



In-Transit Televisions: Productive Patterns and Urban Imageries of Mobility

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From the early 2000s, in Italy, too, the installation of video-communication systems within transportation terminals (i.e., rail and underground stations, airports, waiting shelters, highway rest areas) has progressively affected the urban mediascape, posing new challenges for the design of public infrastructures. This doctoral thesis explores so-called 'go-television' screen networks located in Italian high-flow hubs, mainly — but not exclusively — in metropolitan areas: such real-time broadcasting circuits are conceived to entertain and inform spectators caught in the time of waiting and transit (e.g., 'captive audiences'), through displays and video-totems which interact with synchronised and spatially assembled viewers. As a result, transportation facilities seem nowadays to be characterized by a combination of news stream, recorded image loops, audio announcements, advertisement, multi-screen live relays which became structural components of their *genius loci*: being containers of audiovisual experiences, these interstitial settings shed light on the multiple ways media interconnect with architectures of transport, forging what scholars have defined the 'media-architecture complex'.² Outlined thus, go-TV stands for the result of collective efforts: not only there are specialized companies in this market, but transportation companies and local authorities are also included in the intricate production chain of

the video contents taken into account in the thesis, blurring the line between editorial clips, marketing materials, traffic bulletins and public utility alerts directed to travellers. Through a mapping of the major national cases of in-transit television, the inquiry aims to deepen the commercial and professional practices implied in the functioning of such audiovisual channels: acting as a last-mile medium, go-TV appears to work as a window on the travelling habits of thousands of daily passengers as well as *en-passant* spectators, generating and reflecting a particular experience of mobility.

This research attempts to situate its object of analysis within the Italian media environment, demonstrating how these networks have grown relevant in virtue of their complex creative drives, the strategies of the professionals involved as well as their proprietary assets and the various purposes of their wide range of stakeholders. First, the thesis positions go-television on a theoretical level, showing how mobility and visual cultures have interwoven since the beginning of the entertainment industry. The double logic of transportation as a material and symbolic carrier is deepened, given that television itself has repeatedly been assessed as a technology of dynamism. Furthermore, this study deals with the connections between the small screen and the urban environment, reflected in the particular socio-topological status of go-TV's

consumption settings: attention is reserved, therefore, to the ecological dimension of this medium, to its supposed space-making effects, to its site-dependence — or context-sensitiveness — which operates on a centripetal basis, anchoring the transmission of video contents to the specific spatial frames where they are received. Assuming that the impact of audiovisual media outside the home relies on such a site specificity, the second aim of the thesis is to provide a comprehensive definition of go-television, adequate for the whole range of actors entailed in its production. Third, considering that television developed for travel venues typically aggregates hybrid media forms, the project examines the mediological profile of go-TV: in spite of the growing importance of out-of-home communication, television studies have rarely dealt with video networks outside the domestic sphere (with the notable exception of Anna McCarthy's inquiries),³ which remains a blind spot of scholarly research. Far from consisting in a mere relocation of TV sets away from the household, in-transit video screens seem to strengthen the televisual specificities at the core of their editorial (and professional) manufacturing, while fostering original devices of brand urbanism and geolocalized marketing, as well as inheriting some specific characteristics of cinema and radio (i.e. large screening surfaces, attractionality, voice-centrism and schedules mainly structured upon a 'clock' template). The following section of the thesis features an overview of the commercial and professional habits underlying this channel of distribution, as part of corporate trends which were sampled in the wake of media production studies: the mapping provides an insight on fourteen different companies operating in Italy (beside the profiles of ten now-defunct place media corporations), together with three case studies (Grandi Stazioni Media, Telesia, video portals onboard high-speed trains). These latter cases are not only historicized, but the thesis also proposes a focus on their 'productive cultures'⁴ and a modelling of their on-screen

contents. In this respect, the inquiry integrates a cultural and industrial approach, and is the result of structured and informal interviews with insiders and company specialists, on-site observations (severely limited by the Covid-19 outbreak) and a review of promotional paratexts, trade press, consultancy reports, internal use documents and journalistic sources. The access, when possible, to semi-public documents as contracts, budget plans, financial statements and commercial agreements — in addition to industrial portfolios, consultancy reports and white papers issued by industrial forums — completed the methodological framework, which also included attendance to business fairs and public initiatives.

One of the primary results emerging from this research is that, aligning itself to the 'mobile privatization', the 'TV of the stations' absorbs and re-mediates the context where it is positioned: the dissertation, therefore, deconstructs the main level on which mobility and its contraries are visualized and depicted on these circuits, exploiting the very same movement of spectators. From this perspective, the areas of in-betweenness examined act either as *containers* of *in situ* audiovisual experiences or as the subjects (*content*) of the messages shown by the screen themselves, reconfiguring notions of space, networks and border regimes. One of the arguments put forward is that, while negotiating distances and perceptions of speed through their moving contents, those video outlets embody and promote images of 'squared mobility' (i.e. mobility within mobility), generating multiple senses of place and offering a legitimating self-portrait of the experience of travel. Hence, mobility and its aesthetics work as a narrative trope, also when reduced to codified icons and electronic signs, essential as orientational and wayfinding appliances, rerouting passengers' movement in public spaces. This fetishization of mobility is functional both for the tourism and transport industries, which capitalise their corporate images, becoming direct publishers of

televisual contents. In conclusion, this research points out how go-TV can be evaluated also by the prospects of public communication practices: due to the scheduling of collective interest inserts, in-transit video screens are increasingly called to reinvigorate civic engagement of citizen, as well as sustain the participatory processes of modern smart cities, rehabilitating the public role of the televisual medium.

Notes

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² Scott McQuire, *The Media City. Media, Architecture and Urban Space* (London: Sage, 2008).

³ Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television. Visual Culture and Public Space* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁴ John T. Caldwell, *Production Culture. Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). See also Vicky Mayer, Miranda Banks and John T. Caldwell (eds.), *Production Studies. Cultural Studies of Media* (London: Routledge, 2009). In the Italian context, see Luca Barra, Tiziano Bonini and Sergio Splendore (eds.), *Backstage. Studi sulla produzione dei media in Italia* (Milan: Unicopli, 2016) and Marco Cucco and Francesco Di Chiara (eds.), "I media industry studies in Italia: nuove prospettive sul passato e sul presente dell'industria cine-televisiva italiana", *Schermi. Storie e culture dei media in Italia*, 3.5 (2019).