



# Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual (Console-ing passions)

*Lisa Ann Parks*

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In 1957 Sputnik, the world's first man-made satellite, dazzled people as it zipped around the planet. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than eight thousand satellites orbited the Earth, and satellite practices such as live transmission, direct broadcasting, remote sensing, and astronomical observation had altered how we imagined ourselves in relation to others and our planet within the cosmos. In *Cultures in Orbit*, Lisa Parks analyzes these satellite practices and shows how they have affected meanings of "the global" and "the televisual." Parks suggests that the convergence of broadcast, satellite, and computer technologies necessitates an expanded definition of "television," one that encompasses practices of military monitoring and scientific observation as well as commercial entertainment and public broadcasting.

Roaming across the disciplines of media studies, geography, and science and technology studies, Parks examines uses of satellites by broadcasters, military officials, archaeologists, and astronomers. She looks at *Our World*, a live intercontinental television program that reached five hundred million viewers in 1967, and *Imparja tv*, an Aboriginal satellite tv network in Australia. Turning to satellites' remote-sensing capabilities, she explores the U.S. military's production of satellite images of the war in Bosnia as well as archaeologists' use of satellites in the excavation of Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria, Egypt. Parks's reflections on how Western fantasies of control are implicated in the Hubble telescope's views of outer space point to a broader concern: that while satellite uses promise a "global village," they also cut and divide the planet in ways that extend the hegemony of the post-industrial West. In focusing on such contradictions, Parks highlights how satellites cross paths with cultural politics and social struggles.

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