**What's Stopping the (Global) Flow of TV?**
**Abigail De Kosnik**

Time and Piracy: Minimizing the Lag between TV Broadcast and Global Reception

Television networks and production studios most frequently object to Internet users sharing television content via peer-to-peer protocols on the grounds that file-sharing robs copyright owners of their rightful compensation. However, this line of reasoning ignores international television viewers' main interest in file-sharing televisual content, which is time savings.

Between the initial broadcast of a television show in its nation of origin and the consumption of that show in another nation, there currently exist two types of time lags: the legal and the illegal. The legal time lag can be several months (in the case of syndication) or several years (in the case of DVD/Blu-Ray releases), and the illegal time lag is usually several hours, since Internet pirates typically make files available for download less than one day after their airing. Piracy is by far the better option for viewing global television. Not only is illegal file-sharing a cheaper and more efficient means of transmitting global TV, it importantly delivers product *when it is most passionately desired*. Inevitably, Internet file-sharing will become (or perhaps already is) the dominant form of global TV distribution. The crucial advantage of piracy is that it minimizes the time lag between broadcast and worldwide consumption.

And, contrary to the association of "time-lag" with postcolonial "belatedness" (theorized by Homi Bhabha), the desire for international television programs is not exclusively felt by residents of the Global South. In other words, it is not the case that only television programs produced in Western nations are pirated by and for non-Western viewers. Rather, multiple diasporas of non-Westerners inhabiting Western territories, as well as a rising interest in global media in the West, means that television shows from India, China, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Philippines are heavily pirated in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. It is at least as difficult for those living in the U.S. to legally acquire episodes of *Malhação* (a Brazilian telenovela) soon after their air dates as it is for those living in Brazil to legally acquire episodes of *Mad Men* soon after they are broadcast.

An article on the file-sharing news site Torrent Freak from 2009 reported that illegal downloading of TV programs has increased steadily year over year, with 2009 being the first year that the number of downloads for two U.S. programs (*Dexter* and *Heroes*) exceeded the shows' average viewership on U.S. television. "The rise of unauthorized downloading of TV shows is a signal that customers want something that is not available through other channels....Outside the US, fans sometimes have to wait for weeks or even months before the show airs on TV in their own country. Many of them are simply not that patient or willing to torture themselves, and turn to BitTorrent [the file-sharing protocol used for most illegal downloading] in desperation." [http://torrentfreak.com/top-10-most-pirated-tv-shows-of-2009-091231/]

There are many conceivable options for television content producers and networks to make their products available commercially on a global scale.  Posting high-resolution streaming video of episodes soon after they air (with embedded advertising) on official network websites or on aggregator websites, and ensuring that the sites are accessible to IP addresses outside their countries of origin, would likely reduce the volume of illegal downloads of TV programs.  Pay-per-download or paid subscription services that accept international customers and multiple denominations of currency, and that provide clients with files that are not platform-specific (i.e., that are intended to be viewed via free media players such as VLC), would likely find favor with global audiences.  Currently, authorized TV streaming aggregator Hulu is not accessible to non-U.S. Internet users, and pay-per-download aggregator iTunes is only usable in one non-U.S. nation (Australia), and iTunes files can only be viewed via the iTunes player, which is less-than-ideal for transferring files between computers in one household, or from computers to mobile devices, or from laptop or desktop computers to storage devices such as external hard drives or network-attached storage (NAS).  Official TV network sites that offer streamed content, such as bbc.co.uk and itv.com in the U.K. or sho.com (the official Showtime site) in the U.S., cannot be viewed by Internet users outside the countries of origin.  Many television programs from around the world are illegally uploaded to the video streaming site YouTube, but these are lower resolution than the aforementioned modes of access, and are subject to disappearing from YouTube at any time, as YouTube submits to all takedown requests issued by global copyright holders.

But if TV industries choose to take a "hands-off" approach to illegal downloading, Internet users around the globe will probably be quite happy to be left to pirate in peace.