

AMBIENT TELEVISION

ANNA McCARTHY

A M B I E N T T E L E V I S I O N

VISUAL CULTURE AND PUBLIC SPACE

FOR GUS

2nd printing, 2003

©2001 Duke University Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ☉

Text and photographs, except figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 28, © Anna McCarthy, 2000.

Fig. 28 and all drawings except fig. 25, © Rachel Harrison, 2000.

Designed by Amy Ruth Buchanan

Typeset in Minion by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data appear on the last printed page of this book.

ways in which what de Certeau conceives as institutional strategies and user tactics can blend together in TV's public environments on the micro-level, and I speculate on how public practices of the TV screen, whether or not they call themselves art, might exploit this confusion to activate the dialectical forces that the TV screen embodies in a site, in the service of progressive cultural politics.

PART I

HISTORIES AND INSTITUTIONS:
RHETORICS OF TV SPECTATORSHIP
OUTSIDE THE HOME

TV, CLASS, AND SOCIAL CONTROL
IN THE 1940s NEIGHBORHOOD TAVERN

Press shots of TV viewers in bars are among the earliest representations of TV spectatorship in postwar American culture. Like the scenes of deeply packed crowds outside appliance store windows and in high school auditoria photographed in the same period, such images depict TV viewing in public as a potent sense of collectivity. Although its specialized, Lacanian connotations make it a less than ideal term, *gazing* is the only word that really pinpoints what the people in these photographs are doing. Photo after photo captures TV viewing as a single structure of looking that binds persons in the space, a scene surprisingly close to the figures of collective *domestic* spectatorship captured in the image of TV's "family circle" that was so prevalent in this same period.¹ The image of TV viewing in both sites is a tableau of faciality. Picture after picture shows us a scene of total absorption, of wide-eyed, open-mouthed people whose vision is directed toward a central point. But whereas the familial hearth pictures generally seem to adhere to rigid principles of sex balance in their representations of collective viewing, the TV audiences captured for posterity in the tavern tend to be almost all male.² Often wearing hats and ties, this square-shouldered spectatorial fraternity gapes transfixed, cigarettes and drinks forgotten, in a pose often parodied in newspaper cartoons and mimed (hilariously) at the time by comedian Ed Wynn in his 1949 TV variety show.³

However, despite the perception of the tavern as a masculine preserve, these images of the barstool audience sometimes reveal a woman sitting somewhere in the crowd. In figure 1 she is unusually conspicuous, sitting at the bar, wearing a boldly striped blouse, and biting her lip as she stares at the screen. This female spectator reminds us that although the prevalent image of early TV spectatorship in the tavern may be the kind of homoge-



FIG. 1
An unknown photographer captured the male collectivity of tavern spectatorship for *Time* magazine in 1947. Note the lone and conspicuous female viewer.

neous masculine collectivity described above, it should be taken as a normative belief, not an empirical document, of what the tavern viewing experience must have been like. Indeed, her pronounced visual incongruity within this sea of men in hats is an allegory for the pervasiveness of perceptions of tavern spectatorship as a masculine phenomenon in American culture of the postwar period.⁴ Press reports invariably depicted the bar as the province of male viewers and the home the space of female ones. "The bar and grill set prefers sporting and news events," an article in *Business Week* reported, "and there aren't enough . . . to fill television's broadcasting hours." Noting that "the studio programs designed for home listening do not appeal to the watchers in saloons," the article concluded that the audience manifested a "split personality."⁵ *Newsweek* reached a similar conclusion: "Other television shows feature fashion shows and special events, but bar owners find sports telecasts more popular."⁶ *Business Week* further surmised that the two audiences occupied different class positions. Working-class people watched in bars, whereas those with "more comfortable incomes" watched at home. Such reports also treated this large bar-viewing constituency and home viewers as very distinct audiences. Some surveys, conducted by the alcoholic beverage industry and by TV stations, estimated that most TV viewers watched from the neighborhood tavern; this led the advertising industry magazine *Sponsor* to conclude in 1948 that "the product using TV most successfully to date is beer" — a perception no doubt reinforced in the explicit references sports announcers on television made at the time to viewers in taverns and bars.⁷

These discussions of television viewing in its earliest years are striking in their emphasis on *location* as the basis for knowledge about the audience. In the 1940s, given the novelty value of television, it seems likely that the audience watching in public drinking establishments was highly diverse, comprising gawkers and other unconventional spectators for whom the TV set, rather than the sports events often displayed on it, was the main attraction.⁸ But journalistic coverage of TV in bars nevertheless described such sites in very particular terms, as masculine arenas of white, working-class, urban culture. This is not in itself surprising. Not only was the thick-accented tavern drunk something of a cultural stereotype, parodied on radio by vaudeville performers like Wynn, but the white working-class tavern was popularly depicted as the site of community values in urban public culture — a mythic site revered and celebrated by writers like Damon Runyon, as well as newspaper nightlife columnists like New York's

Earl Wilson.⁹ But the press's narrow focus on a particular version of the tavern audience does highlight the rhetorical value in associating TV viewing places with particular social groups and with particular configurations of collectivity and sociality as well.

Although they are unlikely to be true, such speculative links between the audience's location and its identity illustrate a wider ideology that continues to define much commercial discourse about television outside the home, namely, that there is a direct correspondence between social space and social subjectivity. Today's industry rhetorics of site and spectatorship are, to be sure, far more precise in their representation of this correspondence—the short-lived “Trucker TV” network, for example, targeted truck drivers at highway rest stops—but the construction of the tavern audience as a masculine, sports-viewing collectivity in the postwar years is exemplary as an early institutional fiction that used the habitual character of public spaces as a way of “knowing” the TV audience located out there on the other side of the screen. But the public discourse on tavern spectatorship in this period is also an opportunity to explore the field of cultural politics that comes into being through such spatial constructions of spectatorship. As I will detail presently, the debate and conjecture sparked by the arrival of the bar as a new venue for sports spectatorship gave expression to wider concerns about, and actions against, working-class leisure and entertainment in the postwar period.

In this respect the words and images through which we can trace television's arrival in the bar also reveal how uncertainties about the TV set's effects took on the accent of the social conflicts that defined the bar as a cultural space. As in the home, TV in the tavern occasioned questions about the medium's exact nature as an object in social space and as a window to other places—as a piece of talking, gaze-channeling furniture that needed to be integrated into the routines of everyday life within its location. But in popular and professional press coverage of tavern viewing, one can quickly discern how these questions about television's role in bars were at once comparable to those expressed around home viewing yet quite distinct in the meanings they assigned to particular televisual phenomena. Television's ability to collapse distinctions between public and private space in each location, for example, was judged to have very different effects, depending on the environment in question. Broadly speaking, one could say that whereas at home TV threatened to bring the anonymous and unpredictable realm of the outside world into domestic familial space, in the tavern TV provoked concerns about the “privatization” of the bar

by undermining its traditional, masculinist ideals of free entry and conversational democracy—a concern that remains active, in different ways, around TV's presence outside the home to this day. By noting the points where the postwar construction of television spectatorship in these two arenas overlap and diverge, we can start to distinguish the broader mechanisms of site-specificity that suture television as an object and a spectacle into the human processes of its immediate environment.

This chapter pursues this opportunity, focusing on how a range of American cultural texts, from a beverage industry trade journal to the newsletters of social reformers, represented the screen's power to configure, and reconfigure, social relations in the bar. Television's emergence in the neighborhood tavern, as in the home, embodied contradictory cultural sensibilities and forms of social power. The tavern was a cultural arena in which liberatory ideals of democratic socializing met the privatizing forces of commerce and insular expressions of community. It was a space where the disciplinary desires of social reform constantly bumped up against the sediment of local practices, of explicit and implicit norms of behavior and socializing. It was a masculinist utopia in many ways, and yet its parodic representation in the press and popular culture of the postwar years reveals how often perceptions of this masculinity hinged on class contempt. The following account of television's arrival traces how TV gave expression to these and other contradictions that defined the tavern as a cultural space. It is a history in which class-based forces of social regulation feature prominently; the social questions TV raised for both the denizens of the tavern and its critics were intimately linked to the longer history of the bar as a working-class social space. Specifically, the prevailing discourses on TV's ability to alter space and to structure leisure time in the bar were inseparable from the institution's historical evolution as a space of working-class leisure and its position in the moral geographies of reform movements. When, at the end of this chapter, we visit a tavern that has managed to weather changes in neighborhood culture far more damaging than the arrival of TV, the extent to which anxieties about television's arrival prefigured larger structural changes in urban working-class lives will be apparent.

As I will argue, the history of tavern spectatorship in the 1940s is also a history of how very localized rhetorics of screen and place come to embody more diffuse processes of power and regulation. The debates over the tavern screen anticipated concerns about the impact of collective sports viewing on the economics of leisure that arose with the postsatellite rise of

the commercial sports bar. In each case the thrill of the crowd was seen as the key to the bar as a reception context, and it introduced an intangible and even threatening element to the way other institutions of visual entertainment and recreation—baseball and movies in the case of the 1940s tavern, commercial sports broadcasting in the case of the sports bar—interpreted the TV viewing experience as a form of competition. Anticipating more contemporary concerns about TV's intrusion in various public places, the postwar tavern screen is thus a valuable lesson in how to think about the social impact of the TV screen in public places today.

Commerce, Culture, and the Tavern Public Sphere

The rise of satellite networks designed for drinking establishments in recent decades was not the first occasion for the commercial exploitation of a barstool TV audience. In the postwar years TV manufacturers quickly realized that the characteristic spatial arrangement of the bar gave rise to very particular viewing conditions. A number of companies developed large-screen receivers (both projection and "direct view") to accommodate the bar's collective viewing situation.¹⁰ Whereas larger companies such as DuMont, RCA, Philco, and GE added these models to their existing lines of home sets, at least one company, the United States Television Manufacturing Corporation, specialized in receivers for public places. One model, the "Tavern Telesymphonic," had a nineteen-by-twenty-five-inch screen and retailed for two thousand dollars.¹¹ The tavern TV market also encouraged the early participation of alcoholic beverage companies in TV advertising. Even before the days of network broadcasting, *Beverage Media*, the trade journal for New York tavern owners, was filled with advertisements from local breweries announcing the sports events they were sponsoring on TV. Such advertisements addressed the tavern keeper as the proprietor of a convivial space for sports spectatorship, promulgating the image of tavern viewers as a masculine collectivity.

Such conceptions of the neighborhood tavern as a masculinist space reflected some of its enduring characteristics as an institution. Internal, informal systems for vetting entry and participation in tavern culture on the basis of gender as well as age were common in this period. The potential for hostility toward women in the tavern is vividly conveyed by the content of the following "humorous" signs found posted above the bar and collected in a 1947 survey of taverns in Manhattan and the Boroughs of New York:

Danger! Women Drinking
 Notice! No Back Room Here for Ladies
 Good Ale, Raw Onions, and No Ladies
 No Unescorted Ladies Permitted at Bar¹²

Although no legal interdiction barred women from the tavern, signs like these would severely limit their participation in the social life of taverns in working-class neighborhoods. Still, this does not mean that women were entirely absent from tavern culture. One sociological study in this period found that "women were more likely to affirm the importance of the tavern in providing a meeting place and satisfying unmet social needs." One woman even stated, "If my daughters are eventually going to drink I would rather they go to the tavern than to go to private places."¹³ Her implication, presumably, was that the visibility of the tavern as a space allowed the watchful eye of the community to monitor the activities of women and men therein.

This sense of the tavern as a community hub marks the tavern's historical role as a neighborhood public sphere. Working-class neighborhood bars, before and after prohibition, were a hub of male (and sometimes female) recreation and social interaction.¹⁴ The author of the above-cited study of bar signs in New York characterized the tavern as a place "frequented by men and women who call each other by first names, who know what their drinking companions work at, the number of children each has, whether so-and-so is getting married, and who, in short, feel comfortable, natural, and at ease in each other's company."¹⁵ Regular customers thought of their local taverns as informal social clubs rather than as places to get drunk: "Many who wish to drink may do so at home or in other private ways," one patron noted. "Often [the tavern] is the only place a man can go unless he belongs to such clubs as Madison, Club, Elks club, et al., and including country clubs."¹⁶ This was echoed by a number of patrons, who felt that "everyone is equal in a tavern—whereas schools and churches all have their caste systems."¹⁷ The tavern was thus understood as a social institution distinctly more democratic than others, practiced by its patrons as a nonhierarchical social space.

This ideology of the tavern as a barrierless space for exchange and communication bears some resemblance to the "classical" bourgeois public sphere excavated as a historical form and promoted as a normative political ideal by Jürgen Habermas, although its class contours and physical arrangements differ sharply from those of the eighteenth-century London

coffeehouses Habermas examined. Indeed, Habermas would no doubt dispute such connections, given that he blamed the lack of a critical public in the twentieth century on mass cultural patterns of amusement and leisure.¹⁸ But by most accounts, prior to the arrival of television tavern and saloon life *combined* conversation, community participation, and recreational activities; one could say working-class drinking spots consolidated their community roles as public places by offering both amusement *and* discourse.¹⁹ People came to the bar not to escape but to do a number of things: "talk, exchange ideas, discuss their important problem, and have fun playing cards and shuffleboard and listening to the juke box."²⁰ In addition to the jukebox many other visual and auditory amusements were available in the tavern: movies were often screened in neighborhood taverns, and all had mirrors, and sometimes murals, to spice up the visual spectacle of the interior.²¹ This sense of the tavern's visual culture as a key element of its public life is corroborated in Roy Rosenzweig's study of turn-of-the-century labor movements. Rosenzweig depicts the history of leisure and recreation in the United States as not simply a progressive decay of agency through a commodified desire for passive amusement but rather a reflection of class conflict over working conditions. The saloon was a particularly contested topic in workingmen's demand for leisure time, a demand voiced in quantifying terms — "eight hours for what we will." This was because the right to congregate (and consume) publicly within saloons intensified middle-class reformers' and institutions' efforts to design more appropriate forms of recreation for the working classes.²² Thus, rather than simply depoliticizing the space, saloon amusements were recreational forms that laid the groundwork for television's presence in the bar, and they were the material result of a long-standing political struggle over leisure.

When television spectatorship arrived in the tavern, it was understood, similarly, as a social and recreational practice that marked the temporal relations of the workday, although discussions of this function also revealed how much the cultural politics of leisure that formerly framed urban drinking had faded from view. An article in *Beverage Media*, although it situated television within a longer history of barroom amusement traditions, hinted that tavern life was hardly an alternative to the ossified structuring of time at work. Rather, the article suggested that the tavern might itself be a habitual space of deadened, wasted leisure time: "There's really nothing new about the tavern owner being in 'show business.' If you own or rent a juke box, you're a showman. If you have a

shuffleboard game, you're a showman. You have already discovered that in supplying some form of entertainment to your customers you can attract more people, and you can keep them longer by breaking up the monotony which a normal routine without such features would induce."²³

The tavern, this suggests, could be a space both for the experience of the tired routine of the daily grind and a space where normal time could be suspended and changed by visual spectacle. The television screen's relation to this environment was potentially transformative, akin to what Walter Benjamin saw as the cinema's transformation of "our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories" by the "dynamite of a tenth of a second."²⁴ But it also harbored the possibility of a further inured and deadened populace of working people for whom even the process of relaxation was becoming mechanized.

This latter possibility certainly occurred to many observers of TV's postwar arrival in the tavern. Television's widespread takeover of the bar in the late 1940s, prior to the rise of household viewing, was an early occasion for a lament that has become commonplace with the arrival of television screens in all areas of public life: the worrisome fear that the screen is an intruder in the environment it inhabits and, moreover, one that might bring other intruders in its wake.²⁵ Numerous postwar writers speculated about what the new medium would do to the local tavern as a particular kind of social space. Their questions, detailed in the following sections, included the following: would TV eradicate conversation from a neighborhood public institution, turning the convivial "working man's club" into a theater? Would the appeal of watching a baseball game with the tavern crowd lead fans to desert the stadium? Would televised sports also attract children to this adult male space, and should municipal authorities attempt to divert them with alternative TV viewing clubs? Such questions echoed the nascent concerns about the invasion of the domestic, familial sphere that were emerging around television's installation in the home. In each case concerns about the effect of TV's installation on social space revolved around the medium's ability to warp time and space and to change the environment it entered. However, the terms in which these invasion anxieties were figured in the tavern, as in the home, were profoundly site-specific. Although TV in both places drew concerns about the corruption of children, the tavern screen did so not because it brought inappropriate images into the space of the family but because it brought children to an inappropriate, nonfamilial environment. And although TV in each space

posed a perceived threat to stadium sports attendance, home viewing was believed to do so because it offered a way of *bypassing* crowds; in contrast, bar viewing was seen as a way of bringing the crowd experience home to the neighborhood.

Television's entrance into the gendered space of the working-class tavern thus inflected discourses of spectatorship with site-specific cultural politics—it entered into the particular relations of public and private, of class, gender, and age, that defined the tavern as a space. Rather than repressing or eradicating these local social relations, TV extended their range, linking them to new institutional arenas: the business of live sports promotion and the moral geography of social reform, in particular. When we trace the terms of this postwar discourse on tavern spectatorship in greater detail now, it will become clear that the television screen's appearance in public space was from the first a social mechanism that gave material form to wider conflicts over the cultural meaning of leisure, conflicts that had historically structured the perception of the tavern as a working-class environment.

The Social Space of the Tavern Screen

Let us turn first to the question of the physical changes that the arrival of television wrought within the space, moving subsequently to the wider social controversies that TV precipitated as it became intertwined with the rhythms and routines of working-class leisure outside the home. As is evident in the illustrations accompanying this chapter, the conventional overhead placement of the barroom TV dates back to this period. This foregrounds how, from the very beginning, television's popularity, particularly its sports broadcasts, meant that tavern owners needed to position the screen very carefully for maximum sight lines. Although actual data on audiences are rare, press accounts from this period stress the magnitude of the crowds TV brought to the bar. On one fight night, for example, one reporter at a small New York bar counted 37 customers at 9:15, 162 when the bout ended.²⁶ Although several expensive large-screen models were marketed specifically for taverns, many screens were no larger than nine inches across. This called for inventive measures; *Colliers* explained that "taproom tycoons use mirrors to enlarge the screen's pictures and multiply the visible surfaces," and other bar managers placed magnifying lenses in front of the screen to make the picture larger.²⁷ Many of these smaller receivers were initially placed directly on the bar, but later

it was more common to find them on shelves near the ceiling, a placement that made them easier to see and discouraged customers from fiddling with the knobs.²⁸

Given the need to accommodate large crowds and to provide everyone with visual access to the screen, it is not surprising that a series of viewing protocols emerged around the contingencies of space, especially when big events were broadcast. In crowded bars, patrons were asked to remove their hats and stay seated during important programs. A sign on one tavern's set read, "You're not transparent. People back of you can't see the screen. Please don't stand there."²⁹ Tavern owners found ways to arrange crowds efficiently. According to the *New Yorker*, the owner of one bar seated the audience that gathered for the 1946 Louis-Conn bout in a predetermined pattern: "seventy in straight backed chairs on the floor, fifty more in booths along the wall, a couple of hundred standing at the bar, and several dozen outside peering through the window."³⁰ *Colliers* reported that one restaurant owner in the Bronx converted his back room into a television theater and claimed that a New Jersey tavern proprietor had constructed wooden bleachers around the walls of the bar.³¹ A good example of a theater-like presentation style is shown in figure 2—a photograph of a tavern TV screen taken from a very early collection of photographs commissioned in the early 1940s by the Jersey City, N.J., furniture store that installed TV in numerous local establishments. (These images now reside in the Smithsonian among the papers of Allen B. Du Mont, New Jersey television pioneer, set manufacturer, and network owner.)

From 1947 to 1949 the trade journal *Beverage Media* often addressed its tavern-keeper reader as a subject in need of education on the social conventions of the screen, recounting many such innovative examples of techniques for dealing with television's arrival in the space of the bar. Lecturing the tavern owner on how to serve a distracted audience and "make them feel at home," the journal's advisory style strongly paralleled the "lessons in managing the resident's gaze at the screen" that Spigel traces in women's magazines of the same period.³² A special issue on television in 1947 presented a comprehensive survey of tavern owners with TV sets, outlining their experience of the medium's value, and its potential drawbacks, for the business of beer and liquor sales. Article after article in this issue offered detailed advice on diverse topics ranging from the logistics of seating large crowds, how to answer inquiries from customers about the way television actually works, and the importance of tending to customers' drinks while they watched TV. Like the women's magazines of the

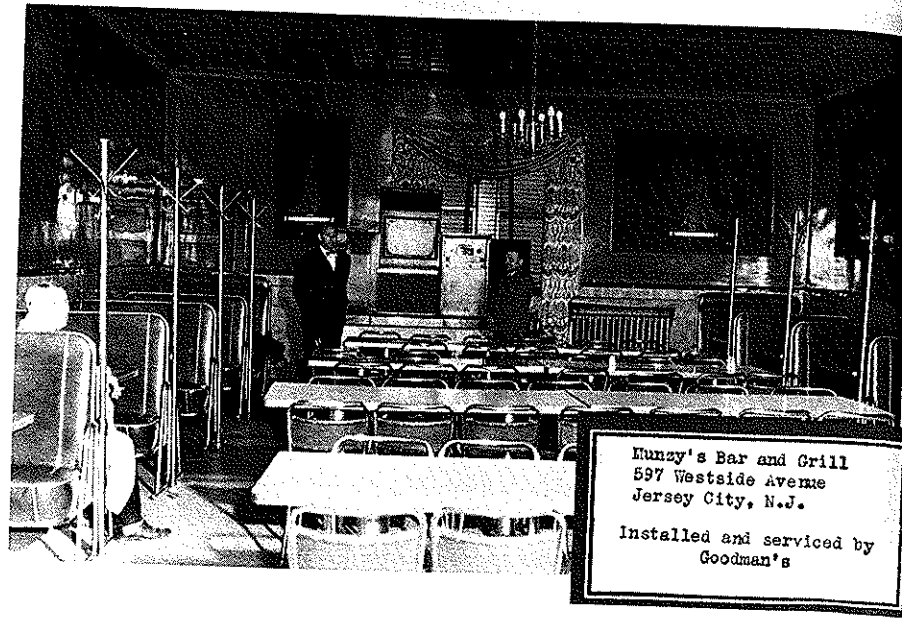


FIG. 2
Munzy's television set ended up in the back room, near elaborate saloon-style wall murals depicting courtiers in eighteenth-century dress. (DuMont Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)

period, *Beverage Media* depicted TV proprietorship as a responsibility that combined labor and nurture. As one article lectured,

One thing is certain, any tavern owner who ventures into television will have to be definitely "on the job" when the television is working for him. He must keep his employees on their toes, not watching the television screen but watching the customers and taking care of them. He must circulate among the customers and make them feel at home in his bar. By seeing that glasses are picked up as soon as they are emptied, he will thus suggest another drink. Tactfully suggesting another drink to the customer obviously nursing his drink might also help.³³

This advice parallels the readerly address of popular magazine articles on domestic TV in the way it encourages attentiveness and polite supervision of the needs of others. Indeed, one can discern a quasi-maternal sense of domestic pride in such passages, as well as in the commercial material promoting tavern television in *Beverage Media*. As a DuMont TV set advertisement's address to the tavern keeper in this same issue proposed: "Your patrons have come to expect the finest of everything from you. The confidence and goodwill you have worked so hard to build deserves the finest in television."³⁴

Perhaps because the screen drew attention to, and brought about changes in, the bar's interior decorations, these trade discussions of television tended to foreground the tavern's cultural status as a space of male-oriented comfort, a status referenced in patrons' descriptions of the space as a lodge, a club, or a "home away from home."³⁵ Such characterizations of the televisual bar fostered an ideology of "masculine domesticity" that paralleled, in some respects, the address to male TV owners that Spigel traces in the culture of the home screen.³⁶ Do-it-yourself, one of the signal features of masculine domesticity, was a skill bar owners honed when they bought TV sets;³⁷ when McGary's Tavern in the Bronx borough of New York remodeled and became McGarry's (*sic*) Broadway Cafe, the owner built a precarious structure to house the bar's large (and presumably heavy) TV set: a "wheeled stand about seven feet high."³⁸ The positioning of the screen on specially constructed stands can also be seen in figure 3, another Goodman's photo from the Du Mont Collection and one of several that show affable, white-coated bartenders beaming at the camera as they stand beside their brand new TV receivers. In this one the bar-

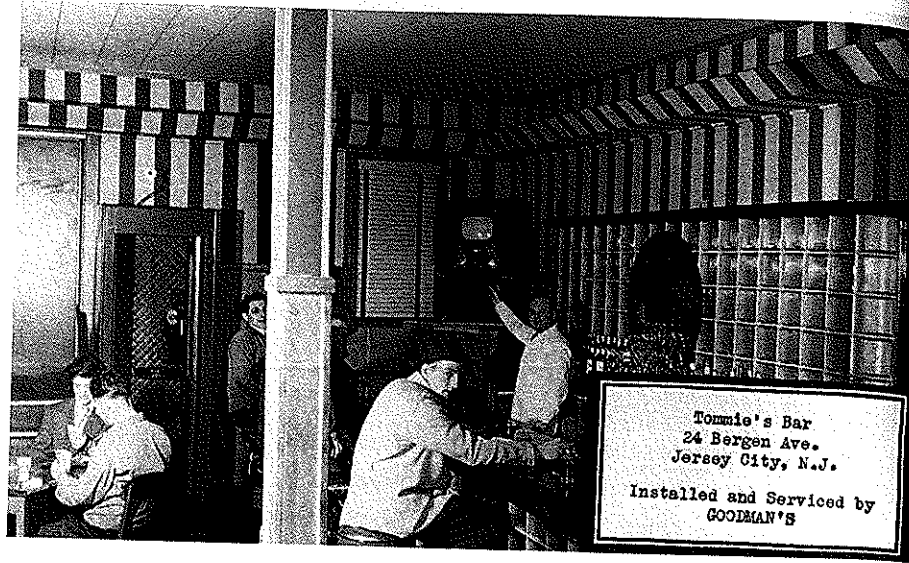


FIG. 3
Specially constructed stand elevated the TV set to pride of place in the overhead space of the room, changing the visual architecture of the tavern in the process. (DuMont Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)

tender gestures proudly to the expensive and ornate console that sits on a platform in the corner of the bar.

Pride was at stake in the domestic men's culture of the tavern in another way, too. One of *Beverage Media's* advice articles recognized the proprietary role of the bartender within the social environment of the tavern, giving bar owners a "crib-sheet" for explaining how TV works. Knowledge of the principles of television broadcasting was important, the article noted, because "when Mike the bartender and Henri the waiter begin to discuss *Iconoscopes* and *Kinescopes* you'll know they've been initiated. They belong to the lodge. The boss has bought a television receiver and the boys have been learning the language. They've found out how it works."³⁹ Emphasizing technological mastery and social status and depicting bartenders as initiates in a televisual "lodge," this statement links the male domesticity of the tavern to stereotypically masculine anxieties about authority and technology.

In other cases, indeed, television's presence within working-class masculine leisure space was figured as a potential invasion of the tavern's hermetic, homosocial community. In 1948 *Variety* reported that television had brought an unwelcome transformation in some bars, citing a report from the New Jersey Alcoholic Beverage Commission officers that stated, "Bar owners are jerking [TV sets] out as bad investments." Their reasons, the article claimed, were that people came to the bar to watch TV and not for the social drinking experience, that patrons drank too slowly, and that they tended to leave as soon as the show was over. "The novelty of TV has worn off and . . . non-paying barflies keep customers from the bar. . . . Patrons fail to agree on which programs they want to look at, with noisy debate resulting from such disagreement," the article noted.⁴⁰ Another complaint about television in the tavern that aired in the popular press was that it killed conversation. Several journalists bemoaned the loss of talk and conviviality in the local tavern: "It used to be practically a barroom must to engage in badinage and raillery with a hapless, elbow bending neighbor. Television has invoked the silence of the tomb on the bar," one writer claimed. This silence was broken only by "the grunts, groans and roars emanating from a ten inch screen perched precariously over the far end of the bar."⁴¹ Contrary to Leo Bogart's assertion that TV in bars "provided a common denominator of experience which may . . . have stimulated some conversation among people with little in common to talk about,"⁴² these commentators asserted that conversations in tav-

erns had become "furtive, sandwiched in between strikeouts, odes to cigarettes, and hysterical hymns to men of muscle."⁴³ One *New York Times* editorial, entitled a "barroom lament," explained:

The saloon . . . has been the favorite forum of the man with something on his mind. In it he could air his preferences, his prejudices, and his heresies; fulminate against his employers, his relatives, and the status quo, voice his grievances against mankind, calypso singers, and parking regulations. . . . The saloon now harbors a horde of mutes. Thanks to the intrusion of a garrulous pictorial contraption called television, the thirsty talker has had his forum shot out from under him. . . . As a business bait, television may offer momentary rewards; as a curb on freedom and continuity of speech it can only breed resentment.⁴⁴

The tavern patron in this depiction was a sodden rambler to whom calypso singers and the status quo were equally irksome; he talked regardlessly, with or without listeners. Despite the affirmation of talk and conviviality as public functions of the barroom, this was the general tone of many articles on tavern tv. It betrays a disdain for the tavern and its patrons and a derisive dismissal of the possibility that it might serve a public function in urban communities. As the above quote demonstrates, such articles tended to affect the rhetorical style of a hiccuping, W. C. Fieldsesque barstool philosopher. Another editorial, entitled "Video Kayoes the Barroom Bore," welcomed television's intrusion as a way of silencing such incessant talkers. It heralded the defeat of the drunk whose "bleary face, unrelenting elbow, and incoherent phrases disturb his suffering neighbor on the bar stool."⁴⁵

This image of the working-class tavern-going public in dominant journalistic accounts of television's impact on the bar offers little insight into the day-to-day role tv played in the lives of tavern patrons, revealing instead how much tavern spectatorship embodied middle-class ideas about working-class identity. Contrary to these press accounts, I would suggest instead that television spectatorship in the tavern, as in other places, no doubt quickly became part of the rhythms and patterns of neighborhood life. This possibility is suggested in the techniques tavern owners used to publicize their tv screens; *Beverage Media* announced that, in addition to attracting viewers with cardboard or neon signs, interior displays, displays provided by the manufacturers, handbills distributed around the neighborhood, and postcards mailed weekly, tavern owners used the neighborhood's oral networks to pass along television-related news: "Your bar-

tender is in a particularly advantageous position to tell his customers about 'the big fight on the television show on Friday night.'"⁴⁶ These forms of publicity locate the tavern and its screen within a local print and oral culture, suggesting that the screen's presence could reinforce community ties, albeit for commercial gain, as much as fray them.

However, it is clear that tv did commodify certain aspects of barroom social relations, most notably in its transformation of the bar patrons into an identifiable collective of predictable and regulatable audience members. Although it was illegal to charge admission to taverns, tavern owners found other ways to pass along the cost of television to the customers. Some raised prices, imposed drink minimums, and suspended draft beer sales in favor of bottles during important sports games.⁴⁷ A bar in Brooklyn was reported to seat viewers during important games according to their drinks: "The front row is reserved for scotch drinkers, the second row for the bourbon, rye, and blend trade, third row for devotees of the grape, the last row and standing room for the ordinary and beer drinking fare."⁴⁸ Whether true or not, such statements reference the extent to which television may have introduced new terms for social hierarchy within the tavern. One complaint among tavern owners was that the customers tv attracted were worthless because they didn't buy drinks. Jukebox manufacturers and operators sought to capitalize on this complaint by marketing coin-operated devices capable of supplying six minutes of television, radio, or phonograph music for a nickel. Promotional copy for one such machine, called the Solotone, emphasized its profit potential for tavern owners: "The mechanism . . . [keeps] people seated and therefore not so preoccupied that they forget eating and drinking. It also is said to eliminate 'floaters.'"⁴⁹ Another device of this type promised to help bar owners avoid "the non-profitable 'free show' customer."⁵⁰

These ways of thinking about barstool spectators suggest a perceived transformation of the tavern into a kind of theater. Television's spatial effect on the bar, they indicate, included the reconstruction of conversational space as a standardized, visually based arena of spectacle. Like the home-theater metaphor circulating in other areas of tv discourse at the time, this idea arose from a longer lineage of class-coded ideas about spectatorship.⁵¹ But whereas the home-theater metaphor embodied an escape from the world of public amusement, the theater metaphor brought the tavern closer to other spaces of commercial visual entertainment, like the movie theater and the stadium. Its perceived similarity to both raised important questions of legality, policy, profit, and even ethics for various

state, corporate, and civic bodies. The screen's transformative potential within its immediate environment thus had consequences that extended beyond the four walls of the tavern, as it also shaped the latter's relationship to a wider geography of gazes, bodies, and commercialized amusement in the postwar American city.

For motion picture exhibitors TV turned the tavern into a theatrical space for viewing images, one that was not subject to the same heavy licensing laws and fees as movie theaters. In 1948 a group of New Jersey theater owners called a meeting with legislators to discuss the "alarming threat" television posed for the film business. A survey in the area had disclosed that, in *Variety's* jargon, "most theaters are now surrounded by a belt of bistros which offer tele entertainment as a cuffo chaser to the drinks."⁵² (Translation: a number of lounges and restaurants with television were located near theaters.) To stave off the possibility that people might prefer a night of TV and drinks to a movie, exhibitors suggested that bars be required to purchase licenses as places of amusement. The effort was probably futile, as the Internal Revenue Service had ruled the year before that taverns with TV were not eligible for federal amusement taxes when the set was "not coupled with other amusements."⁵³ In all likelihood these theater owners were motivated by the 1947 precedent set in nearby Philadelphia, where the liquor board ignored the IRS ruling and instituted a \$120 amusement tax on taverns with TV.⁵⁴ When tavern owners protested, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that "video was in effect motion pictures" and authorized the tax in a move that undoubtedly pleased both sports promoters and theater owners.⁵⁵ Such judicial rulings placed television within the legislative arena of public amusements, where municipal and commercial interests could jointly patrol the borders of the tavern as a commercial space.

For sports promoters tavern TV was part of general debates over the commercial impact of televised sports in the late forties. This debate centered on whether the medium would create new fans or decrease stadium attendance.⁵⁶ In 1948 *Variety* ran an article that characterized the tavern sports audience as a potentially greater threat to gate receipts than were home viewers. The article reported that baseball league executives had "expressed [the] conviction that tele, if confined to its rightful place in the home, could help them by converting some of the public into new fans. They voiced considerable misgivings, however, about the number of bars that advertise in bold window cards 'see the baseball games here.'"⁵⁷ To stave off "the competition tossed in their faces by the television set,"

baseball owners announced that they would ask set manufacturers and distributors to warn bars against advertising games in their windows. If tavern owners did not cooperate, owners of sports teams warned that "they might prohibit baseball telecasting in the future. And that . . . would cut a deep swath into the pull of taverns."⁵⁸ The popular press lent support to this fear; in 1947 *Time* quoted a Chicago tavern owner's perspective on television's ability to aid business (*Time* also attempted to represent his accent in print): "'Bout coupla months ago we was losin' money but fast. . . . I figure maybe dese guys is goin to hockey games or fights, an I say, why not bring hockey or fights here, so guys can see sports and drink atta same time."⁵⁹

The idea that barstool TV viewing was an experience just as "live" as stadium spectatorship, and one that featured the added attraction of alcohol, lay beneath the humorous situation illustrated in figure 4, a cartoon clipped by Allen B. Du Mont in 1946. In this tavern scene, a bemused bartender and patron watch an inebriated press photographer aim his camera at the TV screen, on which the baseball game he is supposed to be covering appears. This image allows us to discern some of the broader cultural continuities that underscored sports magnates' concern with the tavern as a space of spectatorship. Though it plays off the midcentury stereotype of journalism as a hard-drinking profession, it also recycles a joke scenario as old as the 1902 Edison film *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show*. In each case, a stock character's encounter with a new technology of vision raises the possibility of confusing the two-dimensional space of the image with the reality it depicts. But whereas in "Uncle Josh" the joke lies in seeing the bumbling bumpkin try to enter the world onscreen, in this cartoon it lies in the fact that the medium's perceptual collapse of spaces, of appearing to be in two places at once, may be cunningly exploited to confuse others and get away with something.

Postwar concerns with the economic impact of the bar as a location for sports spectatorship hinged upon similar perceptions of the tavern-goer as a viewer who was getting away with something. This perception reveals the site-specific dimensions of early conceptions of television's effects on its spectator. In the debate over the lure of tavern sports, television was seen as an apparatus capable of shaping microlevel social processes and viewer desires in different ways depending on its environment. For commentators who feared TV's effects on stadium sports in particular, the *context* of the screen greatly determined the effects of the images it displayed. The specific source of sports promoters' displeasure with tavern TV was

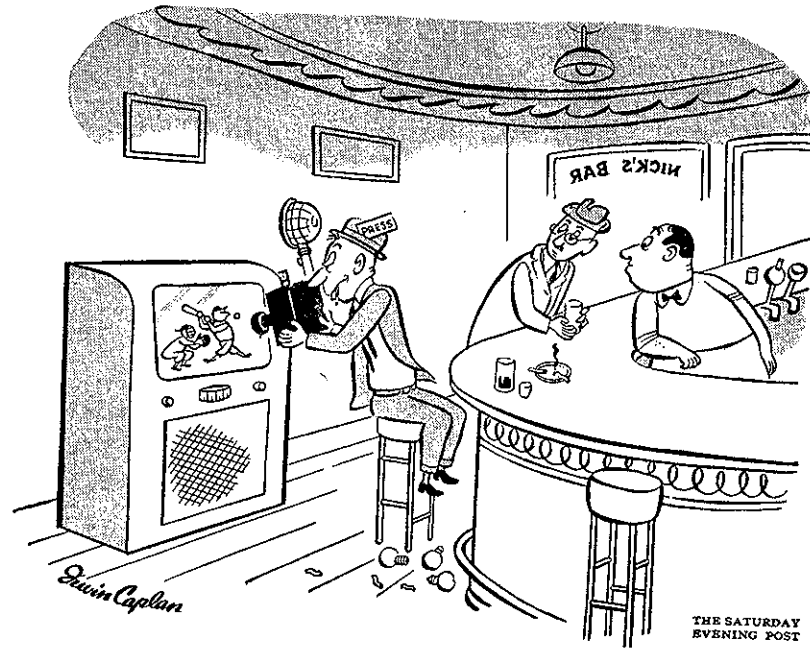


FIG. 4
This 1946 cartoon satirizes major league baseball's concern that the bar was a more appealing place to view—or cover—a game than the stadium. (DuMont Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)

the fact that fans were drawn to the tavern as a viewing environment more local and comfortable than the stadium but just as “live” and participatory.⁶⁰ Home TV, on the other hand, fostered an interest in the real thing. Writing in *Variety*, ABC executive Paul Whiteman explained, “Bellowing opinions is part of the fun of attending a ball game or a fight and I think that television will create fans who buy tickets.”⁶¹ One ad executive stated, “I’ve already gone to more games than I did last year. Television increased my interest in getting out to the park.”⁶² Television technology’s space-binding ideology was thus rendered in nonidentical, site-specific terms from home to bar, encouraging different modes of “liveness” in each one. The home was understood as a site that produced a distinct yearning for the live event in the fan, whereas the tavern was a place where the televised event and the ringside experience seemed to blend together.

The difference in TV’s perceived effects from site to site reflects the very different status of tavern and home as cultural spaces. One is fully commercial, the other considered outside the province of commerce. One was, in the 1940s, a space of homosocial, collective recreation, the other a space defined by familial gender relations in dominant discourse. The next section details another dimension of the cultural status of the tavern: the fact that it was a highly policed space. Much of the postwar concern with the television set’s immediate social effects in the tavern lay in the potential scandal of underage viewers. Reformist concerns in this vein reflected a longer lineage of debates over the corrupting effects of the saloon on poor communities in urban America. As we shall see, the solutions that reformers proposed for the problem of child tavern spectatorship were designed to combat the harmful potential of the screen’s embedded relationship to its social milieu, through the physical relocation of viewers.

Challenges to Tavern Viewing

Some aspects of reformist concerns with tavern TV can be traced back to the Progressive Era, when both the saloon and the movie theater were sites of commercial leisure considered unsanitary, unfit places for mothers and children. Both were crucial battlegrounds in the moral geography of reform movements.⁶³ If the theater was a place infested with gangs of “juvenile delinquents,” the saloon was the place where these delinquent subjects were formed, in the young crowds who congregated at the swinging door of the saloon to gawk at the spectacle of drunkenness inside.⁶⁴ Reformers

used spatial strategies to combat these unsavory spaces of working-class sociality. Many groups attempted to block the corrupting influence of both saloon and theater on youth by establishing separate clubhouses that used structured play activities to instill a sense of responsibility and moral rectitude in young people. One play reformer noted that "the immediate necessity is to get hold of the child, and in early years create such interests and ideals that the future man and woman cannot be drawn into the lower life of which the saloon is the exponent."⁶⁵ For adults temperance groups established social clubs that replicated the social function of the saloon, minus the alcohol, in spaces equipped with billiards, newspapers, and tables and chairs for conversation.⁶⁶ Progressive Era reformers thus mapped leisure in working-class communities along an axis that traversed inappropriate spaces, such as saloons, dubious ones, such as movie theaters, and appropriate ones, such as social clubs and playgrounds.

A similar set of reformist spatial strategies emerged in the controversies surrounding children's inevitable presence at the doors and windows of taverns with TV sets. To combat children's attraction to the tavern, benevolent groups established their own TV sites as alternatives.⁶⁷ These "television clubs" sponsored by churches, park districts, civic groups, and private individuals were considered ideal venues for keeping children occupied. One minister commented that "child welfare leaders have recognized that television has given them a 'natural' for attracting children to the church and to supervised clubs."⁶⁸ As this suggests, youth viewing sites also allowed adults to monitor children's activities. A successful Presbyterian TV club in Greenwich Village led a writer in the *Christian Century* to observe that although the site's "primary purpose was to get young people out of the taverns . . . the only places where most of them had a chance to see telecasts," it also allowed the church to "keep a watchful eye on the audience."⁶⁹ Several other reports noted television's disciplinary effect; as one organizer exclaimed, "one has only to witness a group of vigorous, hard to handle boys sitting meekly before a televised professional or college football game to realize the interest value of this new form of entertainment."⁷⁰

Removing children from the unpredictable social arena of the tavern, where they might be exposed to the sight of drunken adults, TV clubs assembled youth within one space and directed their energy and attention toward a single point. The goal was, clearly, to organize and standardize youth social activities, creating watchers who were themselves more easily watched.⁷¹ In spatializing TV spectatorship by age these TV clubs were an

early and forceful example of an administrative use of TV to control behavior and standardize audience identity in public space. Indeed, they are surpassed only by retail TV installations at the point of sale in their treatment of the screen as a device that can "micromanage" the behavior of subjects in social space.

However, as with all attempts at micromanagement, it should be immediately noted that whether these disciplinary uses of TV in juvenile recreation were *effective* is another question entirely. In one instance several factors combined to thwart a juvenile viewing site's good intentions quite spectacularly. The site in question was the Louisville, Ky., public library, which employed college students as "television sitters" to "keep the sets adjusted and protected, and to supervise the crowd."⁷² The library experienced problems with this youth TV scheme almost as soon as it was established. A local newspaper article reported that "some of the kids are throwing things at the operators, the machines, and the windows." In addition, parents were using the library TV as a babysitter while they "went merrily to parties," not returning until late in the evening to collect their children. The article also claimed that adult drunks were crashing the show—a situation that surely ran counter to one of the general purposes of juvenile viewing sites: preventing children from witnessing the spectacle of adult drunkenness.⁷³ Furthermore, library board members complained that the programs children were watching were highly unsuitable. Father Felix Pitt, secretary of the city's Catholic School Board, expressed horror that the young viewers had been allowed to watch a broadcast of the movie *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. Rather than discontinue the project, the library handed responsibility over to the city's recreation department, replacing the college student "sitters" with personnel trained in juvenile management.⁷⁴

Another controversy over young viewers is perhaps more revealing, however, because it exemplifies in very concrete ways how much administrative rhetorics of TV viewing judged the medium in site-specific terms. For it was a controversy based on the assumption that the screen's physical environment has more effect on the spectator than the image it displays. It happened in 1948, when Patrick "Parkey" Radigan, a Hoboken, N.J., tavern owner, decided to close his tavern to adults for an hour in the afternoon and invite neighborhood children in to watch *Howdy Doody* and *Small Fry Club*. Radigan's motives were philanthropic and reformist; as he told the *New York Times*, "most of [the kids] come from poor families and can't afford to see a big ball game or for that matter, too much of any kind

of entertainment. And besides, it seemed like a good way to keep them off the streets."⁷⁵ But the state Alcoholic Beverage Commissioners quickly put a stop to the "children's hour." With or without patrons, they argued, the physical space of the tavern was a corrupting influence. As one official put it, "A barroom hardly constitutes the proper setting for a 'Children's Hour.' . . . Longfellow would turn in his grave."⁷⁶ An area veterans group stepped in to carry on the custom, adding a TV club room to its lodge.⁷⁷

This relocation communicates how inflexibly site-specific conceptions of the tavern as a space of adult spectatorship could be. At the heart of this "Saga of Parkey Radigan" was an unauthorized coupling of space and spectator, one considered incompatible with the wider forms of social regulation that defined the tavern as a space. Inviting children in to watch TV was a gesture of masculine domesticity that confused the rigid segregation of adult and child recreation that the tavern historically represented. Community versions of family "togetherness" could not, apparently, be formed safely within the seemingly autonomous sphere of adult leisure. In contrast, viewing sites established by church and civic groups upheld the segregation of adult and juvenile spectatorship.

Reformers were not alone in their efforts to achieve particular goals through the relocation of children from the tavern to other, more child-oriented spaces. Official juvenile viewing clubs, exposing large numbers of children to television, were also a great commercial opportunity for broadcasters. They fostered a potential home market for both set manufacturers and retailers, and TV corporations cultivated them by donating receivers or by establishing generous installment plans for charitable group viewing sites.⁷⁸ Such philanthropic gestures, creating goodwill for manufacturers, might eventually catalyze the parental decision to purchase a set for the household.⁷⁹ This was the explicit goal of the National Association of Broadcasters when it recommended that new television stations encourage viewership by establishing public youth viewing sites in theaters: "In effect, the theater would . . . [operate] as a public relations magnet to attract people to buy sets and to develop a station's audience."⁸⁰

The tavern television screen's influence was thus quite extensive. It helped to segregate two TV viewing formations spatially: the barstool viewing collective and the juvenile viewing collective that loitered at the door. Although neither audience was targeted by a particular commercial address on the screen (with the possible exception of brewery-sponsored sports telecasts aimed at tavern viewers), their presence within these particular television locations made them fertile commercial markets for set

manufacturers and for the bar owners who saw television as a way to improve business.

The rise of the home audience in the late 1940s and early 1950s meant that the tavern screen was not a distinct force of spectatorship for long. Indeed, home viewing seemed, to some in the tavern trade, eventually to pose a threat to the social space of the bar. Like theater managers and sports promoters, tavern keepers apparently perceived a loss of business from the rise of household TV ownership. As early as 1950 *Beverage Media* found it necessary to ask, "Is there an answer to television for the tavern and restaurant trade? Television has hurt, without question. Top flight programs are keeping prospective customers at home."⁸¹ As a solution *Beverage Media* suggested a spatial reorganization of the tavern environment: "Television cannot be fought by ignoring it. On an increasing scale, operators are providing television screens that give patrons at the bar and tables maximum visibility to enjoy TV programs as they do at home with the inducement of the bar's conviviality."⁸² It is quite possible that this reference to "patrons at . . . tables" is also a reference to women, as tables were often seen as the designated place in the bar social environment for women. Several tavern owners I interviewed in the course of writing this book noted that their remodeling in the postwar period involved adding "tables for the ladies."⁸³ Television, this suggests, ultimately helped to bring women into the tavern—a possibility that returns us to the image of the female tavern spectator in figure 1, a patron whose acceptance within the space of the bar may have been made easier by the screen's presence there too.

This 1950 complaint against television in the tavern can also be read in a wider historical context, though, as a portent of the large-scale transformation of working-class urban culture that would take place in the decades to come. The postwar years brought increased geographical and social mobility to urban residents, many of whom left the city for suburban areas in this period. The result was a downward turn in the fortunes of urban neighborhoods, which saw dramatic changes between the 1950s and the 1970s: the progressive erosion of an urban manufacturing base, the construction of a highway system that would cut through neighborhoods and the spatial ties of interconnection that helped forge them, and the processes of urban renewal, or "negro removal," as James Baldwin called it, that would balkanize city neighborhoods along racial lines.⁸⁴ If the neighborhood bar declined as a social space in the postwar years, this

with the television set, whether at home or perched atop the bar. The impact of a thirteen-inch screen on the social space of a particular tavern does not compare to the impact of a factory closing right next door to it or a two-level four-lane highway passing by its front door. The next and final section of this chapter pursues these historical implications in the present day, focusing both on social-spatial circumstances, like postwar urban decline, and forms of technological change, like satellite broadcasting, to trace the contours of barstool spectatorship as a continuing part of everyday public leisure.

From Starr's Tavern to the All-Star Cafe

Although it was a shift in methodological gears, I made a pilgrimage when I was near the completion of this chapter's historiographic narrative. I wanted to understand the effects of the postwar years' place-altering spatial processes on the tavern, both as a social space and as a public environment for the TV screen, in material terms—as sensory facts, in other words, if only partial and “unrigorously” collected ones. I therefore sought out the five Jersey City bars—among them Tommie's bar and Munzy's Tavern shown in figures 2 and 3—that someone from Goodman's Furniture Store photographed in the mid-1940s. In many ways Jersey City was a perfect place to seek answers to the question of the afterlife of the tavern in the changing urban world of the postwar decades. Located between New York City and Newark, Jersey City is a place where national networks of transportation and communications converge as they enter New York from the west. Criss-crossed and shadowed by train trestles and highway interchanges, it is a town that is constantly being rebuilt. Indeed, it was Jersey City's aura of being permanently transitional that prompted urbanist Kevin Lynch to choose it as a case study in spatial confusion in his classic 1960 text on the urban experience, *The Image of the City*.⁸⁵ I suspected that these tavern photographs, taken during the 1940s, represented what might be called the city's boom years. In this period Jersey City was both a major manufacturing center and the site of some extensive New Deal building projects, including a huge public hospital and a baseball stadium.⁸⁶ I wondered if this prosperity might explain why these neighborhood tavern owners had chosen to spend money on television sets, even before regular broadcasting had been established. But I also knew that Jersey City's prosperity had not lasted. The decline of manufacturing, a ruinously corrupt local government, and a series of drastic urban

renewal projects combined to change the social and commercial climate of Jersey City dramatically over the years since these images were taken.⁸⁷

Given these changes, I doubted when I set out to look for these bars that they would still exist. Still, I wanted to know what had become of them and the working-class, manufacturing-oriented districts of the city in which they were located. Sure enough, in the years since these photographs were taken, one of the four neighborhoods represented in this collection of images had been entirely razed. Two other bars preserved in these photos, including Tommie's bar (fig. 3), had been knocked down to make way for other buildings. But perhaps surprisingly, the two remaining bars are still open today. One (formerly Munzy's tavern, fig. 2) is now a private club for the Knights of Columbus, but the other, Starr's tavern, is still open to the public. And, as I discovered when I visited on a warm summer afternoon, many of its features seem to recall the 1940s, when the photograph in figure 5 was taken.

But rather than become starry-eyed about the timeless durability of urban working-class culture, I found that Starr's tavern as a present-tense institution reflects the changes that have occurred in urban neighborhood life over the years. As figure 6 indicates, the layout of the space is now quite different. The worn, twenty-foot bar had been moved to the other side of the room in the 1950s to accommodate the expanded short-order kitchen and to make way for more tables. Business was good in this period, and the bar was transported manually, with the lifting power of a large group of customers. The story of this event seemed central to the history of Starr's; over the course of my visit two customers, as well as the bartender, told it to me, I think to convey a sense of bygone networks of sociality. The decline of these networks is indicated in the fact that the long bar shelves stocked with row after row of liquor bottles have disappeared, and the large area in the back has been given over to storage. And nowadays the doors close at 5 P.M. on weekends, sometimes before the baseball game ends.

The story of what happened to this tavern and its neighborhood since the 1940s is a familiar one. When the owner, Frank Starr, purchased his two TV sets in the 1940s, the bar was packed every day with workers from the nearby American Can Company plant. The company remained in the neighborhood until the 1970s, when it moved to nearby Edison, N.J. After that patronage dropped off dramatically. Apparel mills and print and machine shops eventually moved into the empty factory building, now renamed the American Corporate Center. The retention of the initials is sig-

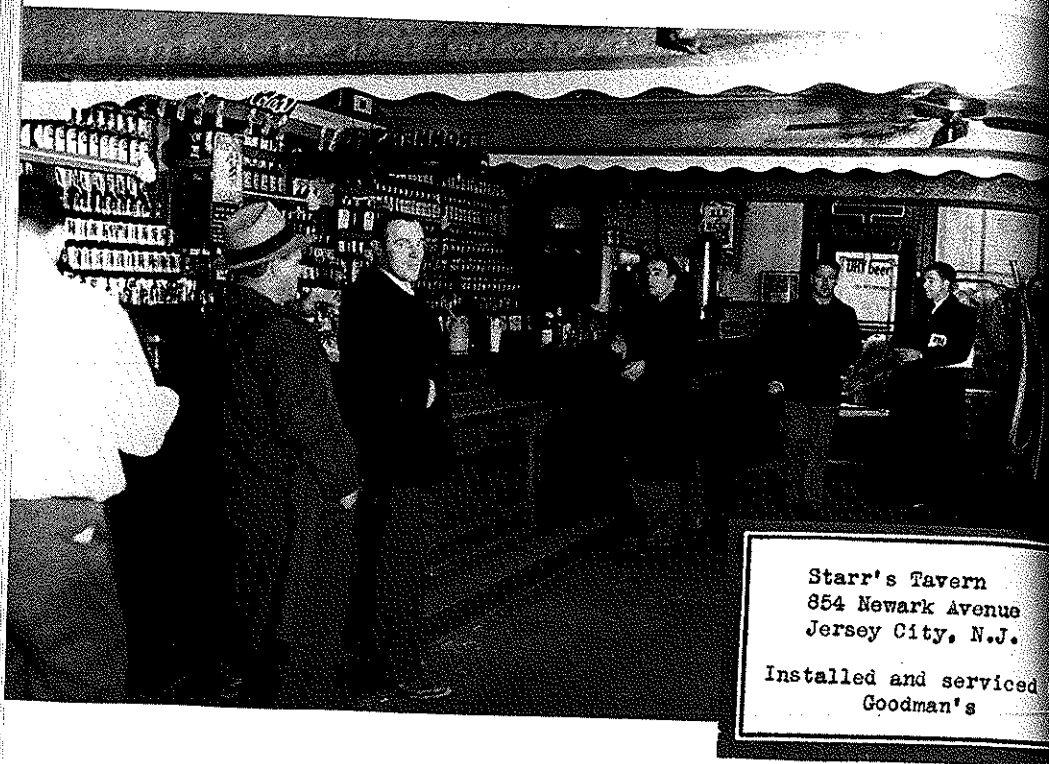


FIG. 5
Starr's Tavern, c. 1944. The bar is on the left, and the screen sits high in the corner above it. (DuMont Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)

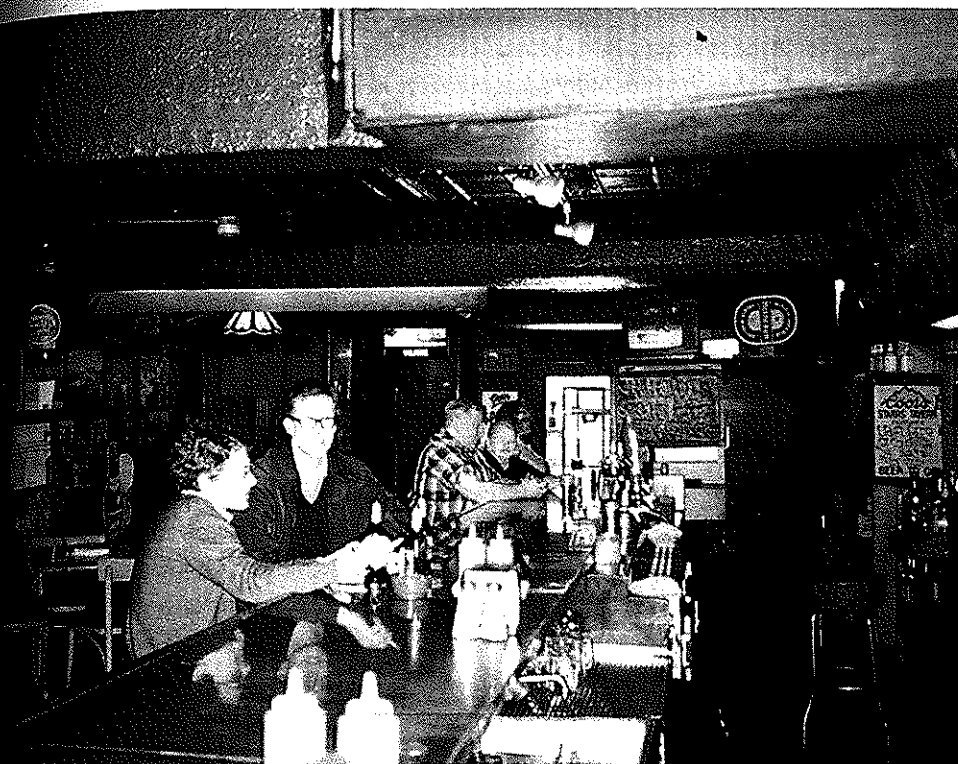


FIG. 6
Starr's Tavern today. When the long bar was moved to the other side of the room in the early 1950s, the tv set moved with it. Still a small-screen model, it now sits on the left, next to the Heineken sign.

nificant, perhaps, suggesting the original owner has remained identified with the building in local usage long after it changed hands. Yet despite the major changes Starr's has undergone, many features from the 1940s remain. The cash register is the same, as are the tin ceiling, the glass door (now alarmed), and the wood paneling. The TV set is still a small one, and it still perches high above the bar, next to an old menu board on which updated prices written on scraps of paper have been taped. The bar still serves its culinary specialty, perfected by the owner's brother in the 1930s: a crisp, deep-fried foot-long hot dog.⁸⁸ And it is still a stop on the itineraries of the (now primarily Latino) labor force employed in the light industry of the ACC building and other nearby plants. Several workers stopped by at the end of the day to cash their paychecks during my visit, although they did not stay to drink or eat.⁸⁹

What does the local narrative of Starr's history tell us about the social space of spectatorship that materialized around the barroom TV? In some ways it puts this space into a radical kind of perspective. Although I do not explore this point until later in this book, my encounter with Starr's history called attention to the concrete, material processes that shape the screen's environment, forcefully conveying the inadequacy of theoretical characterizations of television's spatial effects as, simply, the eradication of a place's specificity. In a Heideggerian turn, Weber describes TV spectatorship as a process in which the screen "takes place" by undermining "the unequivocal determination of place and bodily situation" and by fracturing "the space defined by the television set."⁹⁰ But what I witnessed in Starr's was a very different relationship between screen and space than what Weber understands as the fundamental "undecidability" endemic to the medium's physical form. What transformed Starr's tavern from a central hub of neighborhood work-leisure relations into a residual cultural site was not TV; its impact on the bar's social environment was nothing compared to other local forces. The patterns of work, community, and leisure that gave television viewing in the tavern its gender and class identity in the first place threatened the livelihood of the tavern when they themselves changed. Television's intrusion could not compare to the far more powerful intruder narratives that were being produced in white urban culture at the time, "racial-spatial" narratives of the reorganization of social relations in the city.

But perceptions of television as an agent of destruction for neighborhood taverns are very persistent. Starr's is precisely the kind of local, beer-drinking institution that commentators mourned when the televisual in-

stitution of the sports bars arrived on the scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁹¹ It might be tempting, indeed, to adopt Lawrence Wenner's schema and view ageless neighborhood taverns like Starr's as "authentic" spaces of social interaction and sports spectatorship, wholly opposed to the escapist, theme-park fantasy of the "postmodern" sports bar that "is designed as an 'experience' as opposed to a real place."⁹²

Insisting too strenuously on this distinction between the "real tavern" and the "inauthentic sports bar" not only leads us toward reductive binaries, but it also obscures some of the deeper historical currents that bind the two spaces together. As I want to detail now, by way of conclusion, the rise of the sports bar bears several similarities to TV's introduction in the tavern. Like the latter it is a social, commercial institution that grew with a new communications technology and industry sector, in this case commercial satellite broadcasting. Indeed, if we compare the site-specific discourses on spectatorship produced around the sports bar as a historical and economic institution with the ones that accompanied TV's entry into taverns like Starr's, a similar process rises to the surface. In each case the screen's relationship to its environment is shaped by the latter's location within wider contexts of commerce and social power.

Like the postwar tavern's TV set, the sports bar screen opened up a new site of audienceship in the sports and entertainment market. And similarly, its spectatorial environment raised issues of regulation and policy in the commercial sphere of audience markets. The substantial number of viewers in sports bars who were watching the satellite feeds that networks transmitted to their local affiliates led sports magnates to ask whether sports bars were, in a sense, siphoning off a portion of the regular broadcast audience. To be sure, there are important differences between the regulatory challenges brought against the postwar tavern and the sports bar. In the former the exhibition of live sports images was defined as unfair competition for ballparks; in the latter it became equivalent to theft. But this difference only indicates the "progress" of industrial strategies for commodifying both broadcast transmissions and localized audiences in the years between the two moments. It should not obscure the fact that objections to the sports bar audience bear a remarkable similarity to those that baseball owners and film exhibitors brought to bear on the tavern.

Sports bars were first accused of "stealing" network audiences and signals in 1989. The NFL successfully sued several sports-bar owners for receiving broadcasts of sports events directly from network feeds, via satellite, rather than tuning in to the local network affiliate's retransmission

of this signal. The practice was illegal, NFL officials argued, because it effectively "shortchanged" local and regional advertisers, preventing them from reaching a sector of the markets they had paid for.⁹³ The following year, a month before the September opening of the football season, the organization announced plans to scramble its telecasts so that only local affiliates would be able to receive the signals, something it had threatened to do for many years.⁹⁴ But after sponsoring breweries sided with the bar owners, the NFL relented and agreed to license games to subscribing sports bars in packages that would be prorated to accommodate different-sized audience commodities (the most well-known is the Sunday Ticket plan, started in 1994).⁹⁵ Local teams ostensibly agreed to take responsibility for prosecuting bars that pirated the NFL signal, although this system was apparently less than effective.⁹⁶

As this regulatory narrative indicates, both the tavern and the sports bar gave rise to institutional anxieties about audience activity and its economic impact, rooted in TV's ability to alter, if only symbolically, the *scale* on which a place and its population figure in wider markets of spectacle and amusement. The sports bar may produce a more refined and advanced audience commodity than the tavern did in the postwar years, and it may be a more mediatized space with its multiple video screens and other sports-related amusements; but, at least in policy terms, it is an extension, rather than a violation, of the tavern's collective relations of spectatorship.

Another continuity between the taverns of early TV and sports bars is the way both offer environmentally enhanced "live" sports experiences, although in the latter case the architectural and technological forms that construct spectatorial spaces in the bar are far more differentiated. Sports bars are filled with innumerable technologies of sports vision: satellite screens, on-site broadcasts, boxing rings, skeeball, foosball, shuffleball, indoor golf courses, batting cages, basketball baskets, videotex score updates, computerized "rotisserie" leagues, tailgate parties, and video games like Sport Active Football, in which players "coach teams of real athletes and watch them compete on TV before a stadium of cheering spectators."⁹⁷ These technologies deliver many different ways to participate in the spectator sports experience. When the two-floor Original Sports Bar in Baltimore opened in 1989, for example, it promised its patrons a variety of televisual scenographies in which to combine live sports and drinking: in addition to the bar and cocktail tables, it featured separate lounges with a "press box area" and offset booths equipped with private TVs. Like

the TV screens in sporting goods and apparel stores today, this proliferation of delivery options offers multiple embodiments of a "live" sports experience — coach, athlete, reporter, viewer, crowd participant.⁹⁸ Although some critics might assert that this spectacular space is different than the old-world charm of the 1940s bar, it seems to me that the postwar TV tavern offered similar promises — recall the ersatz bleachers and proscenium-like presentation described in press reports. And then as now, TV sports at the bar served as the cultural emblem of a particular kind of masculinist, collectivity, a place where sports journalists go to gauge fans' reactions to the home team's failures and successes.

Perhaps the most instructive aspect of the comparison between the sports bar and the tavern, however, is the fact that, although the dollar value of the barstool audience may be far greater now, tavern viewing was one of the first occasions for linking TV audience identities, and their values in the political economy of broadcasting, to the screen's presence in a particular place. Whereas in the home *time* was, and is, one of the central means of distinguishing viewer identities (for example, the assumed female viewer of daytime TV), the gendered geography of everyday life outside the home made it possible to classify viewer identities in *spatial* terms as well. This location-based idea of the spectator would later come to define the political economy of TV audiences for "out-of-home" networks, a process described in chapter 3 of this book. However, as the following chapter suggests, the tavern was not the only place in which equations of space and identity formed the basis of commercial TV practices outside the home. The fact that the department store was conventionally considered a middle-class female space meant that the installation of the TV set within it was a discursive process that took correspondingly gendered forms. The prototypically male, working-class sports fan constructed in press reports of the TV tavern had little in common with the ideal female shopper-viewer that department store executives imagined in their point-of-purchase TV experiments in the same years. But each of these site-specific discourses of the spectator illustrates how TV's presence in particular spaces occasions new forms of strategic social "knowledge" about the people who inhabit them.

To understand how such location-based ideas about the TV viewer emerged, and the cultural politics they gave expression to in the process, we must grasp the distinctive features attributed to each of these TV sites in the postwar period. The extent of the distance between the department store and the bar or TV institutions can be gauged in a 1947 TV industry

survey of department stores and their various television projects. According to this survey, one reason that some department stores were hesitating to embark on TV sponsorship was “the bar and grill trade.” The article explained that store managers believed “that the greatest number of sets are concentrated among this group — with store feeling being that the best time to influence customers and sell merchandise is *not* when they’re sipping a drink.”⁹⁹ What remained unspoken here was the idea that the tavern audience, perceived as male and working class, was not a target market for the department store’s commercial appeals. Collating space and identity to match a certain vision of what TV was and what it could do, the rhetorics of spectatorship associated with both places thus reflected particular (gendered) institutional histories. The postwar history of television as a point-of-purchase display technology in department stores, a history recounted in the next chapter, is therefore instructive as much for its *differences* from tavern TV as for its similarities.

GENDERED FANTASIES OF TV SHOPPING IN THE POSTWAR DEPARTMENT STORE

Contemporary visitors to the department store may be jaded enough now to ignore the commercial appeals that continually blare from unattended video screens on the sales floor. But in the years surrounding World War II, shoppers lined up in droves to see the television receivers that were starting to appear in department stores across the country. Most often these receivers were presented to the public as a new form of merchandise — a new commodity. But sometimes, especially in the days before widespread network broadcasting, the goals behind TV’s exhibition in the store were more elaborate. Many large retailers heralded the medium’s arrival by staging free exhibitions of television technology for the education and edification of the general public. These exhibitions were in line with other kinds of gala events held in department stores at the time, events that mirrored museum displays in the didactic views of art and industry they offered store visitors. Held in large auditoria or even on the sales floor, these festivals of progress placed an inordinate emphasis on the consumer applications of the modern technologies and artifacts they displayed. For example, noting in 1938 that “lectures and lessons . . . are two of the most popular department store services,” a *Reader’s Digest* article listed examples of numerous store exhibitions and educational shows, each of which clearly had an underlying commercial appeal, including “enlarged models of moths . . . shown at their horrid tasks [with] improved scientific methods for dealing with the insect.”¹ Such exhibitions in addition marked the department store’s high cultural position, its claim to a community status that went beyond that of a commercial establishment. They were aspirational displays, designed to elevate the store by aligning it with other marketing spectacles of the modern state like world’s fairs and expositions.²