

Dickinson, Kay, University of London, United Kingdom

Ways of Waiting and Watching: Screens in Cairo's Public Places

Public screens are common in Cairo, from sizable roadside displays to decrepit TV sets in souq backstreets, shared by salesmen, friends and customers. How do public screens reshape the nexus of transport and commerce, with Cairo's triangulation of centuries-old African, Asian and European trade routes now stretched upwards through the economies of satellite broadcasting? Regimes of attention and ambient viewing have prompted many generalized theorisations. However, Cairo's screens, rumbling from background to foreground according to mercantile and social intensities, to the lengthy processes of waiting (for traffic to ease, for customers), ask us to renegotiate these ideas according to structures of employment. In a countries where full-employment is policy but not an economic possibility, conviviality, watching, waiting and working for long but uneventful hours – coloured by the nationalisation initiatives of labour, media content and media ownership alike – require new scholarly paradigms that benefit our studies beyond these specific coordinates.