to the intentions of authors and broadcasters. While the distinct, coherent medium is no longer shaping our mass communication as token for granted, new text types like intramedial links gain importance. They give the recipient the possibility to combine media offers into a kind of personalised units, which fit in the recipients' relevance structures. With regard to television these are for example programme trailers. Their basic features, i. e. time reference or design, are outlined in chapter 3. The feature of referring text elements corresponds to the concepts and competences of the recipients, which – as in the example of children's television – form a unit together with modes of literacy or ideas of childhood. Hereby – so the assumption – social spaces are created by semiotic means. These spaces are shaped by text elements and their

structures of meaning and relevance. «Semiotic space» seems to be an adequate term for this phenomenon.

Not only intramedial references, but also intermedial references, e. g. between children's television and their web sites, contribute to these semiotic spaces. They contribute – so an assumption – to the emerging of a new type of public. In order to develop the concept of public by media theory, this article looks at some selected new text types. First, an example from the perspective of a regionally located recipient tries to concretise the idea of globalisation from the perspective of a media user. Hereby the simple question of what makes e. g. a German TV viewer recognize the self-definition of a TV channel, which is broadcast from any location in the world, as «global» or «regional». Also here new text types play an essential function because they help to set up, or promise to do so, relations in the sense of a space. Since the author's profession is educational, the main focus lies on television offerings for children contributing to mass communicative, semiotic spaces, in which childhood is developing.

#### 1. Cultural Ideas on Mass Communication

How do we identify a global/ regional player and find a global/regional audience?

The answer: A simple, practical test, which gets to the essence of what is «domestic» or «global». At the University of Kassel, one can receive several TV channels by way of a digital satellite receiver. All over the world, one can receive news. But, is the programme provided by a global player or a regional one and for which audience – global or regional? A still image was extracted from a news programme, of course the typical one with an announcer appearing in the centre of the screen. The language used for the domestic audience is a clear hint of the broadcaster's spatial context. Words like «aktuell», «live», «fox news», «fox facts», «Nachrichten Überblick», «aktueller Bericht» provide a context. Of course, the channel's logo can be helpful: «CNN». But, as in the case of «mdr», a viewer needs special, regionalized knowledge. If this knowledge along with a language literacy are not available, the test is difficult. For example, which kind of channel are we confronted with in Algeria where a man in western style clothing sits before a map of South-, North America, Europe and Africa? The logo seems meaningless: a «C» in green. Next to it, an unclear arrow-like sign appears. A similar question lies in the analysis of other television stations, i.e. in which category should «Bloomberg» television be placed in?

<sup>1</sup> Hall, Stuart. Encodung/Decoding. In: Hall, Stuart et al. (ed.): *Culture, Media, Language*. London (Hutchinson) 1980, S. 128–139



Picture 1: Bloomberg television

The text partly scrolls over the split screen. Behind the news anchor are two TV screens displaying diagrams.

It is obvious, that a German audience is addressed, perhaps a specialized target group, capable of reading abbreviated economic data and an integrated diagram. «n tv» seems to identify itself in the same way: German wording: «Nachrichten Überblick» and a double banner with share information like: «Marken der Deutschen Börse AG», «Burlington North SF 28,74 + 3,5% Campell». CNN also uses a banner format, however, in English with news-related information, «TO LATEST UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN REPORT». The name of the female newscaster and the title of the programme («WORLD NEWS») correspond with the scrolling line. «FOX» also uses this kind of screen format with stock information and news headlines. On FOX, a US American flag appears in the left upper part of the screen.

Again, how do we recognise the global player? By looking at the design and ignoring the language, it becomes easier. CNN, FOX, Bloomberg and ntv clearly define themselves as «global», although Bloomberg and ntv are clearly directed toward a literate, German speaking audience. CNN probably uses its well-known logo, which functions today as a brandname. For the same purpose, the three other channels bring written text into play. Regional German channels like mdr and SR make use of text, presenting only the title of the programme and the host's name. But, these written words are not presented by way of a split screen or scrolling lines. Like the

Algerian one, they refer to either a national or regional audience as in the case of mdr and SR.

Bloomberg and ntv appear as global players. In this regard, however, they address a small target group of literate German speakers, which can be described as having specific consumption patterns and a similar lifestyle. A screen design with much written text is used by national and trans-national TV channels to provide economic and world news to its target audience. «Global» is an image set up by text and a split screen, used to address, again, a target audience. In this group channels are also global players with an audience all over the world. This global audience, as well its regional correspondents, are able to read discontinuous texts on a TV screen and probably also on a PC screen. They are likely interested in economical results, shares and politics.

### The cultural concept of space

This test should just open the door to a cultural view on the «global», «domestic», «regional», etc. issue. Perhaps, underneath the issue of space, one finds hidden patterns of literacy, consumption and lifestyle. Why do we still use the metaphor of «space» to describe mass communication? An alternative could be «everyday life», because literacy, consumption, and lifestyle are integrated features, like mass communication. It is appealing to apply a key cultural concept to discover a fundamental transformation of mass communication, which will mold what we experience as public.

The idea is to follow a cultural timeline from «space» to «sign», which offers an interpretation of our mass communication in transition. Of course, the epistemology of mass communication used different approaches, sometimes near to and at other times far away from spatial concepts like «global». In the fifties, McLuhan<sup>2</sup> worked with the hint of a spatial dialectic like the «global village.» In the forties, the mass communication model of the information transport, objectified by Shannon and Weaver, pursued the idea of bridging long distances. However, Lasswell's formula (1948, S. 37): «Who Says What In Which Channel To Whom With What Effect?»<sup>3</sup> refers to propaganda and the issue of power in mass

<sup>2</sup> McLuhan, Marshall H. *Die magischen Kanäle. Understanding Media*. Düsseldorf, Wein (Econ), 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Lasswell, Harold D. The Structure and Function of Communication in Society. In: Bryson, Lyman. *The Communication of Ideas. A Series of Adresses*. New York (Institute for Religious and Social studies, Harper) 1948, S. 37–51. Few years later

communication. At the same time, that was also a part Horkheimer and Adorno's<sup>4</sup> approach. They look at mass communication as an industrialized system of culture and its ideological power. In their argumentation, the concept of a system is still open to a spatially defined, and therefore global, mass communication. «System» was still in the argumentative line of considering mass communication as institutionalised, like the state. This is a source of Habermas' examination of mass media in his 1990 update of a 1962 introduction to «Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit.»<sup>5</sup>

Die durch Massenmedien zugleich vorstrukturierte und beherrschte Öffentlichkeit wuchs sich zu einer vermachteten Arena aus, in der mit Themen und Beiträgen nicht nur um Einfluss, sondern um eine in ihren strategischen Intentionen möglichst verborgene Steuerung verhaltenswirksamer Kommunikationsflüsse gerungen wird. (p. 28)

In this context, one could go beyond the regional restriction presented by the state and address a global network society described by Castells<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, and perhaps paradoxically, it is helpful to abandon the institutionalised media system's guidelines and look to another on-going argumentation, in which the meaningful activities, described by George H. Mead<sup>7</sup>, are essential.<sup>8</sup> Reception, as an interpretative way of dealing with

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Lasswell used the following terminology (1952, S. 12): «Someone says something somehow to someone with some effect.» Or in the version of a question: «Who, says what, how, to whom, with what effect?» Lasswell, Harold D., Lerner, Daniel, de Sola Pool, Ithiel: *The Comparative Study of Symbols. An Introduction*. Stanford (Stanford University Press)

<sup>4</sup> Horkheimer, Max; Adorno, Theodor W. *Kulturindustrie, Aufklärung als Massenbetrug*. Horkheimer, Max, Adorno, Theodor W. *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Frankfurt (Fischer) 1969, p. 128–176 (1<sup>st</sup> edition: New York 1944)

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Mit einem Vorwort zur Neuauflage 1990. Frankfurt a.M. (Suhrkamp) 1990. 1st Edition 1962. English Version: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. MIT Press. Boston, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Castells, Manuel. *Das Informationszeitalter I. Die Netzwerkgesellschaft*. Opladen (Leske + Budrich), 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Mead, George, H. *Mind, Self and Society. From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago (University of Chicago Press), 1934.

<sup>8</sup> Bachmair, Ben. *Ethnomethodologie als handlungstheoretische Grundlage einer Didaktik der Kommunikation*. In: *Bildung und Erziehung* 1979, Heft 3, S. 229–240; *Technologische Veränderung von Kommunikation als Herausforderung für die*

the media within the referential frame of everyday life, opens not only the door to actual social phenomena like milieus, fan groups and life styles, but also to the issue of power. Stuart Hall<sup>9</sup> described this issue by using the formula of «Encoding» and «Decoding», which describes a discursive relation to meaning and signs.

From this perspective and generally speaking, mass communication is organized as public programming and its individual reception within everyday life and its relevant issues: A category like «space» may be helpful to model the current development of programme offer, which is dispersing into a more or less open arrangement of media, commodities and events. In addition to this, the category of space can also be helpful in explaining the inter-relation of the audience's activities with the continued diversification of media programme offer. Personal activities, such as the formation of meaning within everyday life, replace the formerly pre-organized, integrated programme offer. Formation of meaning produces, as well, entities in the sense of coherent arrangements of media, commodities and events, a coherence we are familiar with the traditional mass communication. The coherence of mass communication brought together public programme offer and everyday life by the audiovisual means of press, radio and TV. To solidify this argument, one chapter investigates «internet platforms» offered by TV channels. TV and internet are on their way to offering a new mediated space. What could imply such a concept as «mediated space»? E. g. through their design<sup>10</sup>, which produces a connection between typical activity patterns, ideas of childhood and practices in literacy. Websites like [www.foxkids.com](http://www.foxkids.com) and [www.rai-bambini.it](http://www.rai-bambini.it) are interesting examples offering a common space based on common or differing ideas of childhood and literacy. The interrelation of two media, TV and internet, offer a semiotic space, based on a common design and common ideas or practices.

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Pädagogik. Schäfer, G., Loch, W. (Hrsg.). *Kommunikative Grundlagen des naturwissenschaftlichen Unterrichts*, Weinheim 1980, S. 147–189 (Beltz, IPN); *Mit eigenen Augen sehen – der Versuch, Fernsehen didaktisch zu zähmen. medien + erziehung* 1980, Heft 4, S. 194–204.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, Stuart. *Encoding/Decoding*. In: Hall, Stuart et al. (ed.). *Culture, Media, Language*. London (Hutchinson) 1980, S. 128–139

<sup>10</sup> Kress, Gunther; Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Multimodal Discourses. The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London (Arnold) 2001, p. 45 +

## 2. Transformation of Mass Communication

### *From the coherent media to arrangements*

It is worth paying closer attention to intramedial and intertextual references. This results from a loose media structure of programming, such, as the occasional book accompanying a television programme: But, increasingly complex links within media structures are emerging. In today's everyday life, media users increasingly encounter arrangements of media and events, which are no longer limited to a single, isolated media base. Traditionally, these single media items were acquired separately, like a literary masterpiece. Therefore, even television channels offer their programme in a kind of multi-media system, together with books, games or live events. «Who wants to be a millionaire» is a typical example. In this case, TV plays the dominant role and is accompanied by a game using the same name. In the case of «Pokémon», the TV series even agreed on providing merely a supplementary programme for the dominant Nintendo Gameboy computer game. Here the connection between different media is more than just an intertextual reference. In essence, the medial and situative linkage - like an arrangement of media, commodities and events - initially deals with the phenomenon of intertextuality, i. e. the linkage of media offerings. This stretches from the loose form of intertextual references to the general basis of common texts, which appears in different forms. Commonly known modes of representation include written text, accompanying posters and music CDs or a programme on television, for which a text file may be downloaded from the internet. Arrangements of media, commodities and events form an open text or are based on an open text, in which users orient themselves.

Programmes, in the context of medial and situative arrangements and different modes of representation, often have a temporal or social focus. For example, «WWF-Wrestling», «Big Brother» and «Pokémon» come and go in a kind of fashion wave, adding a time frame like an expiration date to the programming, e. g. being «mega in» or «already out again». Fan movements and social milieus take up the social focus in a manner typically recognised in clothing styles or music, e. g. «rap» or «techno».

At the end of the 90's, the internet boom promised a network, or even so to say an integrated standardisation of media offer. This was expected to convert the rather open media, commodities and event arrangements into a reliable system, which would be more manageable for both the public and

private sectors. Internet or not, in general, a common text, along with different modes of representation forms a coherent base.

### **What is a sign-formation of meaning**

Traditionally we are certain, that signs produce a relationship between human beings and their world. Because human subjectivity changes, the triangle-shaped relationship between signs, persons, and the world is always in a state of flux. The history of philosophy shows the extent of this relationship and its theoretical interpretation. This speaks very much for bringing the current form of this triangular relationship to a conscious level. Because signs observed through the context of our media, act as constitutive objects in our everyday life, they also occupy a negotiative function in one's personal relationship with himself, others and his environment composed of events and facts.<sup>11</sup> Not only are all elements connected – they consist of this negotiative connection, which defines environment and subjectivity. This has always been the case, however it continues to force a culture into recognition of how, for example, signs and media intervene. The argumentation pattern, in place since Platon, that the upcoming generations are responsible for their respective decay in cultural development, is an indication for the necessity of relentless re-interpretation.

What is now creating insecurity? We can no longer rely on the familiar form of representation. Would it not be helpful, if the signs on the monitor presented contents and developments considered adequate for our reality? Should it not be taken for granted, that signs also appear like signs, as we know them in our culture? An example: our cultural commonsense tells us that one does not just buy jeans, because he wants to put on a pair of pants. At the same time, it is important to show a specific label. So, the pants take on an additional symbolic function, in addition to that of a clothing article. Of course pants always had the function of a sign, to establish a place in the social system among others for the one who wears it. Pierre Bourdieu referred to this in his «Critique sociale du jugement»<sup>12</sup>. At this time, a

<sup>11</sup> This is the model of the formation of subjectivity, which Norbert Elias developed in his historical cultural analysis: Elias, Norbert: *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. 2 Bände. Frankfurt a.M. (Suhrkamp) 1979. 1st edition 1937

<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris, 1979 (Les éditions de minuit).

specific function of signs receives a high amount of coverage. This takes place, because media and event arrangements only develop if their individual elements refer to each other and by way of these references then become a text. In this process, a stylistic coherence plays a great role in producing a text from elements that appear arbitrary. In defining their symbolic function, the style relevant for everyday life requires a special symbolic, aesthetic openness from objects, media, and events.

The arrangements do not just offer users the opportunity to have a hand in the development of a text, which is formatted by an everyday life aesthetic. The arrangements require users to produce this text and thus, identify objects using their symbolic function. There, Charles S. Peirce's indexed function of a sign becomes especially important. Indexed signs do not possess per se the characteristic of a sign. They are rather circumstances, such as smoke which refers to fire. In the indexed relation of smoke and fire, life experience plays a role. On the other hand, current arrangements of media, events, and objects require namely more or less elaborate forms, in order to set up a meaning. This formation of meaning occurs today in the user's thematic perspective – his life and personal issues - also in the frame of the available or sought social environment, as well as in the frame of inter-relation between media, events and objects.

### Aspects of the general cultural contexts

Regardless of whether the programme offer is made available by open media and event arrangements or by complex media systems on a common textual basis, the user can not avoid the process of selecting, assessing, evaluating, repelling etc. In the run-up to such activities most of the people has to orient themselves. Each social reference framework and personal, thematic motivation, as well as the concise text and intertextually connected media provide options for orientation. Along with mass communication's medial modifications, everyday life also is changing. Currently, we are confronted with an «individualisation», which is not limited to the context of everyday life and its changes. By applying the concept of «reflexivity»<sup>13</sup> in a society of individualised risks, as Ulrich Beck – among others – did, one becomes aware that a typical mode of consideration, cognition, experience or reflection is developing. Reflexivity

<sup>13</sup> Beck, Ulrich. *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. Frankfurt a. M. (Suhrkamp) 1986, p. 249 + und Beck, Ulrich. *Die Erfindung des Politischen*. Frankfurt a. M. (Suhrkamp) 1993, S. 36 +

makes orientation a dominant task, delegated to individual members of the society while being prepared in public at the same.

### Patterns of activities

With its different medial manifestations, the connected text supply corresponds to an abundance of various decision making patterns and usage. These patterns range from casual watching to complex integration, of TV programmes into mundane and individual action patterns with different levels of activity and external orientation, as well as «emotional states»<sup>14</sup>. This integration of media offers into action patterns and modes of feelings in everyday life is in the focus of our social development on the mundane reality of everyday life in the dynamics of the individual accountability. Again the keyword here is «individualisation». The linkage of everyday life to systemically integrated media offers occurs as people «latch» themselves onto the supplies of mass media. In the public realm mass communication and its media prepare this «latching», which spans from advertising to the complex programme overview or self-explanation of how the medium or one of its contributions can be understood. This preparation on the part of the medium corresponds with the directive activities of the users as a part of their life accomplishments.

*SuperRTL*<sup>15</sup> sketches such action patterns for children (S. 58 ff.)

- The «passives», with few of their own activities, however with a great deal of «action-rich television consumption»,
- The «play-children» with many toys and fairy tales,
- «The intellectuals», who concentrate on «more knowledge, in order to receive an achievement-oriented advantage»,
- «The gamer» with their plethora of «games, fun, and excitement»,
- The «unnoticables», with their love of animals and openness to new things,

<sup>14</sup> Super RTL Medienforschung. *Kinderwelten 2000*. Studienbericht Köln (RTL Disney Fernsehen GmbH & Co. KG). Durchführung der Studie: IJF Institut für Jugendforschung, München. Datenanalyse und Redaktion des Studienberichtes: Transferzentrum Publizistik und Kommunikation, München, S. 58 +, S. 48 +

<sup>15</sup> Super RTL Medienforschung: *Kinderwelten 2000*. Studienbericht Köln (RTL Disney Fernsehen GmbH & Co. KG). Durchführung der Studie: IJF Institut für Jugendforschung, München. Datenanalyse und Redaktion des Studienberichtes: Transferzentrum Publizistik und Kommunikation, München.

- «Fun and Action Kids», who are «young, dynamic, and rarely alone»,
- The «Allrounders», with a «need for leadership» and «corners and edges.»

These action patterns are a part of a social dynamic constituted by the everyday life aesthetic. Ideology, basic approaches to the world, and role models are connected with these patterns. They appear «in» them. Gerhard Schulze<sup>16</sup> worked out how «basic approaches to the world», role models, and «values» are connected with aesthetic forms like design and action patterns. Integrated in their design – so to say – on a deeper level, also websites offer such role models and basic approaches to the world. With this assumption, one should not forget the arrangements media, objects and events, e. g. a TV channel, as a referential element of a website.

After this brief outline of the current and media-relevant development, the following will exemplarily deal with reference structures in television channels as well as television structures and their websites. The main focus lies on offerings for children and the types of «semiotic spaces» within the scope of childhood.

### 3. Intra-medial links – The programme as an entity for reconstruction

The idea of the «formation of meaning» expresses that instead of the receptive, mimetic adoption of prefabricated meanings the individual formation of meaning takes over. The way this occurs is based on what is set up in a media text. For example, hints for orientation, which are intended to support the integration of programme offerings disintegrated by the reception type of zapping.

TV viewers, who have, as adults, experienced the development of TV during their lifetime, probably remember the appearance of strange logos like «Pro 7» on the screen. This was the time in Germany when more and more private TV channels began competing with the public ones. Short trailers were gradually introduced, which informed audiences about films

<sup>16</sup> Schulze, Gerhard: Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart. Frankfurt a.M. (Campus) 1992. Schulze, Gerhard: Alltagsästhetik und Lebenssituation. Eine Analyse kultureller Segmentierung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Soeffner, Hans-Georg (Hrsg.): Kultur und Alltag. Göttingen (Otto Schwartz & Co.) 1988, S. 71–92

that would soon be showing.<sup>17</sup> Today, these trailers are also aimed at children. The trailers which use a new but typical TV format, miniaturised sequences of moving images, provide information on programme offerings. There are also logos, mostly still images, which signify the channel or perhaps also the integrated programme area that the viewer is watching. The intention of these mini-offerings is to direct the viewing audience to specific elements of the programme and to keep them from flipping channels. In the beginning this was the simple marketing idea of guiding the audience.

#### 3.1 Guiding the audience: «Find my programme, which has been made for you»<sup>18</sup>

A possible guiding system are programme trailers, which advertise the programmes of a television channel. Next to programme titles there are two types of information, which seem to be the substantial and most frequently employed components of programme trailers: references regarding time and content of the advertised programme. For that purpose, three examples from the year 2000 are given:

<sup>17</sup> See: Bleicher, Joan. Nur ein toter Zuschauer ist ein guter Zuschauer. Programmverbindungen als Paratexte des Fernsehens. In: *Navigationen*. Siegener Beiträge zur Medien- und Kulturwissenschaft. Jahrgang 1, Nr. 1, Juni 2001, S. 77–86. Hickethier, Knut, Bleicher, Joan (Hrsg.): Trailer, Teaser, Appetizer. Zu Ästhetik und Design der Programmverbindungen im Fernsehen. Hamburg 1997

<sup>18</sup> The following overview of trailers in German children's television comes from programme samples from three days, which were recorded in spring of the years 2000 and 2001. They were broadcast on German television channels and the programmes are relevant to children. For further reference also see [www.kinderforschung.de](http://www.kinderforschung.de). The research project «Bestandsaufnahme zum Kinderfernsehen» examines the line between mass communication between the offerings of the channels and the usage through the recipients. An annual sample of three days within a calendar week and 500 hours of programming relevant to children broadcast by television channels licenced in Germany is taken and then connected to a database with standardised data on television usage



Picture 2:  
RTL 2, 2000:  
Preview for June



Picture 3:  
RTL 2, 2000:  
Trailer «Bravo TV»



Picture 4:  
SAT.1, 2000:  
Trailer «Verratene  
Freundschaft»  
(betrayed friendship)

In this year RTL2 advertised its programme for the month of June without giving specific information on the times of the particular broadcast. The special emphasis rather lay on advertising the programme for a particular month via the design, which drew the attention on the month of June. Furthermore, it was presented within a graphic frame. The programme advertisement for *Bravo TV* is provided with the reference «SUNDAYS». The audience interested in the programme is expected to know about the time of broadcast. They gather information on the exact time independently or simply switch on the programme. Sat.1 puts the title of the programme *Verratene Freundschaft* (i. e. «betrayed friendship») before the time of its broadcast «Sunday 20:15». Just as with the trailer for *Bravo TV* the audience gets an overview regarding the title of the programme. However, also the exact time is mentioned, thereby making a difference to the programme advertisement for *Bravo TV*. In order for these trailers to unfold their function of reference and orientation, the audience is expected to have a specific kind of dealing with texts. The audience has to understand programme titles in a written form and assign them to the exact times. This is a text literacy which is based on a educationally developed reading literacy of reading letters and words but also makes the sign-like images a part of the overall text. The trailers partially require the audience to have experience with the extensive programme offerings (e. g. programme area in the evenings) like for example with regard to the RTL2 area «Ich glaub ich bin im Feierabend» (i. e. «I believe I am at the end of the working day») or the programme offerings for audience groups on Pro7.

In 2000 RTL2 offered an integrated programme area with the already mentioned title «Ich glaub ich bin im Feierabend». This image trailer addresses a specific audience group, i. e. that working population which arrange their evening at the time of the programme area with the programme offered by RTL2. The content is not advertised, a knowledge of RTL2's programme is expected to be known or is thought of as less important.

In the same year Pro7 designed their programme trailers in the children's programme areas in a way that differed clearly from the rest of the programme: on a drawn shed there was a picture frame showing an excerpt of the programme advertised. Underneath a reference to the time, e. g. «soon» and the title of the programme, e. g. *Vier Hexen gegen Walt Street* (i. e. «Four Witches against Walt Street») were shown. Design and structure, which address the children and make clear the preview character, at the same time give the relevant information on content and time thereby

making it possible for «experts» within the audience to assign these trailers to a particular programme area.

In order to unfold their impact, these texts with an intramedial hint function depend on action patterns like the ones of being an experts. To become an expert, children have to understand the programme scheduling of the TV channels. However, since far too many programme areas of this kind exist – and thereby make it impossible for recipients to use these as a pattern for their programme decisions - this is only possible on the basis of personal relevance structures («I like to watch this programme, because...»). The use of these programme trailers requires the audience to be experienced with objective time structures such as daily or weekly sequels. Furthermore, it requires subjective assumptions like estimating what «soon» within the context of television programming order means. In addition there is the educationally acquired reading literacy without which these programme trailers do not function. Furthermore the design of the programme trailers constructs an attractiveness, which – just like traditional advertising – intends to replace the audience's independent orientation activities by guiding via trailers. The attractiveness of the design feeds itself from a new generation of programme trailers, i. e. an overlap of lists and images, which require a new and not educationally formed type of literacy. They probably unfold their orientation function only in connection with patterns moulded by the aesthetic of everyday life<sup>19</sup>. These form the basis on which recipients grasp and «read» these text offerings.

### 3.2 Innovative design and a new form of literacy as a prerequisite for programme selection

The optical parallelism or the simultaneousness of a list, which is well-known from print media, offers an organizational structure which helps to

<sup>19</sup> See: Lange, Elmar; Jugendkonsum im Wandel; Konsummuster, Freizeitverhalten, soziale Milieus und Kaufsucht 1990 und 1996; Opladen (Leske und Budrich) 1997

Deese, Uwe (Hrsg.). *Jugendmarketing: das wahre Leben in den Jugendszenen der Neunziger*. Duesseldorf (Metropolitan-Verl.) 1995

SINUS Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut: *Strukturanalyse der Zuschauer von Pro 7. Ergebnisse einer qualitativ orientierten Pilotstudie*. Im Auftrag der MGM MediaGruppe München. Heidelberg (SINUS Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut Nowak und Partner GmbH, Ezanvillestraße 59, 69118 Heidelberg) Mai 1994

Schulze, Gerhard. *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kulturosoziologie der Gegenwart*. Frankfurt a. M. (Campus) 1992

Cathelat, Bernhard. *Socio-Styles*; London (Kogan Page) 1993

gain an overview of an offering or to select what is of interest to one particular recipient. This pattern is also found in the area of new media. When an overview should be given or choices for selection are presented, PCs or the Internet utilize index systems. They appear as a menu, a navigation bar, an Internet portal or something similar. Also television no longer only works with moving images but also increasingly uses lists in order to advertise a programme and to guide the viewer through the programme. At Pro7 (private TV channel) and also at ARD (board of national and regional public TV channels) the printed programme information list, which uses the time of broadcast and the title of the programme, and the typical TV image overlap. A new form of text, which connects the graphic preview with the list, develops.



Picture 5a, b, c, d: Pro7, 2001:  
Trailer «Die Simpsons and Futurama»

This new form of text, which was also to be found at ARD, was introduced at Pro7 in the spring of 2001 with newly designed programme trailers, which are divided into two parts. In the first part the audience gets a preview of the content of the advertised programme in form of a small excerpt. The only things that indicates the preview character is the title of the programme shown on the right side of the screen. First, an excerpt of the programme *The Simpsons* is shown. Then an excerpt of *Futurama* follows. After these two sequences a list of information with regard to the time of broadcast of the two programmes and their titles is given.

«tomorrow  
21:15  
The Simpsons  
21.45  
Futurama»

At the beginning the word «tomorrow» is shown. After that the time of broadcast and the title of the series *The Simpsons* follow. The key figures of the programme are shown in a narrow strip on the right hand side of the screen. They remain visible when the list with the time information appears in the foreground. Next, the data concerning *The Simpsons* move into the background and those regarding *Futurama* appear. At that time the information on the time of broadcast and the title are shown, on the right hand side of the screen the key figures from *Futurama* appear. Both the aesthetic attraction of the design and the differentiation of colours and graphical structure are remarkable. The graphical structure of the trailer list stems from the transfer of the list structure into parallel showing images with the same colouring, e. g. in amber with a differentiation in bands, which convert the time schedule of the programme list into a moving sequence. Underneath are concise images of the protagonists or situations that the trailer refers to. The structural and graphic set up initially separates the information regarding content and time. However graphical gadgets then bring them back together while indicating the unity of the two programmes *The Simpsons* and *Futurama* in one possible programme area. At this point of the development something like a new form of literacy can be assumed. It is due to the audience combining the typical means of design of television, i. e. moving images, colours or protagonists of a story, with the text forms acquired at school and lists. In order to develop an

orientation function, the programme trailer requires not only a reading competence learned at school but also the competence acquired outside of the school to handle the means of design specific to television and computers. The scholastically learned reading competence supports the selection of a programme choice in the way of a comparison. The TV means of representation establish a nearness to the programme. This nearness can take the form of being close with the protagonists, to find them attractive or to disapprove of them. Furthermore a viewer is able to decide on the programme with the help of the representational means of television, if her or she is experienced with the programme to which the trailer refers to. At this point patterns of activities and acquisition such as those of the experts play a role. With regard to the new aesthetic hybrid forms these medial structured patterns can be expected to become even more effective. Trailers address an audience, which is segmented by medial experience and everyday life aesthetics. The typical experience of everyday life to handle the particular representational means of media and aesthetic result from the coming together of the media offering and the recipient. This coming together to the competence to be able to make use of representational modes, which differ among groups of recipients with regard to bring television or other media into coherent spaces. A certain type of literacy, which children learn outside of school, e. g. by using video games, contributes to establishing a common ground. This kind of literacy is a prerequisite for picking up orienting offers like trailers or other links.

### 3.3 *The aesthetic hybrids of media and event arrangements*

When the audience moves around within the explicit children's TV programme, it will encounter a new type of aesthetics with regard to trailers. For example, Pro7, a private, national TV channel, gives a preview of the programme the audience is supposed to watch as if it were shown through a looking glass or behind a kind of porthole, which – depending on the individual interpretation – could also be a display. In contrast, Fox Kids, a private cable TV channel, presents its previews as if they were shown on a media device like CD players or a tape recorders. In one trailer version the control panel of a device with a monitor and someone zapping through the programme (this could be *Spiderman*) is shown. In another version some kind of screen with four buttons for playing, fast forwarding, rewinding or stopping is displayed.



Picture 6a:  
Fox Kids, 2001: Trailer  
*Die kleinen Zwurze*  
(*The little crumpled dwarfs*)



Picture 6b:  
Fox Kids, 2001:  
Trailer *Digimon*



Picture 6c:  
Fox Kids, 2001: Trailer  
*Gänsehaut*  
(*Goose Pimples*)

These programme trailers avoid readable time information. They also do not mention the title of the programme. These trailers predominantly concentrate on the aesthetic innovations by referring to other media like CD players. The design of the trailers makes it easy for children to assign the advertised programme to a particular genre or a specific age group. It is possible also for those kids that lack experience with these programmes. For example the stylised buttons of the device for the programme trailer for *Die kleine Zwurze* (*The little crumpled dwarfs*) are large, round, playful and in bright colours. This is a design like that of traditional children's books. In contrast some kind of technical design dominates when presenting *Digimon*, a Japanese cartoon format. Or, the reference to *Gänsehaut* (i. e. «Goose Pimples») a skull is displayed, thereby indicating the genre type «horror». Furthermore a typical picture of the programme appears on some kind of display. Around this display the buttons for fast forwarding, rewinding, starting and stopping are arranged.

Other trailers from Pro7 and Fox Kids play around with means of interlocking, which indicate the clear demarcation between the preview and the actual programme. In this way children directly understand that what is shown is the preview and not the actual programme.

Just like other channels also Fox Kids uses trailers, which do not lead to a particular programme but rather are meant to give the channel a typical image. Such image trailers from Fox Kids, which Fox Kids refers to as «Rider» or «Tunnel», have the character of «jump and run games».



Picture 7a: Fox Kids, 2001: *Rider*



Picture 7b: Fox Kids, 2001: *Rider*

Picture 7c: Fox Kids, 2001: *Rider*Picture 7d: Fox Kids, 2001: *Rider*

They do not request the children to perform achievements to structure or organize any order programme offers, but they also do not offer any kind of orientation or pre-structuring. They rather emphasize their specific entertainment value and aim at establishing a commitment with the channel. They unfold their wit only to those who possess the adequate expert knowledge regarding computer games. «Rider» trailers present little adventures to the audience, which are well known since Nintendo's «Super Mario Land». The camera moves around in a computer generated fantasy landscape of deserts, wild west towns, oriental palaces or gold mines through the perspective of a game figure. Throughout this tour «the camera» collects Fox Kids logos. As soon as a logo has been obtained, in the lower part of the picture a display pops up showing the total number of all collected logos. A further screen presents items such as keys, springs or looking glasses, which are needed to reach the target. Colourful fantasy figures guide the way to the target.

Another type of image trailers, the so called «Tunnel» offers racing, high-speed drives through tunnel systems and pipes. When viewing the trailer through 3D glasses the spectator seems to be in the centre of the three dimensional action. Obstacles such as apples, flowers or angles are dodged. At the end of such a drive one meets bees, worms or cave men and the Fox Kids logo.

As well as the programme trailers from Pro7 and Fox Kids also these trailers are changing the familiar representational means of television. With the new and subjective means of representation viewer take visually the role of the game figure and view the surroundings through the active game perspective. The audience is given no distance for orientation, they are rather involved in the role of the protagonist. These trailers offer

participation rather than orientation. By this new aesthetic the original advertising function of trailers takes effect – no longer in the TV related sense of information on time or content of the channel's programme. With a kind of subjective game and participation offering these image trailers integrate the viewer into the actual programme. The decision for or against a programme is made via patterns organized by everyday life aesthetics or, more generally speaking, via *styles* in which the trailer offering is integrated, e. g. to be active, fast, individual and unconventional.

#### 4. Design as frame of reference and bridge – Websites for children's television programmes.

The following section deals with an example of how the relationship between the old medium of television and that of the new one – the internet enables a sort of space, which is structured by common experiences, such as childhood and literacy. The two media – television and internet – build an open arrangement of media, where more than just a common or differing style is important. Of course, marketing played a founding role for both. Once it begins, design develops its own individual dynamic. During this process, aesthetically defined frames of references are created, functioning on the level of taste and corresponding with patterns of an everyday life aesthetic. General concepts like childhood correlate with the design. They set up kinds of lines or bridges of continuity, which are probably not just used in making decisions about using a website. Aside from these frames of orientation, which are based on frames of reference, literacy appears as a macro and a development possibility. In trailers with the combination of lists and pictures (the programme's protagonist, for example), a school-related form of literacy is a requirement for unfolding individual orientation functions. There, traditional writing and simple, written text forms connect themselves with typical television pictures.

#### Examples of websites for children's TV channels

Despite obvious differences, all private and public networks' websites are similar in that their home pages offer interesting designs to attract children on the surface, i. e. the first page. This is done in order to offer their range of programmes on a sub-page, as simple time and programme lists for the children to read (in the traditional sense of reading). These programme information pages nonetheless differ in regards to the literacy of genre, which children can obtain or test there. There are also differences in

references made about background information, which the pages are meant to convey. Another similarity is the game-like appearance of the websites' activities. This clearly distinguishes websites from television programmes. In this aspect, the use of websites is becoming an innovative mechanism in the arrangement of media, commodities and events.



picture 8: www.foxkids, first page

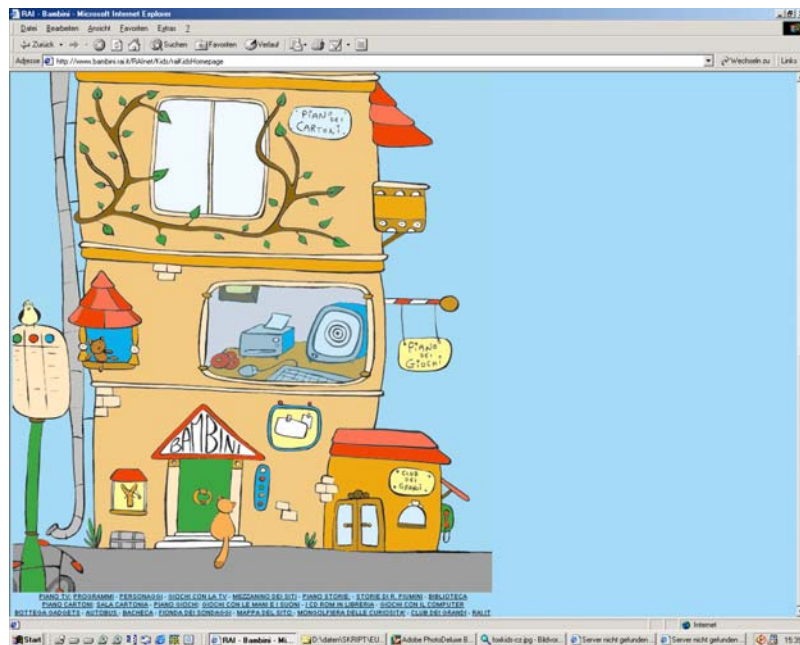
On both Italian and German homepages for www.foxkids.de, television programmes like «Sissi», «Die Drillinge», and «nuovo racconti da brividi» dominate in a simple framework. Of equal importance is the range of games and events like «nuovi giochi», «il gioco di Natale», «2002: Dein Horoskop», «Spiel der Woche» and «Themen Specials» for the current television series «Digimon.» Using a nickname and password, children can also join in an «inner circle» («inneren Zirkel») of the «FK Bande» (G)/ «Club Fox Kids» (I). In addition to this feature, there is also a menu bar with symbols like a football or a key. A child cartoon-figure appears next to a large middle field which contains information for the respective page-nationality, ie: the Italian or the German page (G: «Happy New Year each

eine komentenhaften»/ I: «Vita con Lionel Entra nel mondo di Lionell!!!!») The text («Happy New Year») is part of a newsticker that displays various current events. The Italian version shows a boy in shorts and the German version shows a non-gender specific child. Both children are not overly fashionable and are in no way dressed like adults.

From all frames on the homepage, the user can click to other pages containing, amongst other things, a programme overview. On this page, there is a menu bar with the days of the week, a button for the «Top Ten», a box with lists of times and programmes and a box with current programmes, listed according to genre. The Italian version uses well-known, standard words such as: «azione», «paura», and «comico», while the German version uses word constructions like: «Äktschn'n», a miscorrection of the English word «action», a soothing expression «Keine Panik» (don't panic) and a simple tag «Spaß» (fun). In front of keywords are porthole-like symbols, representing Fox Kids' programme trailers. There is also an explanatory and motivational text under each keyword. Additionally, one finds two characters from current programmes.

Despite a high level of common design features, Fox Kids permits a lot of national expression, including more than just a language adaptation. Another important similarity is the required level of literacy. A child must be able to read and not just cue words. Along with daily time and programme listings, children receive simple genre orientations. Websites and TV programmes share very few common aesthetic elements, such as television programme characters or elements from programme trailers. Website producers can be sure that aside from watching television, children pursue a number of other non-media oriented leisure activities. For this reason, websites also offer games. Although these games have also become a part of Fox Kids' arrangement of media, commodities and events, the websites are not meant to be internet portals providing links to other arrangements of media, commodities and events.

The Italian RAI does not offer a schema similar to that of Fox Kids. Instead, a six-storey house with rooms containing surprises awaits the visitors. Each floor of RAI's children's television house offers a theme and special activities. Visitors can click to the floors either directly or indirectly, using a doorbell or a lift button bar. An animated hot air balloon with moving and changing words on the balloon's surface flies into the picture from the left side of the screen. A picture link on the balloon's basket calls up a logbook in which children can write their opinions on



picture 9: [www.bambini.rai.it](http://www.bambini.rai.it)

various themes and programmes. At the top right of the picture, there is an airplane waving two banners, showing current games. There is a cat sitting in front of the main door, swishing its tail and a bird flapping its wings. Written on a triangular sign above the door is the word «Bambini». By clicking there, children can obtain internal information, such as a card they can use to orient themselves on the different levels.

On each floor (piani), there are signs describing the page's contents:

1. Entrata (Entrance)
2. Piano dei giochi (Games floor)
3. Piano dei cartoni (Cartoons floor)
4. Piano delle stori (Stories floor)
5. Mezzanino dei siti (Internet site mezzanine)
6. Piano della tv (Television floor)

There are three entrances on this floor (through picture links) on three sub-levels:

- a) i programmi (TV programmes)

- b) i personaggi (Actors)

- c) giochi con la tv (Games with the television)

«I programmi» (TV programmes) can be found on the «Piano della tv». From this here, a visitor can reach a second level, which resembles an office with two bulletin boards, a table and other objects. The left bulletin board shows the current TV programme and the right bulletin board is also linked to a third level, offering a list of TV programmes for the upcoming week. The programmes from rai uno, rai due, rai tre and junior sat can be found there, listed according to time. There is an animated red and white box under the first bulletin board. Moving words («gioca con noi» and «il combina favole») are combined with the presentation of a puzzle. This box offers visitors the chance to combine animated sequences and create fairy tales.

Under the second bulletin board, there is a triangular «search machine» with the title «cerca» (search). By sending names of favourite programmes, children can obtain information on programme times and stars, as well as a commentary. At this level, a green mirror can be found, making it possible to search for words within the children's website.

On another level of «Piano della tv», «i personaggi» (actors) is the focus. In a sort of living room, there is a cat sleeping on a sofa, a notebook, a photo album, a hand mirror, plants and a television set. Some of these objects have the following links:

Notebook: Questions to the stars and presenters can be sent from there.

Photo album: Photographs of the moderators are there.

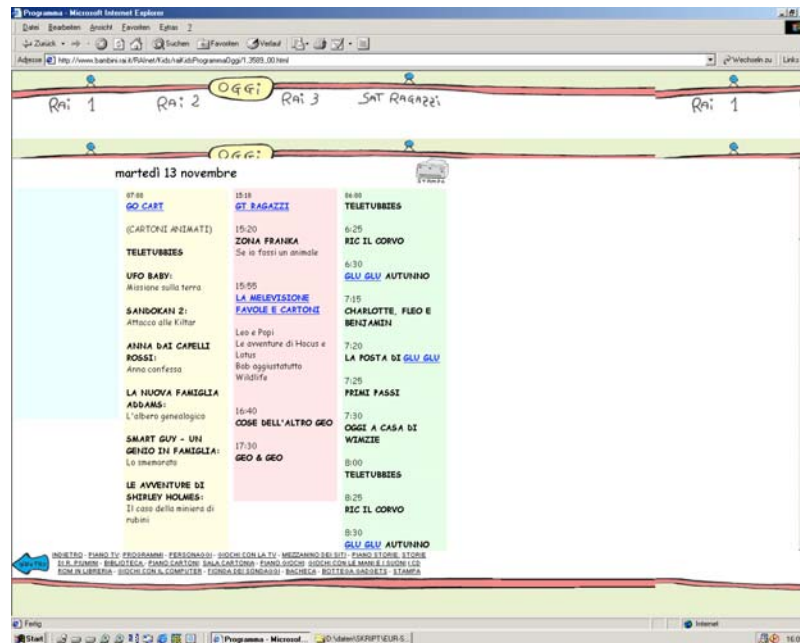
Hand mirror: With this mirror, you can search for words within the children's website.

Television set: Interviews to see and listen to.

### **Underneath an in common: «childhood» and «literacy»**

A «typical» design, producing a connection to the respective senders, was probably at the starting point of a development coined by everyday life aesthetic. That development allows children and to a certain extent their parents a form of either integration or segregation. The idea of the «corporate identity» as a guideline for the design-development corresponds to a stylistically formed user base, that stands out when one compares the Fox Kids-websites with those of the Italian public channel RAI. In its presentation, the RAI-website is an electronic relative of a children's

picture-book, that does not conceal its middle-class set-up. In contrast, the Fox Kids-Design shows a closer connection to comics and cartoons.



picture 10: [www.bambini.rai.it](http://www.bambini.rai.it), 2nd page

Children develop different design preferences in respect to their social styles. The family style supports for some time more stability, but remain flexible through the interactions with their peers. With this, they eventually become users of a website. Because everyday aesthetic preferences are connected with action patterns, there are also implicit connections which function as orientation, as seen before in the case of SuperRTL, which sketches such action patterns for children. In a culture offering the everyday life aesthetic as a symbolic guide for the construction of one's individual world of living, the connection between design and action patterns represents more than just the function of entertaining or specific action patterns. Design and action patterns are the base of «basic

approaches to the world» (Gerhard Schulze 1992, S. 261), role models, and world-orientation (Gerhard Schulze 1988, S. 90).



picture 11: [www.foxkids.com](http://www.foxkids.com), 2nd page

On a sort of deeper level, websites offer role models and values. Of importance is certainly the implicit concept of childhood, which differentiates the Fox Kids and RAI Bambini websites from another. The implicit RAI concept is traditional, however child-oriented, and educational. In contrast, the Fox Kids website is open to consumer activities, childhood without educational requirements, and a youthful lifestyle. In the sense of a marketing instrument which wants to lead its public to the television channel, the website touches on ideas of childhood, in that it offers forms of activities, design, and media that are typical characteristics of a child's world. Under the pretence of such concepts, a medially negotiated ideological common ground is developed, that is concrete for parents.

## Literacy

In order to reach the deeper lying pages with programme information, all websites examined here require experience with television and games, as well as experience with written texts in the form of lists. On the homepage, text plays a relatively small role. The site is also accessible, regardless of one's experience with words. As with Fox Kids, however, without a minimum of knowledge, certain individual, current television programme listings can not be used. As a result, there are pictures or pictorial hints of current series, which offer an adult – assuming he has no specific, current knowledge of child programming – very little to work with. One yearns for explanations in text form. In this case, the other side of literacy, as opposed to scholastically acquired literacy, appears in a non-written form. So, it covers new forms of representation that are related to both media and everyday life experience.

On deeper website levels, direct programme information is provided in lists. They require an academic literacy. At Fox Kids, where the cartoon plays the dominating role, analogue figures from the television show appear on the website. They dominate the homepage and compliment the pages with programme information. Of particular interest are the different levels of abstraction in the symbolic compression. There are images out of the TV programme, which represent as cartoon figure the TV series like an *index* in the sense of Peirce's category of signs. Like an icon, another cartoon figure reflects the cartoon as the dominant format of the TV channel. Additionally there are *symbols*. For example, inside a medallion, next to a written hint for a programme under the headline «Spass» (fun) a clown is seen. Graphic signs are also related to this concrete symbol. RAI Bambini differentiates between signs, as well. Traditionally written text is blended with symbols from TV. But there is a form of functional specification. Indexed signs, acting as an element in arrangement of media, commodities and events, require experiences with the relevant elements of an arrangement. Otherwise, one cannot deal with this type of sign as one does when reading and writing. Without experience with websites or the TV programme, this new repertoire of signs can not to be read. These examples that also suggest new «places» are emerging to aid in learning to deal with signs as cultural representation. In contrast or in addition to those from school, these medial induced spaces obtain the function of social stratification. How an audience acquires its literacy with and within arrangements of media, commodities and events is crucial.