

Multimedia Use in a Sport Setting: Communication Technologies at Off-Track Betting Facilities

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Although there is a growing body of research on public social practices related to the use of mobile phones, internet terminals, and laptops, there are few integrated analyses of the uses of multiple interactive technologies in public settings, and especially those involving sports. This article looks at one such space in which technology is embedded in a complicated network of social and economic relations: the screen dominated pari-mutuel horse race wagering facility. Specifically, the paper examines the relationship that built environments, public screen, and communication technologies have on social practices, and considers the juxtaposition of different places in the quotidian, and in a place of reflexive research practice.

Quoiqu'il existe un nombre croissant d'études sur les pratiques sociales publiques liées à l'utilisation des téléphones cellulaires, des terminaux internet et des ordinateurs portables, il existe peu d'analyses intégrées sur l'utilisation de multiples technologies interactives dans les espaces publics et particulièrement sur celles qui impliquent le sport. Cet article porte sur un de ces espaces au sein duquel la technologie est imbriquée dans un réseau compliqué de relations sociales et économiques : l'établissement dominé par l'écran au service des paris mutuels sur les courses de chevaux. Plus spécifiquement, cet article examine les relations entre les pratiques sociales et les environnements, l'écran public et les technologies de communication. Est également considérée la juxtaposition des différents espaces du quotidien et l'espace des pratiques réflexives de recherche.

In studies of communication technologies, especially in an era in which mobile and public media make media use in all kinds of places and spaces more common, it is critical that we understand how these technologies are actually used—what people do with them, in their presence, and in the presence of others—and in what spaces. As danah boyd (2009) argues “In studying new media, internet researchers may inaccurately bound their view by idealizing the possibilities of the internet rather than by recognizing and working within the actualities of practice” (p. 31). Although boyd specifically references the internet, her concern is applicable to all who study new media. Thus, my study is grounded in the study of practice: the social and technological practices at horse race wagering sites, and attempts to

achieve a better understanding of social interactions in public places. This analysis includes my researcher position in relation to copresent others, technology, and public space. In particular, this study asks how technologies are used, by whom, and to what effect in these settings. What role do media technologies—both old and new—play in social interaction, including among strangers in public?

Ethnographers Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper (2002), in their seminal analysis of the persistence of paper in workplaces, argue, “social scientists in field situations can help pinpoint how digital technologies are really used, including the possibility that new technologies are being avoided or that paper is being used as a workaround” (p. 199). The degree of interaction between users of various technologies, and the interaction around a mix of new and old media, are of significance in studies of modern spaces and places. The persistence of “old” media, the use of multimedia by older users, and the social factors that organize public and private media use in multimedia-rich environments have not generally been of interest to scholars of new media, or of sport, but they are key components in understanding the ways that ‘real’ individuals engage with technology, space, and each other. Furthermore, the simple act of a user in an Illinois wagering facility placing a ten-dollar bet through a computerized terminal on a race being run at a Canadian racetrack implicates him/her in complex streams of transnational information and capital, even if s/her is making a relatively small wager at a local site. As Michael Silk reminds us, “Taking space seriously within the critical interrogation of sport [allows] us to address how space is imbued with power relations” (2004, p. 351).

In this article I will first discuss how betting facilities, and thus their users, are situated in urban—and indeed global—space. Second, I will examine these facilities in detail, including how I went about studying them. Third, I will turn to the specific practices that take place at pari-mutuel wagering facilities, especially interactions with and around technology, and including my own behaviors. Finally, I will discuss the meaningfulness of these practices in an age of media convergence.

OTBs and the City

On one level, the sport settings I describe in this article should be understood as nodes in global systems of information and capital. These sites include networked racetracks, legal and illegal betting locations, legal and illegal internet and telephone wagering services. They are part of the “technopole,” described by Vincent Mosco (1997) as:

...a place that brings together institutions, labour, and finance that, generate the basic materials of the information economy. [Technopoles] result from various local, national, and, in some cases, international, planning activities that bring together public and private sector organisations, to promote systematic technological innovation. (p. 39)

As organizations and institutions that help constitute the local and regional technopoles described by Mosco, horse race wagering sites physically occupy urban and suburban spaces. The construction of off-track betting facilities is part of a strategy initiated in the past three decades to first expand horse racing’s presence within the United States and North America, then beyond, as nodes in far-flung wager-

ing networks enabled by information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Kruse, 2002). Another part of the strategy is the ongoing trend of premier live racing sites being renovated to make them more attractive leisure destinations, and in this process mirroring trends in other sports and their venues. Such efforts are often intended not only to promote the sport, but are part of broader urban (and suburban) revitalization plans.

Often maligned, however, are older, unrenovated leisure and sport spaces, including off-track betting facilities (OTBs), which may be viewed not merely as undesirable next-door neighbors, but as generally contributing to blight across an urban area. One sort of particularly “noxious facility” is often the big city off-track betting parlor. In describing a New York Off-Track Betting (NYOTB) facility, *New York Times* reporter Corey Kilgannon writes, “Downstairs is a vast, dingy space with many scruffy characters soliciting change,” and adds,

As New York City has lost its grit, OTBs have persisted, like exhibits in the Damon Runyon Hustlers’ Hall of Fame, standing sentry against the march of upscale coffee chains, big-name retailers and new condominiums with exercise rooms. (2008)

In this way then, OTBs poignantly reflect the social divisions over space discussed by Silk and others.

The contestation over spaces and meanings of the urban and suburban OTB, including the perceived importance of repositioning OTBs as desirable destinations, is highlighted when one contrasts Kilgannon’s description of NYOTB with descriptions of off-track facilities a couple of hours south on I-95, in Philadelphia. Philadelphia Park renovated its OTBs to be upscale sports bars and called them “Turf Clubs.” Philadelphia Park promotes its Turf Clubs by stating:

For over a decade, Philadelphia Park has been recognized for its innovative design and excellent management of some of the finest off-track wagering facilities in the country, offering state-of-the-art signal technology, comfort, conveniences and great service to racing fans in the greater Philadelphia area. (Philadelphia Park Turf Club homepage, 2010)

It describes the Turf Club in South Philadelphia in this way:

The facility opened on July 16, 1994, quickly becoming a popular stopping place for the city’s sports fans before and after games. In July of 2000, a 9,500 square foot expansion was opened, which offered a glass enclosed dining area with sweeping views of the Stadium to the south and the center city Philadelphia skyline to the north. (Philadelphia Park Turf Club homepage, 2010)

Yet the Turf Clubs remain an exception. Few urban and suburban OTBs are adjacent to larger sport and entertainment attractions, nor do they feature pasta primavera on their menus as the Turf Clubs do.

What all these horse race wagering sites share, despite differences in reputation, location, and amenities, are explicit and integral connections to international information flows. Grant Kien (2009) argues, “In the contemporary context, network has come to metaphorically characterize all human space” (p. 134). In pari-mutuel markets in which the synchronous betting decisions of copresent others, and of

people across the country and around the world, influence one's own decisions, the network is quite an apt metaphor to describe the relation of participants to one another. In the U.S., legal horse race betting is pari-mutuel. It is a system of betting in which those who bet on the winners of a race share in the total amount wagered minus a percentage for the facility's management and any government revenue. Odds in pari-mutuel betting are mutually determined among all bettors in the pool, based on the horses on which people are betting and how much money is being bet on each horse. Pari-mutuel bettors thus participate in global financial markets by betting into the same wagering pools as gamblers in Europe, Australia, South America, Asia, and Africa. Digital technology stretches relations across space, generally allowing transnational information and investment flows into and out of formerly local markets (Kruse, 2007).

Horse race betting venues are clearly sites of transnational commerce, and therefore are "included or plugged into the global economy" (Silk, 2004, p. 353). They are highly technologized spaces of both local and global capital, the intertwining of which Roland Robertson and Richard Giulianotti describe as "glocalization", a process which "encapsulates the quotidian complexity of local-global or universal-particular relations in the context of intensified global compression and transnational change" (2007, p. 168). Thus the local and the global should not be seen as separate processes, but rather, the notion of glocalization emphasizes "the intensified interpenetration of the local and the global" (p. 168). Such interpenetration is enabled by wired and wireless technological forms like telephones, television, and the internet, which, Whannel notes, have helped change "the nature of place, space and distance" (Whannel, 2005, p. 409).

Their positions as loci in de-centered, transnational financial networks; their locatedness in specific geographic spaces; and their role in debates over meanings of urban and suburban space and leisure make horse race wagering venues in North America rather complicated and somewhat contradictory spaces. They are dependent on and contribute to flows of globally networked information, but they are indeed often "dingy" places populated by members of an aging, nonaspirational demographic who are among the least likely to be early adopters of new information and communication technologies. Because of this, it is important to consider, as Cathy van Ingen argues, the ways that social space "connects the wider structures of power to the lived experience of individual and collective actors" (2003, p. 210). The articulation of information flows, new technologies, and urban geography with social and cultural practices makes the OTB a compelling site for examining social and technological practices in multimedia leisure settings.

The Betting Facilities

Horse race wagering sites are dependent on interactive media: mainly on-site screens and self-service betting machines, as well as print, in the form of simulcast programs and racing forms. At the beginning of the project, I assumed that, increasingly, patrons would use mobile information technologies like cell phones, smart phones, and laptops to get handicapping and betting information, and to place bets. This was likely because I, as a racing fan, use the internet to get information on race entries, results, and handicapping from sites like TwinSpires.com, Equibase.com, and the *Daily Racing Form's* website. But my assumptions were

grounded in my experiences. As Annette Markham reminds us of the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research: “Our theories about how the world works are bounded by invisible frames, built not only from our disciplinary training but from our position[s]” (2009, p. 133). Because use of ICTs for information gathering was common among my cohort (largely other academics who study media), and because I assiduously read racing industry news about technology innovations, I was not entirely reflexive at the outset and let some unexamined frames govern my initial inquiry.

Still, I undertook my research in a systematic way (see Atkinson, Delamont & Housley, 2008). While at betting locations, I was particularly interested in customers’ interactions around and with communication technology. Based on my own previous experiences, I was aware of the ubiquity of public screens at these locations—screens display live simulcast television feeds from various racetracks—and the technologies that are used in conjunction with them. To gather information about media users and media use, I conducted field research at two facilities in the United States. The first site was Fair Meadows Racing and Sports Bar in Tulsa, Oklahoma, owned by and mere yards away from Fair Meadows Racetrack (and thus it is an intertrack wagering site, or ITW, which is a racetrack that allows wagering on races at other tracks) in the older “Midtown” section of the city. The second site was the Brick House (which has since closed), a sports bar and softball complex onto which an OTB facility had been added, on the eastern fringe of Urbana, Illinois. I have visited many horse race wagering facilities in North America, and these two sites appeared to be typical and possess characteristics common to U.S. facilities. One is an ITW facility, the other an OTB, both were located in “Midwestern” cities, and while the Brick House was owned by a major racetrack in the Chicago area (Arlington Park), Fair Meadows was associated with a small track with a short meet. Fair Meadows was located in larger metropolitan area, while the Brick House was in a smaller city, although one that is home to a major university. Finally, the sites were the most geographically accessible to me to engage in prolonged research.

I made multiple visits to each facility, on different days of the week and different times of day. Each visit lasted at least two hours. During each session I handicapped and watched races while also watching other users and taking notes. Specifically, when beginning observations in a location, I drew a diagram of the space, including the locations of tables, chairs, screens, betting windows, self-service wagering machines, ATMs, doors, and other relevant objects. I then counted the number of users and employees present and noted any reasonably obvious demographic characteristics, and I would update this information throughout my stay at the facility. I also made note of the social combinations of users: whether they came alone or with others, if they talked to or at least acknowledged others while at the OTB, and if there were places within the space that were more often used for social interactions than others. I noted how patrons used communication technologies, especially printed simulcast programs, on-site television screens, and cell phones; I also paid attention to which patrons bet at machines and which at teller windows. From time to time I also eavesdropped on conversations, especially to see if people were using cell phones to get racing and betting information, or if they were using them for personal or business purposes.

My research approach is best understood as naturalistic observation, as described by Patricia Adler and Peter Adler (1994), in which the researcher does

not claim the kind of detached, expert authority implied by Raymond Gold's notion of the "complete observer." The complete observer, states Gold, has no social interaction with the people he or she is observing and "takes no risks, participates not one whit" (1958, pp. 221–222). I, however, was prepared to engage in unplanned, informal interaction with others at the research sites, I undertook activities typical for the sites, I was familiar with the setting, and I had previously been a nonresearcher participant at pari-mutuel wagering venues. I certainly could not be considered an "objective" observer (Adler & Adler, pp. 379–380). Amanda Coffey (1999) argues that researchers and their fieldwork are necessarily intertwined, and that researchers bring preexisting (though, I would add, in process) identities, experiences, and frames of knowledge into the field with them. As such, I was forced to assess my role as researcher in the field, including my assumptions about the dissemination and use of ICTs to see how people—including me—really interact and use technologies in the context of OTB/ITW environments. My intent was reflexivity and to, as Atkinson, Delacourt, and Housley describe, enter into a shared world with people in the settings that I was studying (2008, p. 219).

One assumption-challenging aspect of the social settings I studied, for instance, was that OTBs do not function primarily as sports bars (with the possible exceptions of those that market themselves as such, like Philadelphia Park's Turf Clubs). Although people gather at both sports bars and OTBs to watch sporting events on screens, most people at betting locations are pursuing their individual betting and rooting interests, and they are not joined together in an explicitly communal activity based in regional identity such as that described by Jon Kraszewski (2008) in his analysis of Pittsburgh Steelers fans at a Texas "football bar." The people in his study are diasporic, having "moved from their home city, town, or region" and then meeting up "in bars with other people from their former region and watch[ing] their former hometown American football team play on satellite television feeds" (p. 141).

As will become evident, while people gather at betting facilities to watch satellite television feeds, and perhaps most notably to act individually on the information provided through the feeds and other media, they are not there to express their identification with a fan community. On special event days, like Kentucky Derby Day, OTBs and ITWs can serve as a "third space" for sports spectating, of the sort proposed by Bale (1998) and discussed in relation to sports bars by Kraszewski (2008), "where drunken fans could elude the policed space of the stadium and home and genuinely interact and intermix with each other in a free and carnivalesque fashion" (pp. 147–148). For the most part, however, for those who frequent OTBs and ITWs, these are spaces of the everyday, with interaction largely restrained.

Indeed, more than half of the viewers/users in my study—including me, most of the time—were solitary. At these facilities, there were clear and similar demographic features shared by the patrons. Patrons were overwhelmingly male, overwhelmingly white and overwhelmingly in late middle age or older. As a woman and generally younger than the other customers (though also white), I was an exception. These observations agree with what is generally known about simulcast facility patrons. In a 2007 marketing study of New York City OTB customers, Boston Consulting Group found that a typical city OTB patron was a "middle-aged male who bets approximately 12 times a month" (quoted in Kilgannon, 2008).

When I was alone in the restaurant section of the Brick House, I did not feel conspicuous, because I seemed to blend in with the other customers, at least in

terms of age (20s through 40s), sex (female, along with approximately half of the clientele), and probable social class (middle). In the OTB section of the establishment, however, customers tended to be in late middle age or older, and primarily male; this was also the case at Fair Meadows. I was made aware of my outlier status not only through my own observations of the demographics of those who were in settings with me, but by comments directed toward me inside and outside OTBs. One weekend night in the parking lot of Fair Meadows, a middle-aged white male jokingly yelled “You don’t want to go in there! You really don’t want to go in there!” at me as I walked toward the facility’s entrance. On another occasion, when inside Fair Meadows and engaged in note taking, I was approached by an older white man who told me that I needed to smile. I never saw any other OTB/ITW habitués being subject to these kinds of attentions and assumed that it was because I stood out as a comparatively young, solitary white woman. These experiences were quite different from those I had during my previous in-depth project: an analysis of indie rock and pop music scenes. Most of the people copresent with me in indie music spaces tended to be about my age, and from similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of them were already friends or acquaintances. Patricia Adler and Peter Adler tell us that female observational researchers in public space “find themselves sensitive to concerns men might not ever consider” (1994, 385), and my experiences in OTBs reminded me of that fact.

This is of course not to say that I was a complete outsider in pari-mutuel wagering settings. I am older than I was when I undertook my music scene research, although still likely younger than the average OTB/ITW user. Other solitary women were present from time to time, as well as professional men who appeared to be in their 30s and 40s. There were some differences in the demographic make-up of viewers/users from site to site. Because the Tulsa facility was an ITW located adjacent to a racetrack, when live racing was taking place trainers and others who work on the racetrack backside, like grooms, hot walkers, and exercise riders, were frequently seen in the facility. In contrast, in summer at the Brick House, softball players who were involved in league softball games on the grounds and their families often made up the bulk of the customers, although they did not frequent the OTB section of the facility. In fact, the OTB section had a separate entrance, although the OTB was easily accessible through the main entrance.

Despite their apparent marginality, given a long history of off-track facilities’ use of screen and interactive media that dates back to the 1970s, OTB users are pioneering users. The task of attending to multiple screens of information and entertainment is a complicated one, as will be discussed below, and takes place in a public site that enables various forms of social interaction. Such sites should not be ignored. Old media can be persistent, and the reasons are often only understood through ethnographies of media use. Sellen and Harper state: “Because change is an evolutionary process in complex environments, the new will not replace the old but will coexist with it. In doing so, both new and existing technologies will begin to interact with each other in different ways” (p. 194). For instance, not only do horse race wagering facilities allow individuals to watch and bet on races from around the country, and even the world, they are places where one can be present with others in a public space in which everyone is engaged in the same media-structured activity. As Dylan Tutt reminds us, “Mediated interaction cannot simply be disembedded from everyday life” (2008, p. 1158). Interactions with and

around technology happen in context, often within the quotidian, and one should not assume that even in public settings that seem exotic to some observers, people are engaging in extraordinary activities.

Social Presence in Public

The environments in which I did my research featured physical attributes, like individual viewing carrels and information/betting kiosks, and established practices, like staring forward at a wall of screens rather than at other people at the site, that allowed users at least an illusion of privacy. Still, when we enter public space we recognize that we will be copresent with others and that we will be differently located in social space than we are when in private. What happens then when we find ourselves inhabiting public space, surrounded by strangers, with little privacy? When one, in public, becomes “part of the flow of events” in small-scale public rituals (Ling, 2008, p. 70)? Specifically in this case, *how do we handle public viewing in the presence of strangers and as we interact with technology?* For instance, on every day (and night) that I conducted research in simulcast facilities, and at every location, loud and excited rooting was common when races were in progress. The locations were all relatively quiet between races, so cheering and yelling were quite noticeable when it happened during races. On some occasions only one or two viewers yelled and cheered; on most occasions, yelling at the screens and rooting picks home was a collective activity that was followed by brief chat between acquaintances or even strangers. In simulcast facilities, loud cheering and yelling can serve to bring individuals with similar rooting interests together through interaction. For example, at Fair Meadows a horse in a race at Belmont Park stumbled leaving the starting gate and lost its rider was met with a collective “oh!”. However, when a patron yelled obscenities including “Fuck!” and “God damn it!” during and after a race, there was an uncomfortable silence.

Fair Meadows’ simulcast center featured rows of carrels with individual monitors surrounding a less individual, more socially oriented and thus sociopetal space. However, a significant amount of interaction took place across rows of carrels. The space inside the rows of carrels included square tables with seating at each for four people. The main screens were located on the south wall of the room, where there were six big screens and one very big screen. The main tracks for the day were featured on the six big screens, with either the most important track or, at race time, the track with a race going off or in progress on the largest screen. Between those screens and the front carrels were seven tall tables with stools for individuals, pairs, or groups. In the Brick House the main screens in the room were not visible to those at carrels, but there was a plethora of social spaces elsewhere in the facility. The Brick House’s sports bar and restaurant section were in a room separate from the OTB, and many more customers could be found in these areas that offered an array of square tables that were almost exclusively occupied by pairs or groups. There were several monitors in, and screens on, the walls in the larger area. They featured other sports programming in addition to horse racing. The space at the Brick House constructed horse race viewing and wagering as more solitary activities than viewing team sports in a sports bar and restaurant. The layout at the simulcast rooms at the Brick House, however, seemed to create more interaction than that at Fair Meadows. The forward-facing tables forced foot traffic to move between the

tables to the betting window, or more frequently, self-service machines. The Brick House's main OTB room was smaller and only a limited number of carrels lined a hallway off the main OTB room. There was more friendly chat among strangers at the Brick House. In these two simulcast facilities there was interaction among acquaintances and even strangers. Although I was generally left alone by other patrons I felt accepted in these spaces when a waitress who had waited on me during a previous visit to the Fair Meadows had a Diet Pepsi (I had ordered one during my previous visit) already in her hand before I had placed the order as if she had gotten it ready when she saw me arrive and sit down.

Much interaction revolved exclusively around handicapping and wagering on races being run that day: I often noticed regulars standing or sitting together and conferring over bets, or at Fair Meadows chatting across tables and carrels. At the Brick House, because the carrels were apart from the main room, very little interaction happened with patrons in the main room, but the acoustics seemed to encourage more talking among people at different tables. Occasionally, viewers who were vocal during and after races were able to enter into interactions about the races with other viewers. Loud vocalization created an avenue for entering into interaction. As Dafna Lemish (1982) observes of public television viewing situations, a commonly noted behavior is the tendency toward television-related social interaction: conversation between or among strangers that is stimulated by the shared viewing experience. Yet at the same time, Lemish points out that most people watching television in public try to be unobtrusive and not draw attention to themselves. People also tend to censure behavior—perhaps through frowns or pointed looks—that is not in line with the social rules of the viewing situation (Bolin, 2004). Users enforce implicit social rules, as happens in many public settings and situations.

Technology Use in Public

For some users of simulcast facilities, interacting with others, or at least being in the presence of others, is an important part of the experience. But what Garry Whannel has written of modern sport in general—that its rise “has been both fueled and shaped by technological innovation” (2005, p. 407)—is pointedly true of horse race betting and its spaces. What is notable about the use of screen technologies in this case study is the fact that at OTBs and ITWs, public screens displaying races from various tracks across the country, the continent, or even the world are meant to be closely watched in the presence of others. This is different from most public screen-viewing situations, where focused attention is not expected (e.g., McCarthy, 2001). OTBs/ITWs, where viewers gather to bet on horse races, require attentiveness to multiple screens as horses, races, odds, and betting pool information appear.

Attending to screens at an OTB is a cognitively complex task, but there are clearly social, leisure, and even financial incentives for viewers to visit simulcast facilities, to take part in the practices associated with the setting. All of the usual practices that I observed taking place on site—buying a simulcast program, sitting at a table or carrel, gathering information from various television screens, studying the program, deciding on bets, walking to a betting window or wagering machine, watching races, perhaps exchanging comments with others—are largely inscribed in the geography of the space. Because of the interrelationship of space

and practice, being in public places and engaging in attendant practices give us a sense of locatedness, and a variety of cues remind us of our location in space and time. For instance, windows in cafés provide a greater sense of locatedness, and thus less of a sense of nonplace of the sort engendered by some sites (shopping malls, for instance). Windows show a café's inhabitants what is happening, and what is located, in the physical space surrounding the structure (Drucker & Gumpert, 1991).

In simulcasting facilities, television screens rather than windows are featured on the walls, and the screens act as pseudo-windows to other places; for instance, in the facilities I studied, screens were windows to places like Southern California, New York City, and Kentucky, and to racetracks like Saratoga and Del Mar. The tracks with the most desirable simulcast signals are also the wealthier ones, with pastorally landscaped infields and paddocks that are featured in simulcasts, truly presenting these distant locales as lush, inviting, and exotic for viewers inhabiting dark and otherwise windowless simulcast facilities. Simulcast viewers are participating in—and therefore are also present at—events at these other places through betting into pari-mutuel pools at remote tracks.

Jane Feuer (1983) argues that television's "authenticity" derives from its ability to evoke the sensation that one is watching events live, a quality that makes television seem more immediate than many other media. In a simulcast facility, including the two in which I made detailed observations, one can be overwhelmed by the many screens showing events from all over the country, or even all over the world, as they happen: post parades, horse races, simulcast hosts' commentary, and race payouts. In part, the live images are taken as guarantors of legitimacy in race betting, assuring viewers that the races have not already happened and that no one has the illegitimate advantage of betting on races after they have been run. Overall, the effect of these many screens, small and large, is to present visual representations of many "elsewheres," including at the Fair Meadows simulcast facility in midsummer: in the evenings one of the simulcasts signals comes from the Fair Meadows racetrack, which is just a few hundred feet away.

In a way, like the computer screens described by Paul Virilio, the television screens become "the ultimate window, but a window which would not so much allow you to receive data as to view the horizon of globalization, the space of its accelerated virtualization" (2000, p. 16). We might also think of them as what Foucault (1986) refers to as "heterotopias," which, like utopias, represent a form of perfection that, unlike utopias, is accessible in the real world. One of the principles of such an "other world" is that:

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another; thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space... (Foucault, 1986, p. 25)

Foucault also states of heterotopias that, "their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (p. 27). Foucault might well have been describing the pari-mutuel wagering facilities I inhabited, for they were rather messy and ill

constructed. Their dingy walls and floors and dim lighting stood in stark opposition to the lush, green locales depicted on many of the installed screens.

One might argue that the transportation of viewers to “elsewhere” may in part mask the intent behind the screens and other technologies in the built environment, and indeed of the facilities themselves: to profit from the bets placed by users. Television screens dominate the space, and in most cases the viewers have no power to change the content on the screen or adjust the volume. The content on screens in horse race wagering facilities is intended to make the viewer place a bet, an act that is much more likely to benefit the facility owners and the owners of the simulcast content than the viewer. Although users may not be aware of the ways they are implicated on global systems of information and capital, bettors are well aware that they are at OTBs and ITWs to bet, and likely lose, their money.

Most of the time, these bettors divided their attention equally between print programs and screens. It was clear that paper has advantages in this setting. Users could study and hold something tangible, make notes on it, have it in front of them, and carry it to the betting windows or machines. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given the ease of use of bound sheets of paper with most of the information required for the day’s handicapping already printed on them. Grant Kien maintains that technography (the ethnographic study of technology) must acknowledge, “. . . that technology contributes dynamically and dramatically to the performance of everyday life rather than one- dimensionally serving as its backdrop and container” (2008, p. 1103). In this context it is easy to see how information that is handy in a portable form and in a medium with which people of all ages, races, sexes and classes are familiar, on which notations can be easily made, and over which two people can simultaneously look and then formulate betting strategies, might still be preferable in some situations to high tech substitutes like smart phones and laptop computers. Paper remains a preeminent ICT in simulcast settings, and it almost certainly remains a preeminent ICT in the everyday lives of OTB users, as it does across many social groups, even in the 21st century. It is a living technology, adapted for and shaped by users to work in many innovative ways.

In domestic space simultaneous use of multiple media is becoming more common, especially as more information and communication technologies move into western households and are “domesticated”: that is, integrated into people’s homes and lives (e.g., Haddon, 2006). Multiple media use is becoming more common in public space as well. On the street and inside public places, we use laptops and netbooks to go online, listen to mp3 players, text and talk on cell phones, and use apps on smart phones. I saw that many users brought personal communication devices to the betting facilities, primarily cell phones. There was sporadic cell phone use among bettors, but rather than placing bets with account wagering services or calling other people to discuss handicapping and racing, almost all of the people I overheard on phones discussed personal, nonracing and nonbetting, business.

Given the relatively few information sources used by OTB/ITW customers and the generally small bets that they placed, it appeared that going to a simulcast facility was more about being in public (perhaps interacting with others, perhaps not) with copresent peers (even if not sitting together or explicitly socializing) than about real handicapping and horse racing knowledge. In the *New York Times* article mentioned earlier, a bartender at a New York OTB location is quoted as

saying “I have customers who spend 12 hours a day in here and bet one race... They just hang out with friends and spend five bucks for the whole day” (quoted in Kilgannon 2008). A marketing report on New York OTB called these customers “social enthusiasts” who are “focused on the social experience” (Kilgannon, 2008). In addition to being able to enjoy the company of other people, users were doing real media work (work that ultimately financially benefits the facilities more than the users). Attending (or not) to information on multiple large screens—fourteen at Fair Meadows, for instance, plus an additional small monitor for those in carrels—is a complex task, especially when one is also attending to print media. As someone who has used complicated screen media—including fast-paced remote-controlled television via multichannel delivery systems like cable and satellite, video games, and computers—for most of my life, I find it quite difficult to keep track of the action on multiple screens at OTBs and ITWs. These screens locate subjects in multiple and rapidly shifting elsewhere while they are also physically positioned by features of environment, the technology and socially positioned by race, gender, age.

In comparison with domestic viewing, the simulcast facility spectator (mostly male, older, white) had little to no control over what is seen on screen or heard over audio channels. The exception was the viewer in a carrel. All users had some control over information attended to, although many cues, like turning on the audio track and putting a particular race on the main screen, tended direct a user’s attention in a particular way. As personal communication technologies become more ubiquitous in the future, how they will change the environment? Will users choose to watch race feeds on laptops or iPhones, or get up-to-date odds information from them, and only attend facilities to legally bet in states where account wagering is not legal? Will more facilities make the use of these devices easier by supplying wireless access? Would such developments spur facility users to become late adopters of smartphone technology? In short, what technologies and sites, if any, will users employ to participate in the streams of information and capital that constitute horse race wagering?

Conclusions

My original focus was to understand how people act and interact in media rich public contexts: in environments in which television is ubiquitous, and sport and gambling content is featured. Media technologies define and organize the spaces I studied, and the constituent and resulting relations should be understood in their public natures. Horse race simulcasting facilities provide a particularly useful example, because of the racing industry’s history of using interactive media to promote its product, because of the centrality of television(s) in these built environments, because of the attention to media required in these settings, because of the nature of copresence at these sites, because of the ways in which OTBs and ITWs situate their users in space, and because of the possibilities that these locations offer for the use of both on-site and portable communication technologies.

My assumption that individuals on site would frequently use personal information technologies like cell phones and laptops to access handicapping information and place bets was incorrect. I was likely wrong for a few reasons made evident in the course of my research. First, just attending to the information available at

the site on screens and on paper is a demanding task, and adding more information through more avenues would greatly increase the difficulty. Second, many, if not most pari-mutuel facilities fail to make available wi-fi access, making it more difficult for users to retrieve online information. Third, the age group most often found at simulcasting facilities is one unlikely to among the early adopters or early majority to use relatively new technologies. Fourth, as became quite clear in my study, a large number of people go to wagering sites for reasons other than engaging in intensive race handicapping and betting. Fifth, to use the term in the Foucauldian way, the use of personal ICTs on site might break the “discipline” of the built environment, which is structured to organize the actions of users in a way that most benefits the operators of the facility and the owners of the race signals. It is in the interest of these parties to discourage bettors from using online account wagering services, from which they receive little or no revenue. Like others in such facilities, I tended to slavishly follow the physical movements and technology use that seemed prescribed by the layout and amenities of the locations.

Although new information and communication technologies had become part of my everyday life in private and in public, I discovered that they were not as extensive part of the everyday lives of those with me at the wagering venues. Because I did not visit venues on special event days, like Kentucky Derby Day, they seemed part of the quotidian. For most visitors, the venues appeared to provide familiar places of social interaction. For many they are undoubtedly “third places,” where individuals can be copresent with familiar others—and in this case, perhaps largely age and sex peers—and take part in the practices of informal public life, albeit in a complex media-rich environment. The presence of screens that require attention to get betting information and watch races means that one is not expected to be involved in intense interaction with others. In addition to the screens, the print information provided in simulcast programs presents facility users with a more durable form of information. Mobile phones provided contact with people and places outside of the built environment. Undoubtedly the setting and contexts provide a range of affordances and meanings for users.

In the end, one of the best ways to understand changes brought about by global flows it is to look at practice in the places and spaces organized by information and communication technologies. Yes, patrons of simulcast centers engage in media use, so they are in essence contributing their labor to benefit often-distant corporations. The repetitive behavior of handicapping and betting is virtually ensured by the cycles of races shown on the screens and the countdowns to posttimes. But looking at located practices shows us not only how people accede to the site’s spatial (and temporal) demands, but also how they sometimes subvert the built environment.

The settings and related practices also illustrate how old media persist alongside new media, in both expected and unexpected ways, and why new technologies are not quickly taken up in the manner their boosters hope. Because television in particular is so powerful and intimate in its form of address, and even as the traditional off-track betting facility appears increasingly dated, public television screens that provide more than moving wallpaper seem likely to become more, not less, common.

The study of space as socially created and socially structuring should continually readdress the changing, mediated, public environments. Such study is especially critical when many of these environments are populated by aging, less affluent, non-early-adopting users who grappling with a mix of old and new media.

My study can help us understand why some media and media settings persist, and how we as students of new media relate to our environments, our technologies, and our practices.

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