

## **Locating the TV**

### **Television placement and the reconfiguration of space in low-income homes in Santiago, Chile**

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#### **Abstract**

This article study how the practice of locating the television set in the different spaces of the home reconstitutes the nature and characteristics of them. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among low-income families in Santiago, Chile the article shows how when television sets are located in each different kind of home spaces (ceremonial, functional and private) it disrupts the way in which these spaces are used and perceived. The point is that this disruption is not related to the material presence of the set in the home. The sets constitute a central part, both concrete and symbolic, of the material culture of these homes. This disruption is caused by the practice of watching television, a practice that does not fit with the quotidian use of different house spaces. This is why because watching television constitutes a place in itself, with its own time and space; a place that competes and challenge the traditional usage and meaning of time and space in the home.

#### **Keywords:**

Home, television, place, practice, location

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#### **Introduction: the place of television**

When thinking about the place of television at home it is clear that the relationship between television related practices and the rest of the practices that we identify as forming what we called 'home', is very complex. Unlike any other media technology, television occupies a central place in home practices to the extent that it is difficult to imagine or think about home without recalling its presence and its related practices. From the distribution and use of home spaces to the scheduling of individual actors in time, television practices constitute one of the central nodes around which, and in connection with, domestic life is lived.

To acknowledge this fact we have to understand television practices as a complex set of activities, sequences and operations that involve a diversity of actors in different moments of time and in different scenarios. Television practices involve much more than just the practice of watching television. From the very first notions that we develop about television when children, to conversations about celebrities, the place of television in our everyday lives involves more than the mere fact that we spend a couple of hours per day in front of the 'box'. In some senses we can say that television is directly or indirectly involved with all major areas of practices developed at home to the extreme that today it is almost impossible to think of one without the other.

As the number and complexity of these practices largely exceeds the scope of the present article we are going to study one specific practice related to television: the practice of locating the television set and its relation with home space. The reason for choosing this particular practice is the double nature of television both as technology and media and the relevance of material culture in contemporary society, especially at home.

When studying television it is to note that

“Media technologies are doubly articulated into the social: both as technologies whose symbolic and functional characteristics claim a place in both institutional and individual practice, but also, as media, conveying through the whole range of their communication the values, rules and rhetorics their centrality for the conduct of the quotidian” (Silverstone 2001) 26.

Media technologies are not only an empty receptacle of transmissions generated elsewhere, but also a material object, a technology, physically located in the temporal and spatial structure of the home. Whilst the double nature of the medium has been acknowledged, the empirical study of television as practice has been focused heavily on viewing and its effects on the audience, implicitly seeing this practice as the unique, or central, activity related to media technologies consumption at home. As Anna McCarthy recognizes,

Viewing is not the only everyday use of television that routinely involves creativity, unpredictability, problem-solving, indeterminacy and expressiveness. A vast repertoire of ideas and gestures comes to life in the placement of the screen in a particular environment, in the things that decorate it and in the images it sits near in social space (McCarthy 2000) 307-308.

The positioning of the television set at home is as central, if not more central than the practice of watching television as it effects the temporal and spatial structure of home. . Locating it is an activity that necessarily involves both the use of television as media or communication and also its physical nature, being a piece of furniture. Along with McCarthy’s research on the location of television sets in public areas (McCarthy 2000; McCarthy 2001) this centrality of location has been also recognized by Ondina Fachel Leal in her study of the sitting of the television set in working class homes in Brazil, for whom, for example,

... The television set and the spaces they occupy in the domestic order are meanings that comprise a cultural rationale. That is, a symbolic system, including an ethos of modernity, that is itself a part of a larger symbolic universe that has as its principal locus of significance the city and the industry. (Fachel Leal 2003)187.

As demonstrated by this quotation, the positioning of the television set is not innocuous or meaningless. It is central to the way home places and its content are structured and the meanings that their inhabitants attach to them. This centrality of the television set as an object and its relationship with home space has received little attention until now at least in terms of empirical research. This is with the exception of the work of Lynn Spigel in relation the historical changes caused by television in postwar America (Spigel 1992; Spigel 2001a; Spigel 2001b).

Our homes are first and foremost lived-in spaces filled with material objects. In concrete terms, homes “may be a place that is held principally in the imagination, but it is bricks and mortar too – a vessel for our most cherished things too” (Chapman 2001) 138 . This materiality of homes is not innocuous but filled with meanings because in the domestic context “the most banal domestic objects and structures are not simply physical entities, but also routinely laden down with values and symbolic

meanings” (Morley 2000) 20. We do not inhabit our houses as the empty receptacle of our routines, but as meaningful places that express who we are, not only to ourselves and our families but also they “function as a social act that transmits non-verbal messages and meanings” to our social environment (Malkawi 2003) 25.

This is especially true in contemporary society, a type of society in which many activities and expressions associated with a more ‘public’ being are declining (Putnam 2000) or are increasingly coming under the control of different kinds of ‘expert systems’ (Giddens 1990). In this context all activities related to the private sphere become core to the construction of personal and social identity. The construction of a space called ‘home’ and its modelling and furnishing appears to be a way in which we can make public our personal meanings and perceptions and, in doing so, differentiate ourselves from others (Bourdieu 1984). Our material possessions are not only a form of comfort to us but also their existence, and the way we arrange and distribute them, function as an “extended self” (Belk 2001) of each one of us, being an extension of our own sphere to the material world.

In this context the location of media technologies at home is central to the way the home as material culture is lived by its residents. In the specific case of television, this paper examines the specific practices of locating the television and the meaning that different locations have to the members of the different homes under study, especially in relation to the perception and use of home spaces as a whole. In order to do so we are going to use the material collected during fieldwork in the city of Santiago, Chile in 2004. This fieldwork was based on the study of the everyday life of members of 20 low-income families who had recently moved from living in shantytowns to a new social housing estate called “Tucapel Jimenez II” located in northwest Santiago. Using an ethnographic approach the research was focused on how the members of these families use media technologies to adapt to their new material environment.

## **1. Home spaces**

The home is a stage. In Goffman’s terms (Goffman 1990), a place where we perform our beings, commonly in an unconscious way, to ourselves and others. The idea of home as a stage shows us how it “functions as a social act that transmits non-verbal messages and meanings” (Malkawi 2003) 25. For most of us our homes are “the theatre of domesticity with front and back places that call for different types of action and interaction according to family status, gender and age, as well as indicators of race, ethnicity and religious identification” (Sydie 2003) 8.

In the context of poverty as in the study here, homes and their contents are one of the few spaces where these families can create and reaffirm their own identity and reflect it on their surrounding social environment given their social exclusion from many other more ‘public’ activities and places. “In spite of the apparent permanency, presumed security and privacy of home in the imagination, in reality the experience of home is characterized by change” (Chapman 2001) 136. This change is related not only to the obvious reality that each family is different and, for this reason, the way they reflect themselves in their homes is different but also in the sense that homes are not stable in time. Even in a context of poverty, homes constantly change with the addition or suppression of commodities and the small redistributions and/or changes in the already available stock of goods and home spaces. Homes, like their members, are always unfinished. In this sense it is even better to see them as a process or a project rather than a stable materiality, the distance between the real and remembered or ideal home.

'Home' is not an undistinguished entity. Susan Kent affirms, "as a society becomes more socio-politically complex its culture, behaviour, or use of space and cultural material or architecture becomes more segmented. This occurs particularly with respect to increasing segregation of partitions" (Kent 1990) 127. This increasing segmentation of space is quite clear in the case under study, even for the members of the families under study:

Nowadays we live in a more organised way. You can be more relaxed as before we had just one room. The living room, the kitchen and the bedrooms were all together so there was no separation of spaces or surroundings. Not here though. Here there is the kitchen, the living [room], then you have one bedroom and the other bedroom. Everything is divided up. It is more comfortable and there is privacy for the children and the couple (Jonathan, 34 years).

When studying homes we have to consider that "for most individuals the "home" (however that is understood or physically structured) is a theatre of domesticity with front and back places that call for different types of action and interaction according to indicators of family status, gender and age, as well as indicators of race, ethnicity, and religious identification" (Sydie 2003) 8. Thus in order to study homes we have to differentiate between the different types of front and back spaces, using Goffman's concepts (Goffman 1990). There is a distinction made by Rich Ling and Kristin Thrane (2001) between ceremonial, functional and private home spaces. *Ceremonial* area, namely the living room, "It is that portion of the home into which guests are directed. It is often where objects are purchased and placed with the intention of impressing visitors. In Goffmanian terms it is the front stage of the home" (Ling 2001) 9. *Functional* areas are those areas related to the maintenance of the home and its members like the kitchen and the bathrooms, but also those areas related to work (home office) or storage (garage, cupboards). Finally, *private* areas in this case are the two bedrooms and represent for many of their inhabitants the only spaces where individuals can express themselves.

In practice however all these spaces are mixed and their location and extension vary considerably in time, sometimes temporarily when children are playing in the living room, sometimes permanently as when a sibling leaves home and his/her bedroom becomes a home office. This is especially true in homes formed in social housing estates like the ones under study here as the available space is always limited and many tasks and practices have to share the same space. It is better to think about ceremonial, functional and private as different 'uses of space' rather than 'spaces', explicitly recognizing the existence of these different places to the characteristics of the concrete practices being developed in them rather than the mere spatial configuration of them.

Prior to analysing each home space separately, it is important indicate the changes that the relations between home space and television have suffered since the movement to the housing estate. As it can be noted from Jonathan's words, what is new in the life of most of these families is the division into different spaces, not the presence of television sets. Without exception, all the families under study had television sets in their homes well before their move to the housing estate. The position of television set as a central part of the house space is not new. Its presence has already been deeply internalised and for most people the television set forms a central part of the 'normal' group of available home technologies.

We examine therefore not the placement of the device as such, but how its presence interacts, and in some sense reshapes, the newly divided home spaces. For families from both shantytowns and overcrowded housing, the opportunity to differentiate between different spaces at home seems relatively new. Many of them used to live in

single-space homes where it was almost impossible to make any distinction between spaces. The entire home was a kitchen when cooking was happening, a dormitory when sleeping was occurring, or a television room when television was being watched. In their new houses for the first time they were able to clearly distinguish between different home spaces. In this process the location of the television set was one of the central issues to be clarified.

## 2. Television and ceremonial spaces

For these families the possibility of clearly marking out a ceremonial space inside their homes has a central meaning in the perceptions of their own well-being and the position that they occupy in their surrounding social context. The change from their former places of living to the housing estate also represents a change in the way they express their individuality, or the way in which they obtain 'distinction' in Bourdieu terms (1984) through their homes.

Both in shantytowns and in 'poblaciones', people "establish identities, perpetuate social norms and mediate community through architecture" (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1994) 845 due to the personalized and non-standard characteristic of the physical environment. The external appearance of the homes is one of the central ways they differentiate one from another. Architecture appeared as a form of "conspicuous consumption" (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1994; Klaufus 2000). In these homes "the exterior is the representation of the current state of affairs in the household and the plans for the future" (Klaufus 2000) 353. It is central to the image that the family projects to others; it is the material expression of the extended self of the family. It is therefore not unusual to find large and solid constructions quite poorly furnished inside<sup>1</sup>.

This situation changes on the social housing estate due to the external homogeneity of the buildings and flats of it. While it is possible for the families to express themselves or to show their concept of aesthetics on the external areas of their homes<sup>2</sup>, the interior is now the main space where they can develop their own aesthetic concepts, especially in the public areas of it. For these families "the front region of the house is a place where a performance is given. The front is relatively well decorated in order to show social status and claim prestige. It is a place for display, maintaining and embodying certain standards" (Ozaki 2003) 105. The living/dining room represents the ideal place to reflect their own tastes and initiatives in order to transform them in unique places as shown by Jessica's account of the living room of her home:

"For me it's always been important to live well, in my economic situation. I prefer to put up just one beautiful painting rather than have too many things. I always try, with the money I save, to buy nice things for the home, maybe not so much furniture or other things, but beautiful things. I like people to come and find my house beautiful, so they say 'huhu, this is very beautiful', but... I put up this painting and my husband hung these pictures and ruined it all. So, I like to have it beautiful" (Jessica, 34 years).

The concept of the aesthetics of the public spaces is clearly important to her, something for which she saves money and about which she has some pre-established ideas (not too many things, but beautiful ones).

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<sup>1</sup> But also the other way round, quite poor houses from the outside filled with high-tech apparatuses and new sofas and tables, it is quite common, especially in a context like a shantytown, in which the permanence of the house is always in danger.

<sup>2</sup> Any extension of the house is at the same time an expression, they are all different and they reveal certain aesthetics concept and appreciation of the inhabitants of the houses, especially due to the fact that, for the financial restrictions of the families, the extension always has an important component of "home made" or DIY work, something that give them even more space to express their creativity through its construction.

In the particular case under consideration ceremonial spaces also have an ambiguous meaning being both public and private spaces simultaneously as,

In larger homes this area can be vestigial in that it is only used for ceremonial occasions such as parties, visits etc. However, in the smaller homes and apartments, the living room is also where the family relaxes. Thus, to use Goffman, the living room has characteristics of being both the front and the back stage alternatively (Ling, Nilsen and Granhaug 1999). This can make it difficult to integrate both the functional use of the space and the need for a ceremonial area within the home. (Ling 2001) 9

This tension between the public and the private character is always present when members of these families use and perceive these spaces, something that will be very clear in relation with the placing of the television set in them. This is seen in pictures 1 to 4. The analysis of the material collected in the field shows that this ambiguous nature of the place is translated into a differential evaluation and centrality of television in terms of location and practice.

In terms of location, the above pictures show no ambiguity about the centrality of the television set in the living rooms of these families. In most the cases, television sets constitute one of the central commodities for families and individuals, something to be displayed to visitors and other residents. This centrality closely resembles the one found by Ondina Fachel Leal (2003) in working-class homes in Brazil, a social environment in which

The repertoire of objects in a house in a working-class neighbourhood is strategically located in the most evident corner, next to the television, as a point of magical contagion. There is a common quality among all its elements – that of fetish: from the non-control over their production, from their nature as commodities, and because they reify knowledge of another order, and are thus cultural capital from another social class (Bourdieu, 1979). In other words, the things do not reflect their qualities as things, but rather their social qualities, precisely in the sense Marx employed the notion of commodity fetishism. ... The TV is the most important element among the set of objects in a home of the working-class group. The TV sits on its own small table, with the importance of a monument, and it is typically decorated with a crocheted doily. The TV, on or off, represents the owner's search for social recognition of TV ownership; this is why it has to be visible from the street. (Fachel Leal 2003) 186

Looking at the pictures here we can identify some of the elements highlighted by Fachel Leal in her research.

All the television sets pictured could qualify to be described as a 'monument' or a 'fetish', in the sense that they all have a symbolic value that is different from its functional value as receptors of communications from faraway places. Although all the television sets pictured were turned off when the photographs were taken, the visibility is evident. Without exception they occupy a central place in the living rooms of the families. They are often the focal point to which the different pieces of furniture, especially sofas and chairs, are directed to.

Along with its visibility, in all the images presented here we can see how the location of television sets is always established in relation with other objects or, even better, as a system of meanings with different parts and relations. The television sets are never alone, and the distribution of the surrounding objects is never casual, or innocuous. As Anna McCarthy puts it:

The routine combination of the TV screen with other objects, images and written texts alters the kind of thing that TV seems to be. The TV set in its TV setting thus serves as many things as once: an image among others, a three dimensional stand on which to put things, an appliance and a flat surface on which signs are affixed (McCarthy 2000) 313.

**Pictures 1, 2, 3 and 4, television in ceremonial places**



The change in the nature of television for residents and strangers alike, through its introduction into the 'normality' of domestic life or 'domestication' (Silverstone 1996) also changes the place where television is located. Television sets always form a determinate arrangement with their environment. Things are not located in a random fashion in relation to the television. They are arranged in accordance with certain ideas, values and aesthetic judgments. From the picture of the children on the living room of Ramon and Alejandra (Picture 1) to the piece of embroidery behind the set in Alan and Edith's home (Picture 3), television sets and their environment constitute a system of meanings on their own. These meanings are diverse but the presence of a television set in the living room is a symbol of normality and social participation, in a context in which symbols of social inclusion are quite scarce. For this reason Jessica said that she would like to have a television in her living room because "in every home there is one, but still I didn't have the chance to buy one. It will be much better, definitely".

For these families, then, the possession of television set and its public display is primarily related to status or 'distinction' in its most basic form: the status of having what 'every home has', the minimal set of commodities that serve to identify a modern urban home as such.

The television set also has more powerful status attributes as demonstrated by the pictures. All sets are relatively new. They are all around 21 inches wide, in contrast to the more traditional 14 inches wide that can be found in the bedrooms of many of these homes. In the case of the picture number 2 the television is accompanied by a Hi-fi system of some kind.

While most of the families have television, the kind of television that they have on display still matters. Commonly the biggest and newest set occupies the 'ceremonial' space, even though the set that was used more was the smaller and older one located in the bedroom. Along with being a commodity, television sets are symbols and if in a situation of almost universal access to sets, distinction cannot be obtained through the mere ownership, then it has to be obtained through the relative differences in terms of the type of set owned.

Television sets as objects have a central position in terms of its public location in the *ceremonial* spaces of the home. But this positioning does not mean that the practices related to the use of television sets in these places are so easily accepted or welcomed.

For some families, the practice of watching television in public places is central to family life, echoing the classical image of television as a "gathering place" (Spigel 1992), or just taking a more pragmatic approach in terms of comfort.

I think that here in the living room is where the family can be together to watch television more often, because if we, me and my husband, go to our bedroom to see television, then my child will not come with us. He will be [here], so I think that you share more as a family if you have the television here in the living room (Edith, 49 years).

I'm accustomed [to use the living room to watch television]. Sometimes I'm still having a cup of tea and then it's nine o'clock, so its 'turn on the telly' time. Then I can sit where I am and watch television, 'turn the television in this direction'. This is a good space for everyone. If the television was on in the bedroom it would be uncomfortable for all of us there. Instead here we have seats. There are the sofas. [They] sit down and watch television with me or whatever they want to see (Nicolas, 39 years).

In both cases the location of the set and the practices related to it are not seen as controversial or problematic. The living room appears to be the natural place for the television, especially in a context where lack of space is one of the main problems in their everyday lives, as shown by the account by Nicolas.

Not all the families share these positive perceptions about the practice of watching television in ceremonial places.

At the table, while we are eating, it [the television] is turned off, because these are the only times when we can be like a family and if the telly [is on] nobody speaks and they don't even know what they're eating because they are watching telly (Rosa, 34 years).

What I don't like [about television] here [in the living room] is that sometimes at tea-time they watch television, but the ideal would be not to watch television when eating because if you do, you only pay attention to what you are seeing and do not talk (Cristian, 39 years).



[In the bedroom] is the only place in which I can watch television. I never liked to watch here [living room] because I like to talk here, to pray and I like a nice place. It is more comfortable here. Afterwards I go to bed to watch television and not to talk. I like to see concentrate on the program I'm seeing and nothing else. At least I have a [differentiated] space; I can talk here, think about what we can do, do things right (Diego, 39 years).

As shown by these three extracts the place of television and the practices related to it can also conflict with the practices related to family life, or at least what the interviewees consider as "good" family life. The first two extracts show how conflictive the interviewees perceive the effects of watching television in public areas at also public or communal times has on the quality of the practice related to family life such as eating together.

In addition to these criticisms, which are in line with the more traditional critiques about the television 'effects' on children and family life (Bryant 1994), there are another type of critiques about the use of television in the public areas of the home connected to the clearly ceremonial use of those spaces.

We have never liked to have a television in the living room because when you are having lunch you're seeing the television and not eating. You can be watching television and someone arrives and it is quite rude to have the television on when people want to talk and everyone is concentrating on what's happening on the television rather than on what the people are saying (Paola, 30 years).

I don't like television in the bedrooms, but if I have to choose between the living room and the bedrooms, I prefer the bedrooms, because I don't like when people arrive and there's a telly on in the living room. It is as if everything that we have to talk about is gone, because everyone is watching the telly. I think that is better to leave it in the bedroom and then if people come we really can talk and not be just seeing television. This is why I don't like it that much. In the bedrooms I don't like it either because sometimes instead of talking or doing other things you're seeing telly. If it's one things it is not the other, this is why I don't like it that much, but well... you have to put it in somewhere (Carlos, 32 years).

Television as practice is regarded as having a negative influence over the use of space not only in terms of family life, but also in terms of the use of ceremonial spaces in the relations between the home and its external social environment. For Paola and Carlos to watch television in the living room while strangers are visiting seems like a disruption of the place, the introduction of an alien practice that does alter the performance that is being developed on the 'front stage' of the home. Here, television practices 'privatised' spaces, affecting the kind and quality of the publicity of the family, imposing over the visitor a certain degree of intimacy that is not necessary or beneficial to display publicly.

Both uses of ceremonial spaces, as ceremonial and as gathering places for the family, establish relationships with television use that are potentially, if not manifestly, conflictive, from the point of view of the interviewees. Why have the television in the ceremonial place as most families did, even whose never watch television there? Television in ceremonial space is clearly valued not as practical object, a source of entertainment or information but, above all, as a symbol. Its symbolic qualities overcome its functional ones transforming the object into a receptacle of images and meanings, not a medium of external communication but an end in itself. The negation of the practice or even the negative practice of turning off the television when someone suddenly steps in (as frequently happened during the interviews) does not negate the effect of the apparatus, because its strength is based in its presence as a material object, and not in its use, as technology. Television sets embody values, represent ideas and concepts to themselves and others through sheer physical presence in ceremonial spaces. Its use can add unwanted complexity and confusion to the factual quality of its existence.

### 3. Television and functional uses of space

In relation to space, functional places have a certain specific quality that differentiates them from other places in the home. This quality can be seen as a certain plasticity that we cannot find in both ceremonial and private places. In absolute terms, functional spaces are limited to those spaces specifically designed to satisfy the needs of the users of the home. They are in this case kitchen, bathroom and a variety of small areas like cupboards, shelves and any other storage spaces.

But in practice functional spaces are more flexible than is immediately apparent. In order to be recognized as home, each single home space has to be transformed periodically into a place of functional practices. This can range from cooking to washing the windows and involves passing through any single practice related to the maintenance of the home and its residents. When ceremonial spaces are used as functional space they lose their visibility. This also happens with private ones.

When functional, spaces lose their intimate character because functional practices not only represent compulsory maintenance homework, but also, and in a profound sense, renew the marks of the residents on their lived space, domesticating it, reducing its entropy, its tendency to chaos.

I feel good with it. I feel that if I put things in order I'm also putting order into my life, into my way of being, [and] I'm teaching my children that everything has its place and time, that they have its time to play as well as I have my time to do my duties, to order my house and I like it. I like to have everything ordered and clean; it's my hobby (Rosa, 34 years).

Not many people come here but I like it when they do come that they feel comfortable. I don't know, maybe it's only for me, but I like it when they come into my home with its order and cleanliness. I feel good (Jessica, 30 years).

Order gives meaning not only to Rosa and Jessica, but also to most the members of the families under study. Functional practices have a symbolic quality; they constitute a way of appropriating the world. In the context of poverty, in which access to new commodities is difficult, order and cleanliness obtain a new meaning for the members of the families under study as members of a consumer society. They are important not only for hygiene or in relation to an aesthetic value, but also as a moral quality that speaks about the respectability, even the decency (Martinez 1996) of the family that resides in the home.

I think that you can be poor but with dignity. To be poor does not mean to be dirty or not in order. No, for me to be clean is important. It does not matter if you don't have good things or too many things, but if they are clean, everything is all right (Patricia, 30 years).

It is important that your house is clean, because it's yours and you have to care for it. ... There are people who're poor but clean and there are people who're poor but dirty, you realize that when you go in ... for example my neighbour's. If you saw her bathroom,... its so dirty, it's like she never does any housework. It look like an old bathroom. ... She is so dirty, imagine she even brought some rats with her from the shantytown!! (Andrea, 40 years).

Functional spaces and practices are central to the position of women in the home against a background where there is little integration of women into the labour market and traditional gender divisions are still very strong. For most of them, these practices constitute their main activity during working days and the meanings attached to them go far beyond seeing them as the necessary chores that need to be done to keep a home working. They constitute a central element to their own identity

and the way they see themselves and others, as we see from the extracts from the interviews with Andrea and Patricia.

In this context the television set and its related practises are more often a source conflict than those in relation to ceremonial space. This situation is pretty clear when we analyse the position of television, and the practice of television viewing when functional uses of home space are in progress, especially in comparison to radio, a technology that has already found its place in these spaces.

[I like to see television] but when I have everything done. When I start doing chores I prefer the radio, because with the telly you have to be there, sitting and you can not move but with radio I can be doing everything and it doesn't take up space (Carla, 31 years).

I think its boring to be sitting there watching television without doing anything else. With music, if you have to do something you can move about doing chores, but if you are watching television you have to be there looking and not doing anything else (Edith, 49 years)

As can be seen from these extracts, in contrast with television, radio has already found its place in relation to functional spaces. Due to its lower demands in terms of sensory involvement, radio allows its users to combine listening with other activities, something that is very handy in the case of housework. The use of radio at certain moments, particularly weekday mornings, seems to turn the house as a whole into a functional space. Radio use melts the distinctions between spaces.

I like radio, because I don't have to be there watching it. I mean, I listen to radio and I move about round the home. I do my chores. It gives me joy; it gives me information and what I like the most is the music. It gives me freedom of movement. I can do things and I don't have to be still. Because with telly you have to be static, you have to be in one place to see it, the radio no. The radio lets me move all over the home and do my chores. I get bored if I don't turn on the radio (Rosa, 34 years).

If you turn on the television you cannot move to other space [because] you cannot see the images. This is why in the morning I turn on the radio. I also put it on moderately loud in order to listen to it in the back bedroom, in the kitchen. ... I have one speaker turned in this direction [bedroom] and the other in that direction [kitchen], so I can hear it everywhere (Mariela, 43 years).

Radio is related to mobility in a way that television is not. Watching television is a fairly static activity inside the home. It requires a higher involvement in the practice, especially visual, making it difficult to combine it with any other home practice. Television as practice does not fit within the practices related to home maintenance unlike radio, as Alicia explained in the following extract. Radio listening permits freedom of movement and dynamism while television is static and immobile.

We turn on the telly only when we sit down to eat., We put it on just for a short time. The telly makes you to be sit there watching it so you are forced to be there, unless you are doing something important and just listen to what the television is saying. The *radio is the one that fits in better* in the sense that when you are occupied with housework or making lunch, you don't need to be close to it to listen. You do have to be there in order to see what's happening on television. Radio adapts better to what we do during the day. This is not the case with television, because if we have a sit-down to see television we know that we are going to use most of the time to watch what is on screen, but not with radio. With radio you can do all the other things and you can listen. You don't lose the plot of what is being shown. But with the television you lose the story if someone calls you or you have to go to the toilet, so television requires more time (Alicia, 40 years, emphasis added by author).

This perception of television in relation to functional places and practices shows an interesting comparison with the relation of the medium with temporal and spatial

mobility inside and outside home. Raymond Williams' widely known thesis about "mobile privatisation" (Williams 1992 [1974]), advises that one of the main effects of television in terms of our everyday times and spaces, is its capacity to bring the world to us inside our living rooms in almost real time. It brings in images and sounds from all over the world to the private spheres of our home to a degree unimaginable with any other preceding media technology. This mobility of content with its sensorial demands, however, also causes immobility at the micro level of the home. This immobility is not really acknowledged, or even raised, when home spaces are used in a ceremonial or private way, but it becomes a problem when mobility is needed such as when we are doing housework. In such situations, as here, the radio is preferred.

The relationship between the two technologies has to be seen as complementary rather than opposite or conflicting. Both occupy different spaces and times establishing a continuum where each practice follows the other during the flow of a normal day. This media routine is deeply embedded in the current everyday life of the members of the families under study here as shown by Isabel.

[Television] is like a routine for us. For example we have a routine to wash the dishes, a routine to see telly. They are a part of our contemporary life. In the morning I listen to the radio until I have finished cleaning the house. When I have finished the housework the radio is finished and the telly is turned on [laughs] (Isabel, 25 years).

This perceived incompatibility between the practices of watching television and those related to home maintenance also has consequences in terms of the location of the devices. None of the homes under study has a television set in the kitchen. Even in the case of the families where the television set is moved frequently between different home places, this was limited to public and private areas (from/to the living room to/from the main bedroom typically) but never involves the temporal location of the set in the kitchen. The kitchen, and in general, functional areas, is not a 'place' for television. When other home spaces become functional places, the television set loses temporally its attributes as a communication technology, being seen only as any other item of the material culture of the household.

#### **4. Television and Private Uses of Space**

As happened in the case of ceremonial space, the place of television sets in private spaces at home is not without controversy or resistance. On the one hand, television sets constitute for most of us one of the most common objects to be found in a bedroom. Even in the case of the low-income groups it is not unusual to find a television set in the bedroom, commonly in the master bedroom. On the other hand, amongst the members of the families under study there is still an important degree of criticism of and disquiet at the effects of television on family life.

The pictures presented below show how pervasive and quotidian the presence of television sets is in the bedrooms of these families. The images from parents' bedrooms show us how normal the set is present in these spaces. In contrast to the television sets sited in ceremonial places, the placement of these sets lack any formality or ceremonial character.

Picture number 5 shows the television set in the bedroom of Pepa. She is a single mother with three children without permanent work so the financial situation of her family was quite difficult. This was reflected in the material culture of her home. Her television set was on a shelf almost without any kind of decoration surrounding it and accompanied in the picture by a supermarket trolley in which she stores clothes.

### Pictures 5 and 6, television sets in parents' bedrooms



On the right picture number 6 shows the television set found in the bedroom of Isabel and Victor. Here again the extreme simplicity of the location is notable. There is no decoration and the set is partially covered by what looks like a chessboard facing and there is an unmade bed with clothes scattered over it. Both images clearly show that television sets, and their environment, are not to be seen by anyone outside the immediate family and its most intimate circle. Here the visibility of the screen is important, not the television as such, and the symbolical meaning of the apparatus seems to be minimal.

This is not the case for all the television sets pictured here. If we study the two lower images, from children's bedrooms, a slightly different picture appears. Picture 7 shows the bedroom of Pedro (aged 12) and his sisters, children of Teresa and Nicolas. As a member of one of the biggest families under study, having seven members, he has very few intimate spaces. In this context the use of a portable television set while resting on his bed, under the bed of his sisters and almost hidden by a locker offers him, quite literally, a space of his own, a 'gathering place', where he can have a certain amount of privacy.

### Pictures 7 and 8, television sets in children's bedrooms



Picture 8 shows the bedroom of Jeanette (aged 22), the daughter of Mariela. This picture shows an interesting continuity between the decoration of the walls and the television set. Putting the same stickers as on the wall on the television Jeanette puts the set into its own space, transforming it from a mass produced technology into something personal and unique with a particular identity and meaning for her. In both cases, the position of the set in the bedroom permits them to mark out, in the case of Pedro, or reinforce, in the case of Jeanette, a degree of privacy and individuality over home space. Here the location of the television is unlike the sitting of any other commodity, but is an element of their owners' search for personal space through media technologies' domestication (or privatisation) and use.

In terms of the practice of watching television, for some of the people under study primarily males, bedrooms seem to be the ideal setting to do it, offering privacy and comfort.

I prefer the bedroom [to watch television] because I can watch lying on the bed. In the living room it is sort of uncomfortable, and sometimes our front neighbours start to scream or the other neighbour puts on his stereo very loud, and in the bedroom you just close your door and that's all (Cristobal, 24 years).

I like to see it there [bedroom], because I'm more relaxed in bed. I take off my shoes and I lie all over the bed and that's all. Here [living room] I cannot be bare-foot because there's people coming.... The bedroom is more relaxed. You can take off your shirt, and lie on the bed. Anyway there's nobody looking at you, so you have more privacy inside your square metre (Alan, 48 years).

Not all the family members under study share this positive perception. Especially in connection with the bedroom of the children, some interviewees (commonly women) consider that watching television is a practice that interferes with traditional usage of bedroom space. Most see bedrooms are spaces for rest and the television only introduces unwanted changes in the sleep patterns of their children.

In the other house we had [a television] in the children's bedroom, but they stayed up late watching cartoons so never slept. Now when they go to bed, they go to my bed for a while and then I send them to their bedroom and they fall asleep fast. If they have the telly here they don't sleep. It can be midnight (Alejandra, 36 years).

[Q: Would you like to have a television set in your children's bedroom?] I don't think so, because they have to have enough time to sleep; they have to have their space to rest,; they have to concentrate on what they are studying and they have to relax, to rest so no television (Pepa, 34 years).

I would like to have [a new television set] in my bedroom, not in the children's, because they have their own sleep routine. The telly is turned off and they go to their bedroom. If they want to talk, they can talk, but no television in the bedroom, no games, no computer, as the bedroom is for rest (Rosa, 34 years).

This is not the only problem related to the use of television in a bedroom. There are complaints about the effects of television on the couple's communication in their own bedrooms, as Marta shows:

Television is killing the way of life, this as I see it. I think that television, and in part music, has killed off communication. My husband is uncommunicative. When he gets home we talk a little ... I even said to him "no, we have to have space for us, we have to have a space to talk. We cannot have the television or the radio always on as there has to be separate space for each thing (Marta, 31 years).

This perception of intrusion, of disruption of privacy is quite common. The practice of watching television is seen as an alien form that has caused a negative change in the way in which family, and particularly couples communicate. In some

cases this perception leads the couples to take action to delineate a space for intimacy moving the television set, as described by Ruben and Patricia:

We used to have it here, in the bedroom and then one day we went to my sister's wedding and during the mass the priest said "the worst thing for marriage is to have a television in the bedroom. It is not recommended and is not good for marriage", then there's no television in the bedroom. ... It is good for marriage because it gives you more time to talk, or for your marital life also, "nooo, I'm watching telly" [laughs], it's good. My wife said to me after we heard that "from now on, nevermore" and little by little we move it. We sort one problem and have another. Communication is good, you can talk. We talk about things, not "I'm watching telly, talk to you later" (Ruben, 36 years).

My husband would like to have a telly; his dream is to have a big telly, but not in my bedroom. His dream to have a [new] telly, but I don't like telly in my bedroom, because I once heard a priest that said that telly is a bad for marriage, because your husband starts watching football and you want to talk about the day and your husband doesn't listen to you because he's listening to football. [Then] you don't want to see the news, but your husband does, so your husband is immersed in the news and not even a single fly can fly. Then this intimate moment in the bedroom when you can talk or use any other energies, is stolen by the telly. This is why I found [the comments] very very real (Patricia, 31 years)

Ruben and Patricia established a clear distinction between space for intimacy and the space of television. For them intimacy is a place constructed by certain practices related to the patterns of communication of the couple where watching television brings negative influences.

The place of television in the private spaces of the home is, as with the ceremonial and the functional, resisted by the families under study. Here again television seems to be more accepted as an object (because, after all, as Carlos recognized it "you have to put it somewhere") rather than as a practice from a normative point of view. The location of the television set did not reveal everything about the acceptance of watching television, even though that they are mutually dependant.

## Conclusions

Today it is easy to assume that television occupies a 'natural' place in the home. For many of us, some of our very first memories are associated with the practice of watching television, and since then it is very difficult to imagine a home without a television in it, from its public display in the living room to the intimacy of a bedroom. This 'natural' image of television does not mean that it is not subject to conflict. Television, like any other technology, is in a continual process of adaptation, or domestication, to the home dynamics. As with any other technology, television still has to fight to conquer its place, and its location constitutes one of the main fields over which these fights take place.

What we can conclude about the location of television and its relation with home practices? The first point to make is about the singularity and difference in the relationship between television and space in each different social setting. The way people perceive television and its location and related practices varies from home to home. A location that in some houses is perceived as threatening or disturbing can be perceived in the next one as natural and even enriching of family life. Sometimes the location is normal, but not the practices related to it, or vice versa. As the specific characteristics and meanings of domestic space vary from home to home and from individual to individual, the relationships established with the television vary greatly from case to case in the same way. Anna McCarthy recognizes it:

For just as social space cannot be fixed, conceptually, as one unvarying way of experiencing relations between public and private (...) neither can we hope to come up



with a general set of social operations that television *always* performs, regardless of its place. If categories like public and private are variable and ambiguous, changing their meaning and expression from site to site, then so too, surely, are the ways in which television screens and images materialize these abstract categories as particular lived and experienced elements of a place (McCarthy 2001) 4.

Television is a multiple phenomena and in order to understand its location, both in practice and in space, in the home we have to take into consideration other social and material phenomena that surround the television set and its immediate location.

There are however some general principles about television and the space called 'home'. In relation to the constitution of home space we can see how television as an object has already secured its place. But the practice of watching television still generates resistance and criticism, especially when it is confronted with the 'correct', 'normal' or 'traditional' ways of using the different home spaces identified here. Even private spaces that theoretically appear as ideal for television practices, are disrupted in a way by the intrusion on them of the set. This seems to show that there is something structural about the kind of relations that television establishes with the places in which it is located and practised.

This structural quality of television is shown by the way that television as practice is not only located within a pre-determined place, but it also creates its own place, with almost all the characteristics that we associate with other places that form our homes. *Television is a place*, and for this reason its introduction into home spaces is always contested by all the other places in the home that have to reaccommodate themselves to, and learn to cohabit with, this new spatial context.

The 'place-ness' of television is given by the fact that places only exist in and through practices being developed in them. The home as place only exists if certain types of practices are developed by and/or with (or without) certain actors in a certain time and space. In the case of television its 'place-ness' is given by the fact that the practice of watching television not only shares certain characteristics of space, but also because it involves a relationship with space that is not to be seen in any other practice that constitute the home and its different places. In relation to the first point, if we understand places as social construction rather than geographical entities, we clearly see how practised television also includes some of the social elements identified with place, as Adams recognizes it,

The idea of "television as place" adopted here refers to (1) a bounded system in which symbolic interaction among persons occurs (a social context), and (2) a nucleus around which ideas, values, and shared experiences are constructed (a center of meaning) (Adams 1992) 118.

In addition to its social 'character' that can be found in all other practices, television practices at home constitute a place because they have a relationship with time and space that cannot be found in any other practice developed at home and that constitute the core of its identity as place, as locality.

In terms of time, television constitutes a different temporality, a different way of perceiving time that is experienced quite differently from that of everyday life:

When I start seeing movies I feel that the time passes fast. A movie last for an hour and a half, sometimes they last for two hours so I am locked inside TV for two hours, two hours locked in the movie. If I want to go to the toilet I have to stop it and then there's a knock on the door and I have to stand up to open the door. The two hours locked inside this miserable movie is quite a lot, as they say, 'time is gold'. In these two hours I could be doing other things, put everything ready for the next day but I do not do it. If I go and watch TV, I remain locked to TV, glued to it, as if I were inside it, doing the same things that they



do on TV. Things are different; life is not like this, It is as if TV gives you another picture, another way of thinking (Victor, 32 years).

While being in this place called television we are in a different time. As Victor recognised, the time of television does not match point to point to the time of everyday life. This is true for any sensation of time protraction (Flaherty 1999) common to every other activity that requires as much sensory involvement as television does. Television also has different temporalities inside it (Scannell 1988); it presents us with a variety of temporary orders including the movie, the programming and the actors involved with whom we have to confront, because, as Victor indicated, "life is not this way".

Television also constitutes a different way to perceive space, especially the space outside the home:

[Is important to watch television] for information, because even if you don't see the news, I think the best way to keep up to date is television, the speed, the image, how the way the world is. Something happens in Israel and you know it in 5 minutes here, even before... You are not alone in the world and Chile, even though that we are the last piece of South America, is affected by the things that happen in the world. In one way or another they impact the country and if the country is affected. I am affected, of course because of the job... or something as simple as the bus ticket going up 10 pesos, the oil goes up 10 pesos and 10 pesos a month hurts. You have to be aware that now, the way the world is, something happening in one country affects the others. In this sense television is good because you can get information, even though you can only get information because you don't have any power to make decisions. You don't have any influence on what Chile said to United States or Europe. At least you do know what is happening so you will understand and know what is going to happen (Cristian, 38 years).

[Television allow us to] know things that you don't have to opportunity [to know]. This is what I like about television. It bring you to the world we are living, the distance in kilometres is huge, but television brings things into our house. ... Television is important for me in that sense, to bring you closer to things, to show different ways of life, the traditions, different places... see the advances, see what will happen in the future, the technology and all this. ... In this sense I believe it is essential to educate yourself, because sometime you don't have any way to bring culture into your home. Television brings it, things that you will never experience in person, to widen yourself, to learn, to widen, not only what surrounds you, your square metre. Television opens a window on to the world, to learn what is happening in the world. You travel without leaving your home, as you can say, and learn things that you don't know before, like books (Rosa, 34 years).

Television constitutes not only "a window to the world" as Rosa said, but the world in itself, particularly in this type of context. For low-income populations and in general for populations with problems of spatial mobility, television not only 'represents' but also 'creates' the world in the same process. By watching television 'the world' is created and actualised as something 'real' outside the limits of their localities, as a background in which their localities are located.

Television as practice constitutes a place where time and space are experienced in a slightly different way to that which we use in the rest of our everyday life. This explains why it is difficult for the members of the families under study to make compatible traditional uses of space with the practice of watching television. While uses of space tend to reinforce home boundaries and routines, those associated with television go in the other direction, making home boundaries more permeable and introducing into the home different experiences and information. In this sense we can understand television as, paradoxically, the place in which displacement occurs. As the image of a "window on the world" reminds us, television builds location through dislocation and in doing so shows many of the contradictions and complexities that lie behind the assumed 'normality' of everyday life in contemporary societies.

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