

Certainly, the television industry is in a much hyped moment of transition and, as a result, it seems that almost everything is being reconsidered including business models, advertising strategies, the use/interaction of new technologies and the production of certain kinds of narratives and genres. However, there are many ways in which things are remaining very much as they were before and, in some instances, these changes are actually reinterpretations of models and forms even though they are being packaged as "new."

One of the goals that we should have as television historians, is to debunk this myth of newness in both large and small ways. Tying recent developments back to similar moments/ideas/forms serves to remind us that there are historical patterns and points of repetition and intersection that reveal the institutional and cultural limits of change and innovation. This sort of work also helps reveal the constructed nature of "newness" in relation to industrial practice. We also might be able to tease out exactly what really is unique about this particular moment of transition if we compare it to others.

Of course, none of this is news to anyone who studies television history. And in our initial discussions as a panel, we found that we all were thinking along these lines in regards to our presentations and our role in this conference. There have been many books and articles that have come out as of late that explore the connections between the new media of the past and that of today. (I'm thinking here works such as those of Lisa Gitelman, the anthology "Rethinking Media Change" by Thorburn and Jenkins, Lev Manovich, Alex Galloway, and others.) Yet, I think we would all agree there is more work to be done in this area as we explore not just the big transitional markers and claims of the New, but also those the finer movement and details that exist within.

One of the current sources of anxiety and excitement for the television industry has been video content produced to suit the aesthetic, economic and narrative characteristics of the internet. Certainly, there are specifics in regard to the platform that present a kind of freshness and new types of audience engagement. However, what is interesting to me (although not altogether surprising) is the way that so much of the actual programming borrows relies on traditional narrative tropes and forms and references "old media" in a various ways. And yet the television industry appears to be struggling to find ways to co-opt and/or reproduce what they are finding on sites such as YouTube and channel it back into the box (I'm thinking of recent shows such as I-CAUGHT and Online Nation here). More specifically, I want to talk about how amateur video is being constructed and used at this moment and consider it in relation to the medium's historical relationship to amateur media production -- in particular, public access, the guerilla television movement, and primetime reality programming of the late 1980s and early 1990s. By looking more closely at these connections, I think we can find a productive site for discussion about the (often troubled) relationship television has had with this type of programming and how it gets even further complicated, perhaps, within this current moment of industrial transition.