

## Putting the TV back in Television Studies

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This important call for humanities based scholarship to take seriously TV's material form is equally a call to revisit our assumptions about what and where televisions are. A renewed focus on apparatuses not only risks reducing "the tube" to a mere box of wires and chips, but must be wary of sustaining static assumptions about medium specificity. The implicit and explicit focus on the TV set as a domestic medium—one that occasionally, and temporarily, goes mobile in lesser forms—continues to cover over the cultural work of the console outside the home and across media forms. Building on the work of scholars like Anna McCarthy, I am interested in what alternative TV sites (and sets), such as out-of-home TVs and TV networks (from large format displays to mobile phones), TV in video and installation art, and TV on television and in cinema, can tell us about past and future television technologies.

My central claim here is that we cannot sidestep questions about TV's site-specificity in attempting to bring to the foreground the significance of its apparatus-ness: "technological standards, obsolescence, e-waste, spectrum policy, access" and the like. In fact, as the list of apparatus based concerns for this panel attests, assumptions about TV's physicality quickly suggest a very limited set of conditions for television as a material and cultural form. A situated nuts and bolts approach, however, can also bring into relief several routinely under-considered lives of the TV. Rather than attempt to be comprehensive, impossible here, I gesture to three distinct apparatus-contexts.

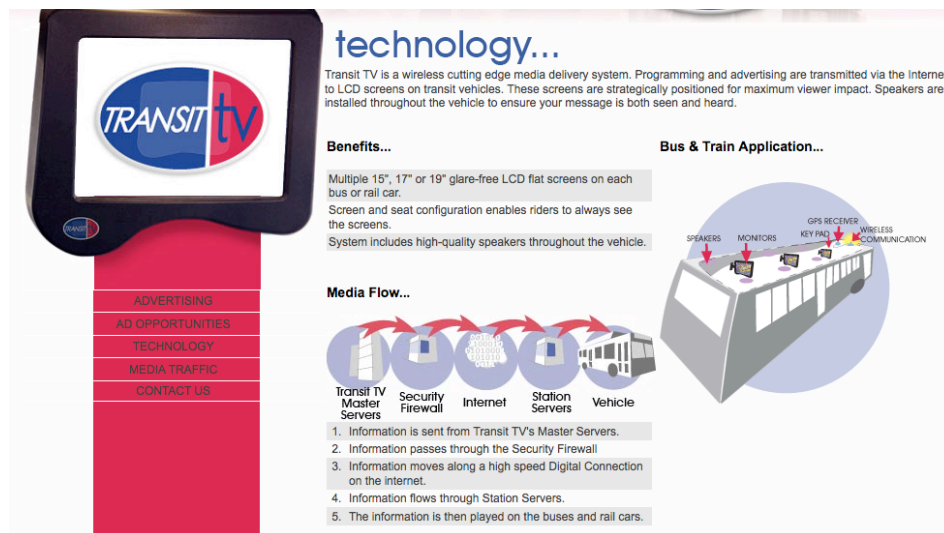
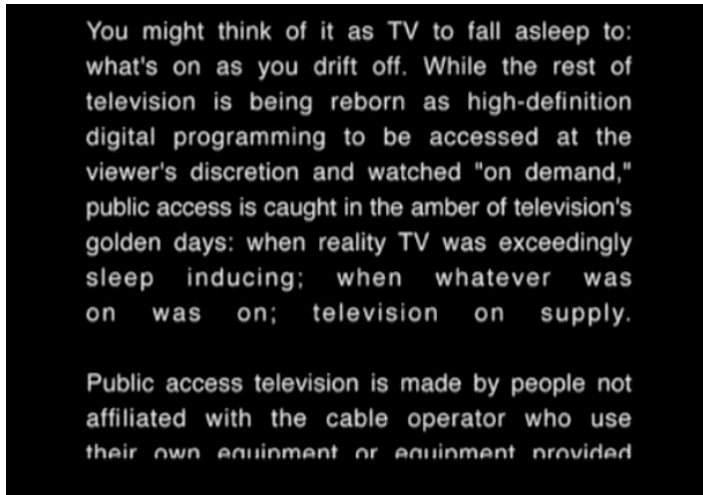


Figure 1: Screen capture of Transit TV technology for buses and trains

One concrete example of television's texture outside the home is Transit TV, a non-domestic network operating digital TV on buses and subways in Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago, Orlando and Milwaukee. Relying on a unique blend of locally adapted programming and GPS-triggered advertisements, Transit TV highlights the peculiarity of the apparatus and apparatus related debates in the space of transport. As **Figure 1** suggests, transit viewing depends on unique wireless broadcasting, urban infrastructure,

and exhibition design on vehicles, as well as LCD flat screens (and speakers) designed to weather nearly 1.2 million daily riders (the weekday average in Los Angeles), and to resist theft, vandalism, glare and interference. The onboard TVs also ask important questions about screen culture, public space and citizenship. As Transit TV's advertising research boasts, the current landscape of "clutter and media fragmentation" leaves fewer and fewer "truly captive audiences"—public transportation is one such sphere.



**Figure 2:** Lucy Raven's 4:3, 2008 (still from artist's website)

TV's material role in video and installation art also demands more research and asks substantively different questions related to aesthetics, standards, access, waste and obsolescence. Two of Lucy Raven's recent TV-based video projects, to take a commonplace example, *This is a Test* (2009) and *4:3* (2008), engage television sets and form—Emergency Broadcast System tests, and aspect ratio—while also partnering with public access stations and art spaces. *4:3* was exhibited as a closed-circuit video installation (on a TV monitor) at PS1 in Queens, NY, after being broadcast on a New York public access channel, Panda TV 23, in the midnight to 6am timeslot, generally dead air. Combining a series of mediations on aspect ratio, the analog switch-off, and public access, the artist describes the public service announcements as "TV to fall to sleep to."

Finally, we routinely encounter material consoles, and discourses about the TV set, in film and on television. Far from mere representations, these mediations produce both technological archives and are critical in managing understandings and adoption of TV apparatuses. From public service announcement's orchestrating the digital transition to the routine focus on new technology and televisuality in popular programs like *30 Rock*—the television within television structure (as well as film, online spaces, etc.) is vital to our understandings of technological change, industry organization, and the everyday look, features, locations and use of the screen. **Figure 3** captures the regular product placement of new Sharp flatscreens, here in a production context, and then onscreen elsewhere in the show, as well as viewer's varied screens.



**Figure 3:** Mise-en-abyme structure in “Generalissimo,” *30 Rock* (Season 3, episode 10)