Modern Italy, 2013
Vol. 18, No. 1, 55–73, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13532944.2011.611491

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The creation of shared space and the definition of a 'light' community in Italian television in the 1980s

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(*Received 5 February 2011; final version accepted 21 April 2011*)

In the mid-1970s the reform of Italy's radio and television system led to the end of RAI's monopoly and the advent of commercial television stations. This resulted in a reorganisation of the system according to the precepts of daily life and domesticity, with viewers at the centre of the relationship with the medium. This article, by analysing televisual archives such as game shows, explores how television formed part of the changes taking place in society and reveals how it became a kind of meeting-place, coinciding with the rise of an affluent society, between aspirations and desires and stereotypical models dictated by the market. These models were able to express new values that went beyond the boundaries of ideological affiliations and were in effect a response to the search for new forms of identity. In particular, television's place became an open space that was defined through modes of socialisation. It thus constructed a wider intimacy, a 'mediatised hearth', that progressively eroded the barriers between the private and the public sphere and led unexpectedly towards a 'relationship of interest' between television, competitors, viewers and financial backers. A new community then emerged, characterised more by possessing than by existing.

Keywords: television; Italian history; advertising; game shows; Berlusconi

Introduction

To understand the socio-cultural implications of the transformation of the televisual world we need to take a brief look at the period prior to the 1975 reform. Monopoly state television saw its role in that period as to educate and provide access to high-level culture (although this was also done through more accessible formats, such as TV adaptations with a historical or literary theme). At the same time it provided models of socially acceptable behaviour, which were defined by the moderate nature of language and attitudes in serious programmes and also in variety shows and films.[1] Although there was a fixed weekly slot for various genres, the same could not have been said for daily programmes: the separation between the programmes, which was marked by signature tunes at the start and finish, was often followed or preceded by 'empty spaces',[2] and pointed to disjointed scheduling. The cost of television licences grew progressively (*Lo spettacolo in Italia* 1990, 4) and RAI 1 and RAI 2, the two national state networks, reached 98% and 90% of Italian families respectively by 1968. However, state broadcasters still remained closely tied to the paternalistic and pedagogic model; in line

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https://doi.org/10.1080/13532944.2011.611491 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with this perception, those on the receiving end of their broadcasts were not viewers to be entertained but people to be educated. The RAI (the state broadcasting company) was aware of the potential of involvement and persuasion through television once it had become family entertainment, yet they chose to disregard it. RAI's fear (expressed also by the intelligentsia and by the very influential world of politics and the Church) of bringing about possible changes in the public's behaviour caused them to protect television viewers, trying to stop such changes becoming widespread for so long as they could.

In the mid-1970s the reform of the radio-televisual system and the advent of technicolour immediately afterwards transformed the face of television to which viewers had hitherto become accustomed.[3] The deregulation of the market also marked the end of RAI's monopoly and new commercial broadcasters started to entertain people in their homes. Within a few years, stiff competition brought about by commercial television channels led to far-reaching changes in their relationship with viewers. These were no longer merely people to be informed, educated and entertained; and broadcasters needed to devise forms of constant interaction that could also benefit the sponsors' market. It is no coincidence that surveys of viewer ratings by Auditel were introduced in the 1980s in response to pressure from commercial networks and the advertising market.[4] One of the factors that motivated the formation of Auditel, apart from a wish to publish the data collected with maximum transparency, was 'the need for certainty in the world of advertising'.[5]

The outcome of these developments was a change of perspective that put viewers at the centre of the relationship with the medium. Although there is no lack of theoretical writing in the field of media studies on the evolution of such a relationship, whether on the transformation of televisual structures or on television's socio-cultural position or as an analysis of programmes in a range of genres, little has been written about the way in which television became part of the ongoing changes in society and the role it played in promoting new cultural models. Through entertainment programmes such as quiz shows and game shows,[6] and through reality television, we can trace not only the mentality and culture of the 1980s but also the way in which such a mentality was promoted and (sometimes) generated by a new televisual culture.

A privileged observation point for these changes is provided by the organisation of domestic space and the role played by television within the home, and by the changes in set designs as seen on television. Both environments are analysed in this article not necessarily as places, but as spaces defined through the processes of socialisation that have come into being and allowed the barriers that once separated the two environments to fall. Thus the intention of this article is twofold: on the one hand it aims to demonstrate that the transformation in the 1980s of the connection between television and domestic relationships in terms of a greater 'intimacy' can be explained by starting with the concept of *space*; and that in this way, this concept helps us to define the terms of a new community, which is recognised according to new models of belonging. This is a community of individuals in which the ever more active and particularist behaviour of competitors in game shows seems to mark a sort of 'relationship of interest' between television and the competitors, and where the role assumed by the advertisers seems very prominent. The promotion of a consumerist culture on the part of the televisual medium is therefore intensified through the image of opulence and abundance that derives from game shows, from their daily availability[7] and from the sponsorship of consumer products, something which often seems to be encouraging excessive consumption. The move from a

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leadership function to the 'cultural' function of consumption allowed television to express new values that went beyond the confines of ideological or class-based affiliations. Thus through the content and form of the televisual archives that have been examined, we can point out styles and practices of consumption that were marked by an attempt to create new guises for viewers to identify with.

Testifying to the domestic ambience

At the end of the 1980s one of Raitre's entertainment programmes, *Complimenti per la trasmissione* (1988),[8] enabled television to go literally into Italians' homes. No longer merely as a window on the world but through a wide open door that brought viewers into daily contact with other families and other homes as privileged observers of how these families and homes had changed (or had remained the same) in line with demographic shifts, the new form of the economy and employment and leisure activities.[9] This amounted to a change of habits that in turn entailed a transformation in the geography of domestic space and the experiences connected with that space.

Although nearly all Italian families already had a television set, there was a gradual but constant increase in the 1980s in the purchase of television licences and a growing preference for colour television (*Lo spettacolo in Italia* 1990, 262, 264), as well as a tendency to buy a second set. We know from research by Eurisko on the frequency of cultural activities in Italy in the mid-1980s that watching television was the only daily cultural activity for 86.3% of those interviewed. Use of other media such as the daily papers and sports news accounted for low percentages and more specialised viewers (Calvi 1987, 173 [table 5.14]). There was an incremental rise at this time in the acquisition of recreational goods (*Lo spettacolo in Italia* 1990, IV)[10]; but even in *Complimenti per la trasmissione* the television set (of which there was often more than one) seemed to be the only medium of mass technological communication that was present in all homes. Furthermore it was the television set to which the most time was given. Unlike other media, television seemed to be capable of transcending differences in the age, class, gender or cultural background of viewers.

From live screenings inside people's homes, but also from interviews with people in other programmes, one can observe how the environment of the living-room (*sala*) was the preferred site for placing the television: that is to say, the space where in the 1980s the importance of family togetherness – which in the 60s, by contrast, was expressed in the small dining area (tinello)/Saraceno 1987, 55) – was reaffirmed, along with the function of welcoming guests from outside the family, which was once reserved to the more elegant salotto. The absolutely central position occupied by the television set in this part of the house thus seems to be of particular importance, the more so if we are attempting to contextualise the televisual medium within domestic communication and the supply of information. What type of information is derived from the presence or absence of other technological objects and to what socio-cultural deliberations does the information lead?

Computers and video-cassette recorders, for example, were both novelties in the world of new consumption, yet they were not seen in any of the homes that were visited in *Complimenti per la trasmissione* – although it should not be forgotten, in this connection, that these products were at that time very limited in terms of what could be done with them. Within a few years computer science would lead to major changes in all sectors of

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production, finance, the service industry and telecommunications, bringing about changes in the workplace and the professions yet leaving no trace of its presence. Yet neither schools nor universities had access to these new technologies, except at the level of specific faculties; thus it was difficult to disseminate the competences in this field, especially given the small number of graduates and people with a secondary school diploma.[11] The almost total absence of video-cassette recorders, on the other hand, seems odd, since television programmes repeatedly proclaimed their desirability throughout the decade. Furthermore, media stories of the private parties in cities such as Milan, Florence, Venice and Rome served to underline aspects linked to the use of free time outdoors on balconies or roof gardens and in the more sought-after *salotti*. These kinds of events became synonymous with a sense of being fashionable and the use of the video-cassette recorder for selected screenings was a standard feature (Gatti and Nicotri 1984).[12]

Let us now look back to a mass media object from the past, namely radio, and focus on the link between the domestic space that it occupied and the functions linked to that space. In the 1930s and 1940s the radio was always placed in the living-room, that is to say in the centre of the domestic space. It was a medium that informed, entertained, introduced new characters and brought 'nearer' the important personalities of the political and social life of the day (Scarpellini 2008, 118–19). In the 1980s, by contrast, the radio never appeared in a shared place; most often it was kept in the bedroom, which suggests more personal enjoyment in accordance with one's own musical tastes and specific interests in the various information programmes. In this sense the radio became more and more a medium that was acquired for oneself and shifted one's personal sense of privacy from the home in general to the more restricted and defined space of one's own room. The effect of the break-up of the free radio stations of the 1970s, which was linked to the fast pace of programming and the modalities of language and interaction with a completely new listening public (Eco 1976), should not be forgotten.

So television's role within domestic environments turned out to be central. Although it appeared to have supplanted radio in its capacity to attract the attention of different family members, it appeared in some respects to share radio's function both as a daily background medium which alternated information and entertainment and was a means of enabling each member of the family to carve out his/her own niche. If we accept Casetti's thesis, according to which 'neo-television enables personalized practices' (Casetti 1988, 67) in relation both to choosing programmes and to enjoying them, we could argue that there was a relationship between the tendency to acquire a second television set and the room in the house where it was placed.[13] On the other hand, as the number of television channels multiplied following the reform of the radio-televisual system, so did the supply of programmes and their availability throughout the day. Thanks to market research surveys the profile of viewers at different times of day could be analysed, and viewers were given the widest possible choice as to what to watch and when, based on personal preferences. In this context every television network built its own identity and achieved 'recognisability' with viewers through programme schedules and daily programming in time bands. Thus television became part of the family and its better-known characters and programmes belonged to the daily routine. In the afternoon, for example, there were broadcasts targeted specifically at young people coming back from school or at elderly people or housewives (Rizza 1989, 78). Having a television set in the bedroom was for parents a way of watching late evening programmes before falling asleep or, in an era when a lot of attention was devoted to looking after oneself, the propensity to place the exercise bicycle

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or other sporting gear in the bedroom (*Complimenti per la trasmissione* 1988, Ep. 21) was a way of combining a bit of physical activity with a background of television.

Television made the viewer a 'witness' (Ellis 2000), someone who could be 'on the spot', in terms of places, people and issues – even if they were far away, without needing to move from his or her own domestic space. In this way it gave information about the context that produced it but it could also ask questions about the reasons and forms of possible changes or conflicts. If we take account of ongoing demographic, economic and workplace changes, for example, then we are able to examine the connection between television and domestic relationships by 'reading' the organisation of the domestic space that took place concerning the relationship between family members and the various rooms in the house, as well as the presence of media and technological objects. In addition we can examine the relationship between television and the creation of new meanings, which was linked to the new consumerist culture that television itself was promoting.

In 1980s Italy the percentage of adult children living with their parents was much higher than the average in other industrialised countries, and up to twice the percentage in the United Kingdom (Jowell et al., ed. 1989 cited in Dalla Zuanna 2001, 142). The inevitable demand for privacy required by individuals found a sort of solution in the parental home, where improved living conditions as regards available space and the number of people in the house allowed more scope for creating one's own space (Ginsborg 1998, 571). The statistics, however, do not fully take account of borderline family conditions, where the search for privacy within the walls of the family home assumed different tones and meanings. The household whom the presenter of *Complimenti per la trasmissione* met in Capodimonte (1988, Ep. 15), for example, was made up of two nuclear families; something which seemed similar to the situation in the 1940s with extended families (Saraceno 1987, 54), when a married couple was given a bedroom, in which (with their own baby) they had a semblance of privacy from their family of origin with whom they shared all other spaces. In a similar family environment, where change of circumstances had led to a marked reduction in personal space and made any form of privacy impossible (the four sisters of the wife shared a bedroom, and the size of the beds meant that they could hardly move about), the number of television sets multiplied noticeably.

Furthermore television, as a 'translocational medium' (Turnock 2007, 117–18), was in a position to 'transport' the viewer towards processes of modernisation and consumption that were ongoing in Italy. The presence of television in the kitchen, a place for preparation rather than consumption of meals and where it was difficult to watch television attentively, led to a wider reflection on this particular room in the house and its evolution in the 1980s. Considered a 'female space' par excellence throughout the 1960s, to the extent of often being publicised as a space of both work and self-fulfilment for the housewife, the kitchen now seemed to be scaled down in terms of the symbolic value attached to it. By means of a comparison between the financing of kitchens that were marked by their brand and style and the live screening of Italians' kitchens through Raitre's broadcasts we can make two observations, in relation to both the physical space that they occupied in the home and the functionality-aesthetics relationship of the objects of which they were composed. Although there had not yet been a move from live screening of these interiors to a mention of true open-plan kitchens, as in the examples described by Scarpellini (2008, 276–78) a few years later, the kitchen area, which was in general reduced in size, often extended into the living-room area where meals were eaten. When economic conditions permitted the acquisition of a fitted kitchen, the gas burners and gas oven were

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not always included and quite often these two things were separated from the wall cupboards. Television, on the other hand, was not a mirror of reality but could reflect the pipedreams of those who watched it: that is to say, it could offer a model or the expression of a style. In this sense, even the simple functionality of rooms such as the kitchen and the bathroom was vested at that time with an additional significance, dictated by taste and fashion, a novelty that the author Arbasino (1992) underlined in a fierce article on relations between television and advertising and the imitative behaviour of viewers. It is in these terms, for example, that the gross linguistic error of a lady from Lucca should be understood: when showing her kitchen she emphasised, as a matter of pride: '*Monocottura*' (which is a special type of tile), meaning to say 'Only cooking and eating here' (*Complimenti per la trasmissione* 1988, Ep. 6). Leaving aside the naivety of such a linguistic error, what must be emphasised is the capacity of television, by virtue of its relationship with everyday life, to capture (albeit briefly) the first signs of a slide in values from substance to form.

Now if it was television that seemed to be omnipresent in Italian households, another relevant aspect was the centrality of the domestic reference in entertainment programmes. The home was indeed still a priority for Italians. In the years of mass internal migration, when people often struggled to find adequate housing, the idea of owning one's home became a symbol of a new beginning (Scarpellini 2008, 149). This being so, the data from the 13th National Census, which showed that homes were often owner-occupied, perhaps comes as no surprise. Despite research such as that by Tosi (1997, 295) highlighting the difficulties – especially for young people – in finding living accommodation large enough for a family that was not prohibitively expensive,[14] if you take a closer look at the homes visited by the presenter of *Complimenti per la trasmissione* it appears that there was no shortage of self-contained and sizeable houses and flats. Most of these belonged to families who lived in the provinces, worked in retail or services, had a medium level of education but were often gifted entrepreneurs. There were also country folk with accommodation so spacious as to make the presenter exclaim 'What a smart house!'. The homes were of a good size, with rooms for the family, grandparents and occasional guests and even a laundry room for washing clothes. Furthermore, one cannot fail to notice the attention paid to individual tastes, brand names and more modern styles.

If the differences between a house in town and a house in the country seem to have lessened in the second half of the 1960s (Saraceno 1987, 56), these homes were now embellished in a similar way by the acquisition of consumer goods that were highly symbolic. We are talking here of an opportunity that for the first time seemed to extend to all social classes, a situation that was also different from the period of Italy's economic miracle when, according to Scarpellini (2008, 137–39), it was primarily the middle classes who fully benefited from the supply of new consumer goods, while the economic conditions of the working class and farm labourers, though better than in the past, did not allow them the same standards of consumption – a difference that was still more evident when compared with their European counterparts.

The chance to share consumption and lifestyles through television determined television's central role in setting up reference models. At the same time, it should be noted, it was the features of television genres required by the producers that guided the interpretation of their meanings. In other words, it is in the relationship between the televisual genre, the institution of television and the control of advertising that we can identify diverse modes of engaging viewers with changes in society and the consumerist

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culture of a specific country. If we consider British television in the 1950s and 1960s, we find that the new consumerist values that were spreading in society at that time, apart from quiz shows and advertisements (the latter, unlike what happened in Italy,[15] were carefully regulated from the start of ITV in 1955) were to be found above all in the soap operas and national sitcoms. The large number of titles and serials of that type in British production from the 1950s (which were aimed mainly at the working class), in addition to their long-lasting appeal in subsequent decades, allowed viewers not only to watch television but also to reflect on and discuss daily the social and cultural changes that were taking place. A sitcom such as *Meet the Wife* (BBC 1964) emphasised in some of its episodes the risks inherent in unbridled consumerism and emulation, like the uninhibited spending of money beyond one's means to buy plane tickets to exotic destinations or domestic appliances (Turnock 2007, 149–50).

By contrast, in Italy these televisual genres (which were very popular with viewers, who often identified themselves with the experiences of the characters) were absent from public and commercial television. The first Italian productions of this type were made in the mid-1990s and, as a rule, preferred middle- to upper-class settings with intrigues linked to love and power. Televisual space dedicated to the spread of consumerist values was generally included in entertainment programmes, especially in the numerous quiz shows and game shows that underlined the concept of desirability and quick access. Viewers were constantly urged to acquire furnishings of greater or lesser value for their own homes in shows such as *OK, il prezzo è giusto!*[16] or via the sponsorship of television game shows. This technique implied indirectly that there was a chance for any viewer to acquire a standard of living that was sufficiently elevated to demonstrate that he/she had cast off their social chains. So what were the strategies of 'getting closer' that neo-television adopted and to what information did these strategies lead?

Making the televisual space domestic

In the late 1980s the presenter of a well-known entertainment programme used to insist, when introducing the programme's sponsor, on his equality with viewers at home. When presenting the Standa brand to viewers, he would state: 'La *Casa degli Italiani: La Standa* [The House of the Italians: La Standa] is like your house, the clothing department is like your wardrobe, the supermarket is your fridge, therefore La Standa is the house of the Italians' (*Tra moglie e marito* 1987, Ep. 2).[17] The methods and the language used by the presenter in *Tra moglie e marito*[18] highlighted the transition of televisual communication from being understood as a mere transmission of messages to expressing a clear will, when necessary, to create interaction with viewers at home: a will emphasised, furthermore, by the persistence with which the sponsors' 'spaces' were made to correspond with the families' 'spaces' in their own homes, though not before being passed through the televisual spaces.

As a consequence this new televisual culture was no longer based on the traditional coupling of television and viewing public, but was defined by means of a three-way relationship that also included advertising and its marketing rules. This new situation eroded the boundaries of that rigid hierarchy that separated production and reception 'spaces'; it placed them, at any rate formally, on an equal plane or, as we shall see, on one of reciprocal interest. But in fact the televisual medium, with the advent of

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commercial television, soon abandoned its pedagogic role of broadcasting information and serious culture from on high. From now on it would opt for mimesis, through which it would come into direct contact with viewers and make known their dreams and aspirations so as to return them in the form of affordable goods. This was a process that unfolded in accordance with the modalities of a 'dance of approchement' by television towards the family, where the television network was not content with building relationships in the present, but planned to interweave its own mediatic memory with the fabric of family memories. This was a way of creating a sense of belonging, but also an operation that would accompany and accelerate an ever more obvious consumerist culture.

The new televisual space seemed more and more 'domesticated', restructured in familiar style and language, with egalitarian dialogue and shared enjoyment. It was thus no chance that the sofa or armchair became an almost essential feature in the 1980s in set designs in both entertainment and news broadcasts. The programme *Tivutrenta* (1983)[19] was devised on the anniversary of 30 years of state television with the explicit intention of emphasising its constant presence in the lives of Italians. It set out to trace a sort of common memory[20] that would relate the mediatic memory of state television broadcasts to personal, family or social recollections of a fixed historic moment. For example 'While I was watching *Campanile Sera* at home,[21] I got engaged' (Sampò 1983).

In *Complimenti per la trasmissione*, by contrast, it was the dining room that became the stage, where the production assistants were friends or members of the family and the signature tune was recorded on a portable tape recorder. In a sort of tacit exchange between the norms governing family life and the rules of the televisual machine, the game in progress changed from being a media event to a memory shared between family members, neighbours and viewers. Thus, whereas in the past a programme such as *Specchio Segreto*[22] would have teased 'secrets and intimate thoughts' out of its unsuspecting participants (Anania 1997, 74), now it was men and women of the real world who freely exposed their personal and family lives to the viewing public. The awareness that the home of the host family was no longer private derived also from the spontaneity with which local residents went uninvited into all the rooms in the home and used the telecameras to greet people, while in Manduria it was the lady of the house who opened the ground floor sitting-room window to allow the crowd assembled in the street to take part 'live' in the show (*Complimenti per la trasmissione* 1988, Ep. 37). At the end of the programme, in a situation that by now could no longer be divided into public and private, all the protagonists assembled in the sittingroom/stage for the final farewells. It was this point that marked the transition from the family and its social environment to the community of viewers. The appointment for the following day in another town supplied the temporal and spatial coordinates, equally enjoyable from the comfortable sofa in one's own home.

Unlike local television, which was strongly rooted in (and limited by) the ambience of its own province, national television brought local culture and traditions to an appreciation that went beyond urban and regional boundaries. The people's heritage in entertainment broadcasting manifested itself through basic identifying concepts, such as local dishes, the use of dialect in songs or proverbs and places or symbols of a city (*Complimenti per la trasmissione* 1988), but also by portraying, if only in jest, regional prejudices (such as the Sicilian with the sawn-off shotgun [*Tivutrenta* 3 October 1983, Ep. 5]), which were still preserved despite decades of mobility between the north and south

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of Italy. In this way the concept of a community united *for* and *within* television was set against an Italy that differed widely in its customs, history and culture and, as in the programme *Un milione al secondo* (1983),[23] was shown through dances in costume, the civic masks during Carnival, medieval flag-wavers, natural landscapes, bucolic pictures and beautiful works of art in a sort of tourist postcard.

The constant questions put by the programme presenter to competitors about on which local television channels[24] Retequattro programmes were transmitted emphasised, at the same time, the need to promote one's own television channel in a rapidly moving televisual market as well as the desire to create an image of the network which tried to unify and portray numerous local contexts from across Italy. If the publicising of programmes presented by television celebrities allowed viewers to schedule an 'appointment' with the network, the imposition of its brand through the distribution of massive prizes to those viewers who played from home created a relationship of loyalty and interest between the television channel, the programme and the viewing public.[25] In the case of *Un milione al secondo*, the public piazza, which had previously been a prime location for political protest and economic and social demands but had been condemned to silence after years of terrorism in Italy, now reacquired its own space as a place for partying and meeting people thanks to the effect of television. With the blessing of the programme's financial backers the piazza also became a stage on which people could display themselves, for their own neighbours but also for those 'at home' who were the viewing public. Even the most unlikely members of the public came to display a marked and uninhibited desire to be in the limelight, regardless of age or gender: at first only timidly, waving or pushing so as to be in the frame (even if they were wearing a uniform 'to maintain order'), then ever more fearless in their answers to the presenter's microphone, to the point of organising choirs and banners in support of their own city or of their fellow citizen who was a protagonist in the event (*Un milione al secondo* 1983, Eps. 2, 3, 15, 16), perhaps accompanied by a band from their village (*Un milione al secondo* 1983, Eps. 11, 14), or actually joking with the victim of the game itself before and after the show (*Un milione al secondo* 1983, Eps. 4, 11, 12, 14, 15).

The adoption of familiar behaviour and language within the dynamics of the roles, which had once been almost exclusively hierarchical, between television professionals and ordinary people led to ever more active (and not at all subordinate) participation by the latter. Televisual space therefore was understood as 'sociable space' (Turnock 2007, 177),[26] where the encounter between television professionals and ordinary people took place in an ambience of cordiality and familiarity. Nevertheless, although it was often the presenter who invited the intervention of the public in the studio it was often a member of the public who took the initiative in expressing an opinion or recounted his/her own esperience, while some people dared to say 'Ti do del tu' (I will address you using the informal 'tu').

Thus the relationship that developed was very different from that which was analysed by Turnock in 1960s British television, which led to the identification of a 'structured and ritualized sociability' (Turnock 2007, 180). The behaviour of competitors in Italian television quiz shows in the 1980s, like that of the viewers, was much more audacious (*Tivutrenta* 1983, Eps. 2, 5, 13). This was very unlike the variety shows or quiz shows of monopoly television, in which the arrangement of the television studio envisaged a clear separation between the respective spaces of performers and public. This difference was marked out not only by the stage design but also by the 'right' to speak. Studio audiences of 'palaeo-television'[27] were for the most part silent and applauded to order; competitors

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were allowed only to give their answers; and the presenter's assistants were famously silent or nearly so, while the presenter was the true protagonist.[28] At that time, just like in post-war Britain, in encounters between television presenters, competitors and spectators in a television studio these groups were not seen as equals and the competitors who were invited to participate in a quiz show inevitably betrayed their subordinate status with regard to television professionals.[29]

By contrast there was a very sophisticated relationship with viewers in the field of 1980s neo-television, as is shown by the introduction of telephones into the studio to enable presenters to interact directly with viewers at home, and the sponsored game shows devised exclusively for home viewers. The telephone was already used in television in the late 1970s in Italy and was a great success in many programmes in the following decade[30] when, as testified by the data of the 13th National Census, an overwhelming majority of people throughout Italy had a telephone (*13° Censimento* 1994, 75). The telephone served to establish a particular rapport of 'neighbourliness' between those on the screen and those who were present within the walls of their own home. Thus a new form of interaction was established that had all the characteristics of a direct relationship as regards the simultaneousness of visual and aural participation, yet without the obligation to share a physical space. The telephone, in a certain sense, 'expanded' the televisual space and linked it to the domestic space. The rapid increase in the use of telephone numbers for viewers to ring presenters and express their opinion, and in particular to play games and win prizes or money, together with the practice of sending postcards (devised with the dual purpose of maintaining viewers' affections and increasing the sales of the products linked to the game show) was clearly an attempt by producers to attract the attention of viewers at precise intervals. It was precisely the mechanisms of these game shows for viewers at home that determined what sort of 'neighbourly relationship' was being established.

Building communities

Television's place shifted from the domestic to the televisual environment and became an open space for socialising, aimed at creating a common space where popular heritage and televisual culture blended together and the relationship was constructed on a basis of shared interests and needs. There was a reciprocity between the individuals who desired success and money by appearing on television and television's need to attract a large number of viewers in order to obtain more sponsors, who in turn relied on the televisual medium to win more clients: the same clients who when faced with the new televisual culture learnt to understand the importance of new forms of consumption.

If we think, for example, of the persistence with which televisual competitors offered themselves to television almost as if it were an employment agency, and if we analyse this factor within a historic context that valued such matters as the wish to improve the quality of one's life, to obtain a secure job and earn plenty of money (Stefanizzi 1993, 106), and then contemplate the real difficulty in finding a job (despite the euphoria over the so-called 'second economic miracle', the unemployment rate rose from 7% in 1980 to 13.5% in 1989 – Vicari 1993, 255), with peaks of 27% among young people and 18.6% among women (Ginsborg 1998, 587, 601), then we can understand why television was able to become such a useful tool for bringing about change in people's social circumstances. On the other hand, if we go by the data in the 1986 Eurisko Report – Italians seemed

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disinclined to connect personal attainments with the true chance of success in society: most Italians thought that the key factor was assistance from 'someone who matters' (48%) or from good fortune (42.3%), if not from some politician (31.3%, especially in the centre-south) – then it is no surprise that the common practice of *raccomandazione* or 'pulling strings' to obtain favours and jobs continued in the 1980s. In spite of the weak signals that data of this type give us on the importance of commitment (37.4%) and qualifications (35.4%), it seems clear that there was a general mistrust concerning the possibility of true cultural change (Calvi 1987, 19–22). Yet only a few years earlier an enquiry on youth employment in southern Italy was once again pointing out the malfunctioning wrong-headedness of an antiquated system that sacrificed the energy, intelligence and qualifications of the younger generation on the altar of favouritism and nepotism, with the consequence that every attempt at change was paralysed and every hope of social advance was made vain (Stajano 1979).

So television became a means of getting oneself 'recommended', a modern way for an ancient tradition, if only in the context of an unusual 'democratisation' of the practice and through a new awareness that revealed how the televisual medium had become rooted in the domestic setting, so that the presenter was seen as an 'extra member' of the family as well as an intermediary in the television world who was in a position to create new relationships. Television game shows therefore became a preferred sociological observatory for immediate research into changes in the social condition itself. The labour market, what is more, had undergone far-reaching changes, as had the geography of social categories: between 1980 and 1990 the number of people employed in agriculture fell from 14.1% to 8.7%, those in industry from 37.6% to 32.4%, while those in the service industries increased from 48.3% to 58.9% (Ginsborg 1998, 583). The data on the self-employed and professionals give an indication of a qualitative change in employment patterns: in 1987 they made up 30% of all workers as against 10% in other countries (Vicari 1993, 260). It is no surprise that the 'independence and personal freedom' factor appealed to 90.8% of Italians (Calvi 1987, 25–26). Therefore, were there ever more Italians who ran their own business or would have liked to do so; there was a trend, indeed a fervent wish, for change in tune with the times, especially at the personal level; this attitude seemed to reward personal initiative and the pursuit, even a crazy one, of well-being. Such people ranged from Italian capitalism's *nouveaux riches* (Ginsborg 1998, 82), who came primarily from the financial and telecommunication sectors, to the multiplication of small entrepreneurs with family-run businesses, and finally to that army of small and medium-sized businesses that proliferated in the Italian economy; these last benefited from the consumerist boom, at any rate in the richer areas of the country, that enabled them to acquire wealth and social status (Ginsborg 1998, 99).

Personal expectations increased in the context of this new lifestyle, while self-fulfilment and the pursuit of well-being, even material, were based on needs and wishes and, this being so, created new affiliations. The contrast with the previous decade, marked by strong collective participation, seemed clear with the re-emergence of that peculiarly Italian trait that for Livolsi constituted a sort of 'red thread' (Livolsi 1993b, 7) in Italians' living culture and for Bellah a 'basso continuo', thorough bass (Bellah 1974, 443) in the structure of Italian society. The expression of subjectivity was therefore at the centre of the process of modernising the country and, at any rate in its more ephemeral version, was identified with pretentious display and the pursuit of instant happiness.

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In a period when a high level of unemployment and a frenetic pursuit of consumer goods seemed to go hand in hand, the televisual dream of game shows with enormous prizes seemed to promise (at the same time) money, work and (through the distribution of prizes) material proof of one's own social status. In settings like that of *Un milione al secondo*, for example, everything was linked to abundance and opulence, but above all everything was at the same time exceptional and yet affordable. Accompanied by the sound of a so-called Waltz of Luck, a small crane would tip out on to a long green carpet the many postcards sent to the programme with the answers to the game show that had been devised for viewers at home. These cranes table, week after week, represented the true scale of the dream entrusted to Fate through the sponsors and the television show: the obsessive repetition of the wealth and fortune that was being distributed, the enunciation of prizes won and the way in which they had been invested, the selection of the winning postcards for those who participated from home, the 'suitcase of dreams' from which wads of banknotes were extracted, displayed and counted one by one by the presenter with the help of the studio audience, but also the consolation prizes for the losers and the sponsored free gifts given to the guests. In the same way, on *Tivutrenta*, the lucky ones listed their own fortunes with great precision and someone would arrive in the studio with a calculator to add up their winnings, while someone else would tell their story of having started up a business, realising their dream of being self-employed (*Tivutrenta*, 1983, Eps. 3, 5). The relationship that came to be established was of a utilitarian, almost familistic, stamp in its perception of a television that not only 'entered' Italian homes but became 'a part' of the family itself in the moment when it 'provided' for the well-being of the clan and at the same time became a place for the construction and diffusion of a new identity that went beyond the confines of former political, religious or territorial affiliations and was instead linked to a more modern consumerist culture.

The constant emphasis on the absolute ordinariness of the participants added an essential ingredient to the creation of a community that seemed to be awarded prizes precisely for its genuine mediocrity. From the selection in regional markets of families to compete in *Complimenti per la trasmissione* to the popular quiz games in *Un milione al secondo* in various town squares in Italy and the declarations of the presenter of *OK, il prezzo è giusto!* ('No need to make any preparation at all to take part in *OK*, [because] on *OK* we don't want culture, we want good luck' (*OK, il prezzo è giusto!* 1984, Ep. 7)), neo-television promoted popular culture and in so doing inevitably highlighted the cultural elite's progressive loss of supremacy.

Daily life no longer seemed 'humdrum', precisely by virtue of this new image of modernity that enhanced the sponsorship of everyday objects as if they were a way of being, or becoming, glamorous.[31] There was no abandonment of reality for fantasy in transferring the wishes of the average person to the televisual medium. On the contrary, it was precisely the everyday life of totally unexceptional people that was being awarded prizes. Such people were invited to guess the price of common commodities such as washing-up liquid or cat food in the hope of winning sets of jewellery and precious stones, complete sets of gym equipment, cars or new technological gadgets. A programme such as *OK, il prezzo è giusto!*, for example, through the sponsorship of objects and the offer of prizes that would re-create domestic space, forced people to face up continually to their own home, showed them its similarities but in particular highlighted the things that it 'lacked', and emphasised the economic and prestige value of such things and created a surplus of longing and aspiration. In the same way new technological gadgets such as the

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computer or the video-cassette recorder became synonyms of modernity and innovation, while the exercise bicycle on its own testified to an increasing attention to taking care of one's health. This would be followed by the purchase of skis, suitcases and windsurfing boards, in the years (as the ISTAT statistics showed) when travel and tourism were rapidly expanding.[32] It was in this way that viewers switched from simply enjoying television to becoming the consumers of the symbols and meanings that television purveyed: consumers who adopted and spread the culture of the medium. The opportunity to share certain consumption habits and lifestyles by means of television determined television's central part in proposing role models.

Commercial television, in particular, presented itself in the guise of the harbinger of achievable well-being. In this context, the role of the television presenter went 'beyond the visible': he/she underpinned the meeting between seller (the sponsor) and buyer (the viewer) and, in so doing, mediated the transition of meanings that accompanied the objects and services on offer. Through the reiteration of the typical modes, forms and rhythms of neo-television the presenter favoured the imposition of a televisual culture created in accordance with the precepts of acquisition and introduced a wider form of consumerist culture. Quiz shows and game shows in particular, which were to be found on all the networks at all hours and gained very high ratings, extolled their value through sponsorship of products and the distribution of prestigious prizes. As is clear, this was a different way of understanding the concept of value, in that it coincided with the importance of need and individual interest. The insistence on the extreme ease of self-enrichment thanks to the 'benevolence' of television and sponsors acquired a particular significance in the 1980s, when 'to appear' became synonymous with 'to be' from so many points of view. Thus it happened that one of the young couples in *C'eravamo tanto amati*,[33] for example, found themselves discussing the waste of the money spent by each of them on following the novelties and fashions of the moment, with a husband who stole the household furnishings in order to sell them and buy the most recent kinds of electronic appliances. It could also happen that a bookcase occupying the entire wall of the largest room in the home was almost empty because the family had no books (*C'eravamo tanto amati*, 1989, Eps. 12 and 17), the bookcase having been bought simply to complete the furnishing of the house on the basis of unspecified role models. The empty bookcase could be seen as a symbol of a period when, one might say, the container had become more important than the contents and when possessing, creating or imitating a specific style became synonymous with social recognition. The ostentatious display of what one possessed in the way of household furnishings and attention to detail, for example, seemed to be an important ingredient in presenting the family to the outside world.[34] The 'desire to seem' and the forms of consumption adopted were often based on 'obsessive simulation' (Ginsborg 1998, 172). Although this did not necessarily imply that the householder had acquired not only material well-being but also the cultural style of social classes that were previously regarded as unreachable,[35] the connection between 'what you are' and 'what you possess' seemed ever less conclusive in defining one's own identity; it was often what one possessed that defined one's affiliation.

Thus emulation and the wish to show off became two key moments in self-experimentation and the quest for belonging. Consumer goods in the 1980s were not sought merely for their usefulness: their intrinsic meaning brought about an act of recognition by a group at any level, and became an expression of new, shared values. Through consumption understood in this way, people assumed models and lifestyles that

https://doi.org/10.1080/13532944.2011.611491 Published online by Cambridge University Press

specified affiliations and laid foundations for new forms of identity. This awareness took root very quickly and was implicit in the everyday choices even of people in difficult economic circumstances. If we compare income as against consumption, it seems that Italians spent more than they earned (Livolsi 1993a, 236; Istat 1991) even in the south of Italy, where youth unemployment had reached 44.1% (Ajello 1984). Perhaps these were the first signs of that 'liquid modernity' that Zygmunt Bauman would later analyse, based on the operation of consumption and not on that of labour (Bauman 2006). In this sense game shows, which as a televisual genre were deeply rooted in their era, allow viewers to enter into the mentality of an epoch through their opinions, attitudes, desires and aspirations. Together with surveys, opinion polls, social research and enquiries carried out at the time, the game shows also help to define more clearly which value system can emerge from a specific historic moment.

Conclusion

During the 1980s, following the reorganisation of Italy's television system in accordance with the precepts of daily life and domesticity, television became an open space in which friendliness of discourse and familiar modes of address defined the relationship of reciprocity and helped to create a climate of cordiality and experience-sharing. Starting from the domestic setting, what television reproduced was in fact another type of intimacy, a 'mediatic hearth' (as we might define it), a place where viewers could meet to discuss things but could also obtain, by means of the games, financial help or useful relationships, sometimes unexpectedly developing a long-term familistic habit that put television into the unusual situation of an 'additional member' of the family. In its 'dance of approchement', neo-television borrowed from daily family life an atmosphere of family confidences and friendly neighbourhood conviviality and invited viewers to recount personal reminiscences and create communal memories, until the formal barriers separating the private from the public sphere gradually fell away.

The custom of regarding television as part of one's daily life induced many of the people involved to make personal use of it, to the point of establishing a sort of 'relationship of interest' in which television for the first time, in its twofold loyalty to viewers and sponsors, did not confine itself just to entertaining the family but wanted to become a part of it, understanding its dreams and soliciting its wishes so as then to direct them to the models that were repeatedly put forward by the advertisers. In fact the arrival of commercial television introduced into the tranquillity of the domestic scene this new permanent guest, as persuasive as it was welcome, which could transport anyone into a world of dreams and wealth where, in contrast to monopoly television, viewers were the protagonists by virtue of not some exceptional talent but their ordinary daily life.

The domestic nature offered by television informed discussions on consumption and transferred the complicity of the relationships thus attained directly to the sponsors, after which the viewer became a teleconsumer. It was then that television moved from its original function to that of taking on a 'cultural' function linked to consumption, capable of expressing values and affiliations that were identified in new forms of identity. Thus the terms of a new televisual culture took shape from the analysis of the centrality of the televisual medium in the interior of the domestic setting and daily events, as well as from the close interaction described in this article between television, viewers and sponsors,

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and served to identify and propose new lifestyles to adopt in accordance with the precepts of acquisition. In this way a new community came into being that was recognised more for possessing than for existing. No longer was there the 'oppressiveness' of ideologies of the past that imposed precise forms of behaviour 'from on high' and required constant commitment and absolute loyalty, whose adherents had meeting-places that were clearly identified in the sections (but also the festivities) of a political party, a trade union, in places of worship or religious organisation. Instead there was a way of 'seeming' derived from the demands or fashions that were expressions of the moment, a 'changeable' and thus 'light' affiliation to be consumed in haste in accordance with the dictates of the market; an affiliation which was rooted in daily life and in the delusion of choice and which developed through a televisual culture that suggested apparently equal relationships. A reading of television's spaces in accordance with the terms of daily family life reveals the construction of a new form of intimacy, defining common memories that comprise primarily 'fun' moments. It also makes the concept of value coincide with that of interest, thus making the concept unstable and allowing anyone, through the acquisition of the meanings of consumption, to dare beyond his or her own ordinariness.

Translated by Jennifer Radice

Notes

1. In connection with this 'Norms of self-discipline in television broadcasts' should be cited. It is a document of censorious intent that, in particular, refers to sexual morality and can presumably be traced back to the then chief executive of RAI, the engineer Filiberto Guala. The text of the document was published by Arturo Gismondi in his book *La televisione in Italia* (1958). The same work reports the speech by Pope Pius XII on the moral dangers posed by television and the consequential need for vigilance in this respect. Gismondi's text is cited in Menduni (2007, 102–03).
2. For a chronology of the organisation of RAI's programme schedules from the start up to the 1980s, see Fenati (1989, 161–87).
3. Regular broadcasting in colour started in 1977. The rulings of the Constitutional Court no. 225 of 10 July 1974 preceded Reform law no 103 of 14 April 1975. This permitted installations for the reception and broadcasting of foreign television programmes, and no 226, which legitimised commercial radio and television services by cable in a local area. In accordance with the precepts of these rulings, Decree no. 603 of 30 November 1974 was passed in order to bring into being the necessary legislation. This decree, which never became law, was followed by a second one (no. 3 of 22 January 1975), until Decree no. 51 of 18 March 1975 arrived in advance of the Reform Law no. 103 of 14 April 1975. For a close scrutiny of the key points of the Reform with reference to the reorganisation of the system in the context of state television and a comparison with other countries, see also Anania (1997, 77–87).
4. The Auditel company was formed on 3 July 1984.
5. Audience Televisive in Italia (1990, 1). The document ratified the objectives, structure and technologies of the Auditel company.
6. See: Ellis (2007, 40–44); also Ellis (2006) on the usefulness of 'rubbish TV'.
7. In the 1980s quiz shows and game shows as a televisual genre were present on all the networks at all hours and achieved the highest ratings, to the point when they earned their own parody in Renzo Arbore's *Indietro tutta*, broadcast on Raidue in 1987.
8. *Complimenti per la trasmissione* was broadcast on Raitre from Tuesday to Friday at 8 p.m. directly from a family's home. Every morning the presenter would go to one of the local markets in small or large city centres in every region of Italy in the hope of finding a family willing to invite the presenter into their own home to carry out the broadcast, a simple game in which the family was invited to participate with friends and neighbours to win a cash prize. The tests to be

https://doi.org/10.1080/13532944.2011.611491 Published online by Cambridge University Press

undergone (for example cooking a typical dish, reciting a poem in dialect, putting on fancy dress) were no more than a pretext for going 'beyond the visible' and allowing wider comments.

9. See Morley and Silverstone (1990) on the usefulness of contextualising television in the area of domestic communication.
10. Research by Eurisko-Sinottica indicates that between 1986 and 1990 ownership of a colour television set rose from 70.8% to 88.4%, of video recorders from 3.5% to 25.4%, of computers from 9.4% to 16.4% and of stereos from 34.0% to 40.5%: Biorcio and Maneri (1993, 188, table 2), source Eurisko-Sinottica 1986–1992. Nevertheless, at the end of 1988 there were 3 million video recorders (about 15% of families) in Italy, as against 13 million in the United Kingdom, 12 million in West Germany and 8 million in France: *Lo spettacolo in Italia* (1990, VII).
11. Between 1981 and 1991 the average percentage of graduates in Italy rose from 2.8% to 3.8%, while those with a secondary school diploma rose from 11.5% to 18.6%. Nevertheless a comparison with the principal EU countries between individuals aged 25–64 reveals a more than double deviation: Ginsborg (1998, 592, table 4.1; 594, table 45). For an analysis by province, see *13° Censimento generale della popolazione e delle abitazioni – 20/10/1991* (1994, 53 diagram no. 7).
12. The spread of home video ownership, according to data from Eurisko-Sinottica, had already reached 45.4% by 1992 – a percentage high enough to presuppose consequences for the enjoyment of television.
13. In the cases of *Complimenti per la trasmissione* the second television set was found in order of frequency in: parents' bedroom, kitchen and kids' bedroom.
14. The same situation was presented in *Complimenti per la trasmissione* (1988, Eps. 15 and 25).
15. See Forgacs (1992) on the bombardment of paid advertising on Italian television.
16. *Ok, il prezzo è giusto!*, the Italian version of *The Price is Right!*, was broadcast from 1983 on Italia1 throughout the decade and then in subsequent years at various times of day and with transfers from Italia1 to Canale5, Retequattro (all commercial TV channels owned by the Fininvest group, now Mediaset). Some viewers in the studio were selected to take part in simple games, in which they had to guess the price of products shown and which had been previously described in detail. The winners took home rich prizes.
17. The slogan chosen by Standa for its advertising campaign was to be repeated by the Canale5 presenter in several episodes.
18. *Tra moglie e marito*, the Italian version of *The Newlywed Game*, was broadcast from Monday to Friday at 8 p.m. from 1987 to 1992. Three married couples, in the studio for the whole week, gave separate answers (first the wives, then the husbands) to mischievous questions from the presenter, aimed at checking the degree of the couples' reciprocal knowledge of each other. The prize was in cash.
19. A Raiuno variety quiz programme devised to celebrate 30 years of public television. The competitors in the studio challenge each other on various programmes and television genres that have previously been broadcast. At the same time, an Italian family invited into the studio (generally parents, children and grandparents) and a telephone jury of other viewers in the rest of Italy give an award each time to the most-loved television programme of the past. Sketches, interviews and television celebrities alternate with the quiz games.
20. Enza Sampò's introduction to *Tivutrenta* (1983, Ep. 2).
21. *Campanile Sera* was a national programme that ran from 1959 to 1961.
22. *Specchio Segreto* was a national programme shown on Raiuno in 1964 and revived in 1976.
23. Quiz show shown on Retequattro with elements of variety, broadcast weekly in the evening from 8.30 p.m. The competitors challenged each other in a quiz about a range of musical genres. The runners-up had the chance of re-entering the game with a 'forfeit': standing publicly in the square of their city of origin at midday on the following Sunday. The programme included dancing and guests from the worlds of song, film, sport and (obviously) television. Viewers at home were involved through a game that required them to send a postcard with the answer to a question about a piece of music. Prizes and money were to be won.
24. ReteSicilia in Caltanissetta, La Voce Sarda in Cagliari, R4 in Brescia, Rete Salento in Lecce, Teleuropa in Naples, Tele Centro Italia in Terni, Antenna Sud (the network of *Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, Bari's daily newspaper) in Taranto and in Bari, Antenna Sicilia in Aquilina, TRM in Trapani, TVB in Ascoli Piceno and in the Marche.

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25. See Casetti (1988) on the staging and performing mechanisms through which the concept of 'trust' in neo-television was developed, with the purpose of drawing up a 'communication pact' between channel and viewer.
26. Turnock cites Simmel (1971) and Scannell (1996): Simmel, G. 1971. *Georg Simmel on individuality and social forms*, ed. D.N. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Scannell, P. 1996. *Radio, television and modern life: A phenomenological approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.
27. We owe this neologism to Umberto Eco, who used it for the first time in 1983 in his column 'La bustina di Minerva' in *L'Espresso*.
28. In fact, even in broadcasts in the 1980s, the presenter's assistant was allowed only to recite his or her own script.
29. See Goffman (1990) for an analysis of performing roles in social relationships.
30. The most famous example is perhaps *Pronto, Raffaela?* (1983), a very successful programme broadcast on Raiuno at 12.05 p.m. that won a record engagement for the well-known star of the show and provided the press with plenty of targets for critical comment on the televisual preferences of Italians and their inclination to go for popular rather than 'high' culture: Bocca (1984).
31. See Gundle (2002) on the concept of 'glamour' and consumption in post-war Italy.
32. Between 1982 and 1983 the percentage of Italians who took a holiday abroad rose from 6.8% to 16.7%: Ginsborg (1998, 575, table 10).
33. *C'eravamo tanto amati* (1989–1994). In the programme, broadcast on Retequattro from Monday to Friday at 7.30 p.m. (subsequently weekly in the evening) a married couple, each of them supported by a 'witness' (mother, brother, etc.), related for one week a list of conjugal problems. During the broadcast the husband and wife, cleverly provoked by the presenter, quarrelled and shouted after having revealed the details of their own intimacy alongside laughter from the studio audience. On the set two more couples acted as 'judges' to give advice, but also to advertise the programme's sponsor. The format, a winner in the TV ratings, was later exported to the United States with the title *That's Amore!*
34. See Löfgren and Frykman (1979) on the ostentatious display of one's own home for the purpose of social recognition, although in the context of the Swedish upper middle class in the nineteenth century.
35. Consider, for example, the farcical portrayal of the young *nouveaux riches* of the 1980s in Carlo and Enrico Vanzina's comedy film *Yuppies, i giovani di successo* (1986).

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