

The Social Space of The Café: How Service and  
Physical Design Condition Social Performances

by

Alex Bernson

Class of 2011

A thesis submitted to the  
faculty of Wesleyan University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
with Departmental Honors in Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies

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## Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination of an amazing academic and professional journey through five years, four cities, seven cafés and two universities. I can't possibly hope to thank everyone who has helped me to get here, nor communicate how much the support I have found has meant to me. That being said, here is a feeble attempt.

Thank you to my family for supporting the non-standard approach I've taken to get to this point. Hearing that their son wants to take a year off school to move to Portland and be a barista is not something that all parents would greet with support. It is at times comical how different my sister's life and mine can be, yet we couldn't share a more similar love.

Carrie Preston, thank you for introducing me to the power of critical studies and queer and feminist thought. Most of all, thank you for encouraging me to think big thoughts, approach academia with the proper humor and irreverence, and realize that no matter how transgressive I may ever feel beliefs to be, well, I didn't grow up with cows, and there are always people whose stances are braver than mine.

Thank you to David Schomer for making the café that made me fall in love with cafés, and giving me my first coffee job working there. Thank you to Mike Miller and all of my other bosses who have believed in me and let me make coffee at

their cafés, and especially thank you to Linda Derschang for letting me pick her brain about the how and why of Oddfellow's Café + Bar.

The coffee industry has been an amazing home and base of support for me. Thank you to everyone who helps make that community what it is, and especially Jen Prince, Alex Pond, Talon Wood, Stephen Vick and Bronwen Serna for showing me the possibilities of this beverage, having my back, sharing the green coffee, listening to my endless musings, and keeping me caffeinated in the most pleasant way possible.

Opening Espwesso, my first café, at Wesleyan University, was the most unexpected, rewarding and educational thing I have ever done in my life. I can't thank my staff, business partners, and the student body enough for helping to make it the success that it is. Jacob Eichengreen, Hannah Cressy, Adam Wechsler, Maureen Gorman, Wendy Escobar, Micah Fiering and Sophia Levan, thank you so much for your hard work, and your endless patience.

This thesis would never have gotten written without having constant access to caffeination at Espwesso, and without the support of my café family and the joy of working there, I wouldn't have made it through with my sanity intact. Thank you to Mr. Robert Allbritton for his generous donation that made the café possible, and Sarah Allen for giving me the chance to write about my café in Barista Magazine.

I wouldn't be here, or really anywhere, today without the tireless, unfortunately often thankless support of Nicholas Stevens. There is so much thanks to give, I can't even begin.

Sam Jones is a straight up baller, and I couldn't ask for a realer friend. He's made it look easy for as long as I can remember, and always shares that with me. Thank you for being the one person who I could really trust to talk to about why it is more important to change the world than live in the world.

Zach Lundin is the best gay younger brother I could ever ask for. It's nice to always know that I won't be the only one bringing it hard, queening it up, dorking out, tryin to chill, or giving some side-eye. He knows what's tedious, and when it's time to say f.t.s.

Eddie Miller gave me a book that told me "finding your life's purpose means finding where your great joy meets the world's great need", and I've been living by that ever since. He also knows just how important a good bench can be.

Louis Lazar gets the award for most clutch support and encouragement ever. Having someone on the same page made this thesis crunch work.

I am inspired every day by the amazing things my friends do, especially here at Wesleyan. Mike Rosen, Anthony Smith, Margot Boyer-Dry, Mel Hsu, Heran Abate, Josh Smith, Davey Knittle, and everyone else, thank you for the good times, the inspiration and the encouragement.

I have worked with some truly inspiring baristas and managers, and I wouldn't be half the barista or the person I am today without their example.

Lastly, thank you to all the customers I have served coffee to and will serve coffee to in the future. Ultimately, it's all for them. Except for the ones who don't tip.

## Introduction

Cafés, coffee houses and coffee shops have always occupied a unique place in the social lives and social imaginaries of urban societies. From the earliest Ottoman coffee houses all the way to the massively broad, intensely segmented modern café scene, these institutions have been at the heart of societies' understanding of themselves and their public life. They have been fertile grounds for the birth of political, intellectual and artistic revolutions. They have been crucial tools in city-dwellers' on-going negotiation of how to express and preserve individuality in the face of the sometimes overwhelming urban milieu. More than anything else, cafés have been the daily sites of drug deliverance that in their ritual visitation come to be an invaluable sensory, mental and social environment that helps give life a sense of social possibility and individual agency.

To say that I have fallen in love with cafés is an understatement. I have worked in the specialty coffee industry for the last five years, being a barista at seven different cafés, including the student-run café that I founded on the Wesleyan University campus. My goal is to open a small number of extremely considered cafés that perfectly present all of the crucial social possibilities of the café as a socio-spatial type, while of course serving uncompromisingly premium quality coffee. I profoundly believe in the power that quality coffee as a trade commodity has to improve economic, social and environmental conditions globally, and I have deep faith in the

power to affect positive social change that comes from paying attention to the possibilities for localized forms of social resistance that are embedded in the social and physical structures of the mundane daily stages on which we all perform our lives.

This work is presented as a senior honors thesis for the Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies major at Wesleyan University. The intellectual and broad political impulse of this work comes from my training in feminist and queer sociological theory, and the theoretical approach I take, as well as much of the underlying theory I refer to, comes out of the multi-disciplinary feminist and queer fields. However I make no bones about the fact that this work is not academic in its goals and that I have attempted to make it as accessible as possible to non-academic readers while still presenting a logically and theoretically complete argument. The goal of this work is purely pragmatic. This is my attempt to develop a coherent theoretical narrative of the social functioning of the café so that I am able to create a more perfect café when the time comes for me to do so. Secondly, I hope that this work is able to show other people in the coffee industry the importance of analyzing the café from a sociological perspective by demonstrating the possible approaches and insights that can come out of such an analysis.

This thesis is not purely theoretical, nor is it based upon quantitative research, or even exhaustive comparative analysis of primary sources. I guess my approach could most nearly be described as analytic auto-ethnography. I am constructing a theoretical framework that explains my experience in cafés. This is of course potentially

problematic since I am rather biased on the subject and already have strong intuitive beliefs on the subject of café design and function. I certainly attempt to avoid the many potential issues that my approach creates, though at the same time, I am not particularly concerned with them. Throughout the work, I present examples based on my own personal experience and observation, and I should be clear that I am not claiming the resulting insights to be authoritative in any way beyond the scope of my own personal understanding. I think that the insights may be of interest to others in the industry and academia, but I accept that due to the limits of length and time entailed in an undergraduate honors thesis, not all of the points I raise are thoroughly defended as I would like them to be. In this project I have chosen to prioritize touching on what I see as all of the major necessary points in analyzing the café as social stage over conclusively proving a subset of those points since that would provide an incomplete picture of the café.

I firmly believe that academic training, and especially social theory training, is useless if it cannot be applied to the immediate, complex and messy concerns of the world outside the academy. Successfully introducing the importance of social theory, especially feminist and queer social theory, to the coffee industry would make me much happier than successfully introducing the importance of the café as an object of study to feminist and queer studies readers. That being said, I think that studying the café presents a valuable opportunity to explore the exegetical efficacy of more abstract social theorizing because the café is in many ways a social world unto itself, influenced

by the society around it, but operating with a degree of independent internal logic. I will be attempting to create a coherent theoretical lens that marries a consideration of the external social context of the café with a more micro- or phenomenological<sup>1</sup> account of the mechanisms that determine social inter-relationships in the café. As a microcosm of society, the café can function as a sort of Petri dish for experimenting with the implications of different social theories, seeing whether putting them into dialog can successfully provide an account of why we all scurry from door to bar to seating to door in the ways that we do.

The café is a particularly fruitful object of study for queer and feminist theory because it is a social space that occupies a liminal place between the traditional binary oppositions in social life: public and private, economic and social, work and leisure, individual and communal, domestic and communal, etc. The café is marked by what Erling Holm in his work *Coffee and The City: Towards a Soft Urbanity* refers to as informality, accessibility, and soft-sociality. There is a fluidity and permeability to the café as a social space, and all social identities and inter-relations that are present within the space inevitably partake of both aspects of all social binaries to at least some degree. In the café there is the “tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true”.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Phenomenology refers to a broad swath of thought in philosophy, sociology, critical theory and other disciplines that could be said to be generally concerned with “how and why phenomenon happen” and what implications the “how and why” have on the form and perception of the phenomenon, as well as on the world outside of the phenomenon.

The fact that social realities can never be completely divided into neat binaries is one of the foundational ideas of all feminist, and especially queer, theory. Social realities are inevitably complex and relational, with supposed binaries such as ideas of “man” and “woman”, “public” and “private”, or whatever else, all in actuality existing as mutually constituting, always referential social constructions. An attempt to define what is private creates an implicit definition of what is public, and every attempt at definition is constrained to its contextual moment. There is no possibility of saying that something is completely and absolutely public or private because those concepts exist as a spectrum constructed out of a vast array of social concepts, including but not limited to: civic architecture, domesticity, propriety, morality, political subjectivity, gendered and racial identification, class, and individuality. At any given moment, a behavior may be designated public or private based on the specific configuration of all of those different facets of society in that exact place and time, but in the next instant, some social reality may change, and the behavior will no longer be public or private in the same way. Anything that is social only has existence and meaning when examined or experienced as linked to other social objects<sup>2</sup> or relationships, and those links are constantly changing and evolving. A café can certainly be said to exist physically

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2 I take social object to mean any social actor, be they individual or structural, as well as any physical or conceptual object or subject that carries or is capable of carrying symbolic meaning or entering into symbolic relationships.

absent any relation to social objects, but as a social space, it can only be said to exist as an amalgam of social relationships that coalesce around its physical location.

To understand how the social space of the café is formed and reproduced, I will be using the overarching metaphor of social identity performance in Judith Butler's *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*. I will explore her theory in great detail in chapter two, but for the moment, the relevant part of her theory is the idea that the social identity of gender is constructed through the continual repetition of identity performances, with the specific stylization of those performances constructing the specific variation on gender being expressed by each individual. In essence, gender does not exist as a unitary or internal attribute of a person, it is instead an external classification applied to an individual—and internalized by an individual—based on how they perform the acts of their daily lives. In this view, gender is in a continual state of re-production, with the style of each individual act affirming or challenging the gendered performance expectations that society places upon the individual.

I wish to expand greatly on Butler's metaphor by using performativity theory as a general phenomenological account of how social meaning is created and re-produced, using that as the base of a theoretical framework constructed to understand how the specific, nuanced social identity of a given café is constructed out of and re-produced by the stylized performances that occur within that café. In my time working in cafés, I have noticed that the physical design of cafés, as well as the way

that the service interaction between barista and customer is designed, greatly affects how people conduct themselves in the space. I will analyze the possible physical and service design decisions in cafés as the primary determinants of the style of social performance that occurs in a given café, showing that these decisions have profound impacts on the overall social identity of the café due to their influence on the form and style of the endless daily actions and interactions within the café space that together constitute and re-produce the café's social space as a lived reality.

My goal with this analysis is to more fully understand what aspects of physical and service design in cafés are especially important to the determination of the café's identity. Further, by examining the mechanisms through which those aspects determine the café's identity, I hope to understand the most effective ways to change those design aspects to maximally promote a specific social identity for a café. For me, the perfect café from the customer's perspective is one that makes its regular customers feel as invested as possible in the café as a communal institution, as comfortable as possible in the space, and able to find the maximum range of desired social usages in the space. From the barista's perspective, I believe the perfect café is one that: encourages and enables organic, rewarding relationships with regular customers; creates a feeling of community that involves the baristas and customers as equal partners; maximizes tip income; minimizes the unnecessarily fatiguing aspects of the job; and allows the barista to understand their job as an important and worthy

profession. I want to find the physical and service design that will help construct that social space.

I'm going to begin chapter one of this thesis by situating the discussion of the internal workings of the café space within the larger socio-historical context of the café as one of the pre-eminent social institutions in Western social life. I'll start with a historical overview of the genesis and evolution of cafés from the 17<sup>th</sup> century English coffee house all the way to the current, some would say postmodern, coffee shop. This will provide a general idea of the issues at play in cafés and the major historical physical and service design approaches, leading into an elaboration on Mr. Holm's work on the social phenomenon of the modern café. *Coffee and The City* is a fantastic overview of the modern café that integrates a discussion of the physical design of cafés with an explanation of the social uses the café is put to, based on extensive field research and interviews conducted by Mr. Holm. I shamelessly lean on his work to help me situate the café as an object of inquiry within classical and current urban sociology. By the end of chapter one, we should have a fairly clear idea of what the café represents as a social institution, what usages the customers put it to, and how the collaborative, performative construction of an informal, accessible and yet still semi-private space is integral to the social utility of the café.

Chapter two will look at how social expectations condition performance styles in the café. This is where I will be exploring Butler's theories in greater depth, integrating Jose Muñoz' theory of disidentification in an attempt to understand how

the café social space operates as a stage for social performance that creates restrictions on and new possibilities for the possible performances available to customers and baristas. The service performance between customer and barista can be a surprisingly tricky one, with issues of tipping, emotional labor, social intimacy, economic agency and social hierarchy all colliding in an often unclear, and always subjective dance. I will flesh out the theoretical issues by referring to existing academic research on food servers in informal restaurants, and then apply the resulting analytical framework to a pragmatic examination of an alternative approach to service that is advocated by David Schomer, the owner of Espresso Vivace, whom I am eternally grateful to for giving me my first café job the summer after I graduated high-school.

Chapter three will take the social stage metaphor a step further by looking at how the physical design of a café can encourage certain social performances while discouraging or completely disallowing others. I will be using the work of feminist geographers, as well as theoretical works on social space, to show how social space is constructed out of the relationship between physical space and the social usages that space is put to. Further extending Butler, I will show how physical design decisions create ideological positions by influencing the style of social performances. Referring back to the ideas of informality and accessibility discussed in chapter one, I will show how the importance of informality and accessibility is demonstrated by the design of seating arrangements in cafés. Two cafés in Seattle, WA will be used as practical examples: the restrictive seating arrangements at the 12<sup>th</sup> avenue Stumptown Coffee

will be analyzed in terms of its effects on laptop usage in that café, and the many varied seating options available in Oddfellows Café + Bar will be analyzed in terms of how they enable a number of distinct usage patterns for casual and especially regular customers.

# Chapter One: A Brief History and Current Overview of the Café's Role in Society

*The café is many things: an object of nostalgia, a stage for inventing oneself, a place for creating relationships and a home, in the words of the Austrian critic, Alfred Polgar, 'for all who wish to be alone but need sociability for this'.<sup>1</sup>*

Alfred Polgar's aphorism on the café, in all its various translations, is perhaps the most often quoted explanation of that peculiar blend of social spheres and sensibilities that give the café its enduring place in the social imaginary and daily lived experience of modern societies. It neatly captures the experiential texture of what Erling Holm refers to as the café's ability to soften the distinctions between social spheres, leading to what he terms “soft urbanity”.<sup>2</sup> Individuals come to the café as a part of the repetition of their mundane daily rituals, each using the possibilities offered by the café in slightly different ways, but in totality creating an indeterminate, liminal space that gives customers a powerful tool to negotiate their own personal fit with the chaotic, often grating experience of modern urban life.

It is tempting at this point to dive directly into the discussion of the sociological roles filled by the café, however to do that successfully, it is necessary to become a good deal clearer on our object of study—on what we mean when we say “café” and just how limited our scope of inquiry is. First off, there is the problem of terminology: do we refer to our object as a coffeehouse, a café, a coffee shop, an espresso bar, or a coffee lounge? All of these labels can be found in writings on the café and related topics, but there is rarely any consideration of the important question:

are these labels specific and mutually exclusive, or are we free to use them interchangeably? Secondly, we must ask ourselves what are the implicit biases and blindnesses of our object of study, however we choose to refer to it?

Answering the question of terminology requires an understanding of the café as a fluid typology of retail and public space that has in various times and places served an overlapping constellation of needs via a variety of spatial and conceptual configurations. Each of the possible terms we could refer to it by corresponds roughly to a specific type of configuration arising out of a specific historical and cultural context. I will identify some of the base commonalities between these configurations and then give a brief description of the historical forms and social functions of each type. This will give us the necessary background to begin discussing the modern café's sociological dynamics in the framework of Holm's informality, accessibility and soft-sociability by allowing us to see how these attributes of the café typology first arose as specific socio-spatial expressions in response to a specific historic moment.

As Christophe Grafe explains, different configurations of cafés and bars “were established across cultural boundaries as accepted concepts for commercial spaces and forms of public behavior”.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the elaboration and communication of these concepts can be seen as a discursive form through which different societies articulated their own views on the proper responses to social changes such as industrialization, modernization, and post-industrialization/globalization. In developing their own specific take on the café concept, 17<sup>th</sup> century London, 18<sup>th</sup> century Vienna, 19<sup>th</sup>

century Paris, and 20<sup>th</sup> century Italy and the United States all demonstrated to themselves and others their own specific position on the changes in public social life going on in their time-period. Each evolution of the café typology incorporated aspects of earlier types, modifying and expanding them in response to the social and economic changes of their time-period. Of course, earlier conceptions continued to exist alongside the new forms to varying degrees, and especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is possible to observe expressions of the café, espresso bar and coffee shop types within blocks of each other in some cities.

Though the concept of the café we are proposing to study must be properly understood as a network of concepts with complex referential relationships across time and space, it is possible to identify a number of commonalities across these concepts. Most obvious are the severe implicit and explicit biases. All of the configurations we examine arise out of the West, though the initial inspiration for all coffee shops was drawn from the coffee shops of the Ottoman Empire, and so their functions and forms are intimately tied to the fundamental precepts of Western Modernism, such as: oppositional and mutually excluding spheres of public and private, and of work and home; civic engagement; humanism; liberal democracy; capitalist divisions of labor and class; and the like. Further, all of the configurations focus on urban societies, which of course have their own particular relationships with the discourse of modernity and the complications, contradictions and inequalities that arise from it. The 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century concept of the coffee shop complicates many of

these issues because of the ways that it arose out of, and indeed helped to propagate, the post-modern, post-industrial vision of Westernized globalization, with its attendant ties to suburbanization, consumerism and shifting political subjectivities. However it cannot be denied that all of the conceptions of the café share an intimate relation with the history of Western social, political and intellectual discourse. In sharing this history, they to varying degrees share in both its strengths and its embedded patterns of patriarchy, racism, classism, colonialism and homophobia.

Unfortunately a full discussion of the café in relation to the processes and problematics of the development of Western discourses of modernity and urbanity, or the development and spread of neo-liberal globalization, would be far beyond the scope of this thesis. At various points I will attempt to show how some of the problems mentioned above find expression in café typologies, but properly situating the evolution of the café within that historical discussion would be a book unto itself. I will have to be content with simply alluding to the issues that such a work might concern itself with.

These deficiencies in contextualization are to some degree ameliorated by my very specific focus on the current specialty café concept in the applied portions of this work. I am putting theories of performativity, emotional labor and social construction into dialog with Erling Holm's soft urbanity and other thinkers' macro analyses of the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century café. The claims that I make will be very specifically limited to that context, and taken simply as a micro-phenomenological account of that context,

should hopefully be consistent and no more reproductive of problematic biases than the larger social context within which they are situated.

## **Commonalities in Café Typologies**

Having glossed over the issues and biases that our analysis of the café object will be reproducing, we now return to the work of actually becoming clear on this object. In examining the different conceptions referred to by the possible labels of coffeehouse, café, coffee shop, espresso bar, and coffee lounge, I think it will be helpful to first have a description of the basic social characteristics shared by all of the forms. Grafe starts us off well with the statement: “the main commodity a café could offer was sociability, in a venue where visitors were invited and able not only to meet other people but also present themselves as public personae”.<sup>4</sup>

Habermas, Holm and Oldenburg all add some sort of qualification to the effect that the café venue inevitably has a degree of social, spatial and economic informality.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the café is nominally open to all customers, the etiquette of interaction within the café is not completely rigid, customers are presented with a range of possible ways of inhabiting the space, and the staff “do not throw out customers who sit in a window seat hugging the same cup of coffee for two hours”.<sup>6</sup> The coupling of this informality with the sociability and presentation of the self as public personae causes the café to become a form of semi-public social space that

exhibits a degree of intermixing between different classes and between what is traditionally understood to be “public” and “private”.

I believe it is crucial to add to these qualities Erling Holm's contention that the café, particularly in its “soft urbanity also is characterized by an ethical upgrading of what is often labeled as the 'banalities of everyday life' as Scottt Lash describes it (Lash 1990, 175)”.<sup>7</sup> The repetition of these banalities of everyday life help to produce the meaning of the café—their ritual, often daily, repetition forming the shape and texture of the experience of the café. As I will explain in much greater depth, the character of a given café is produced by the actions of regulars and the ways that the staff and space shape those actions.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, there are plenty of customers who come into a given café once or only rarely, but as an institution, the café is oriented towards customers who make it a consistent part of their daily or weekly ritual. It is the constant repetition of acts by these regulars that causes the ethical upgrading that leads to the production of meaning.

I take this characteristic to be crucial because in arguing that the barista and customer collaboratively produce the café environment through performance, I am arguing that the repetition of these banalities are indeed the only source of meaning in the café. All other possible locations of meaning production in the café must then be understood merely as manipulations of the banalities of everyday life, gaining their power from the ethical upgrading of significance that comes from ritualized repetition.

Of course, it cannot be forgotten that a café must also invariably serve coffee. Grafe explains that the emerging social acceptability of coffee as a drink coincided with a change in public manners due to coffee's stimulating effects, especially compared to the incapacitating effects of alcohol. Drinking coffee in a café made one more able to conduct business and “proper” socializing, and “visitors took up the invitation to use the institution as a place where they could improve themselves and their social standing”.<sup>9</sup> This active, directed form of socializing caused cafés to become central points in the formation of business and community in early urban societies. These associations between coffee and productive socializing are some of the most enduring beliefs about the café.

This then is the basic phenotypic description of the café that I will be working from: it is a retail venue where, besides coffee, one of the primary commodities being sold is sociability, and due to its informality and the mundane, repetitious rituals it caters to, this venue occupies a unique semi-public, semi-private place in the daily lived experience of a broad range of city-dwellers.

Beyond this description of institutional commonalities of the café typology, it is possible to identify a common symbolic function and generative impulse behind the emergence of each new café form. Each form of the café emerged organically from earlier retail configurations in response to changing needs of consumers that arose out of larger socio-cultural shifts in a society's understanding of its public self.

## **The Coffee House**

The first shop to sell coffee in the Western world was founded by Pasqua Rosee in London around 1654. Mr. Rosee was an assistant to a prominent London based merchant who specialized in trade with the Levant region. This merchant and his business partners had picked up the habit of coffee drinking from the Ottomans they traded with, and they backed Mr. Rosee's shop so that they could both indulge their own habit, and hopefully create a market demand for coffee—a demand which at the time could only be fulfilled via their trade in the Levant.<sup>10</sup> To say they succeeded in this goal is a gross understatement. By the 1660s, coffee shops were firmly established parts of the emerging public life of England. By 1700, London had over two thousand coffee shops, with coffee shops providing more rent and occupying more spaces than any other trade.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of the English coffee house was based on the Ottoman coffee houses that traders and other travelers had observed throughout the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman coffee house had existed as an institution since at least the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, and was as integral to the urban social life of the Ottomans as the English coffee house would come to be for the British.<sup>12</sup> The principle characteristic of the Ottoman coffee house was its informality.<sup>13</sup> In the Ottoman coffee house, one could find people from all levels of society, from judges, to members of the court, artisans, poets, workers, and merchants. At least in theory, everyone was to be treated equally within the coffee house and customers were free and encouraged to converse with one another. The sustaining activities of the Ottoman coffee house were relaxation and

conversation. These activities led some to decry the coffee house as immoral or encouraging of treasonous plotting, with some judges and sultans even attempting to outlaw the coffee houses, but such views were never strong enough to counter the massive popularity of the coffee shops throughout all sectors of the empire.<sup>14</sup>

The British were inspired by this informality and the conversation it spawned, and these qualities served as the base for all aspects of the English coffee house as a social institution. As Grafe explains,

...it was this function as a type of place where one could meet people from a large range of social backgrounds and the suspension of hierarchical relationships that allowed sociologists and political thinkers to identify the coffee house as one of the birthplaces of the modern public sphere.<sup>15</sup>

The coffee house of the Ottomans remained largely a venue for leisure, but the English coffee house profoundly shaped all aspects of the emerging public sphere, from socializing, to politics, to business. The coffee houses' relationship to the public sphere was analyzed by Jurgen Habermas in his seminal work The structural transformation of the public sphere : an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society. I will be dealing more fully with Habermas's theories at the end of this chapter, but for now I want to highlight his contention that the formation of the public sphere relied on the existence of public spaces that were institutionalized “neutral grounds” where no one party could make ownership claims that restricted the use of the space.<sup>16</sup> It was the informality that the British borrowed from the Ottoman coffee house that allowed the English coffee house to function as the public spaces where the public sphere could come into being. The physical design decisions of the English coffee

house were crucial in institutionalizing the informality and suspension of hierarchical social distinctions that came to define the social relations within the coffee house.

Perhaps unsurprisingly based on the name, the English coffee house was very domestic in its design inspiration. Many coffee houses occupied renovated homes, and it was quite common to have the proprietor and his or her family living in rooms behind or above the coffee house retail space. The decoration and furnishings of the coffee house reflected the new expectations of the home environment that were coming into being for the new urban middle and upper classes.<sup>17</sup> The decorative language was certainly domestic, but it was executed in a higher quality than many private homes at the time,<sup>18</sup> reflecting the aspirational aspects of the new domestic desires. Despite being domestic in appearance and locale, the functional design of the coffee house was highly specialized and pragmatic.

The English coffee house was defined functionally by its communal seating arrangements. The coffee house would always have a large central room into which the customers entered from the street, and in the middle of this room there would be a large communal table or set of tables. Initially these tables were long trestle tables, like the ones to be found in the taverns of the era. Instead of sitting with flagons of ale, the customer would pay their one penny (the traditional price for all coffee at the time), receive a cup of coffee from one of the many serving-boys constantly running to and fro, and then be free to sit at the tables as long as they liked, reading the many different newspapers that would inevitably be spread across the tables, or engaging

other patrons in conversation. These communal tables enforced the public neutrality of the coffee house space—“customers were expected to take the next available seat, placing themselves next to whoever else has come before them”.<sup>19</sup> Though there were certainly coffee houses that were understood as more upper class or working class based on their geographic locations, in the coffee houses in the central part of London at least it was not uncommon to find minor nobility, merchants, intellectuals, clerks, artisans, and lawyers all sitting next to each other. By enforcing a mixing of many different people around a shared communal space, these tables served to suspend social differences and implicitly authorize conversation and equal esteem amongst strangers.<sup>20</sup>

As the coffee houses became more established and more strongly identified with intellectual and political discussions, the trestle tables were often replaced with large round or oval tables. Round tables may not seem very noteworthy to us now, but when they were first introduced into the coffee house environment, they represented a leap in what Ellis terms the “political technology” of the public sphere. It was the owner of the Turk's Head Coffee House in London who first introduced this innovation when he had a large oval table specially made for James Harrington's “Rota Club”, a group of men who would meet in the Turk's Head and discuss ideas for political reform. The table was large enough to seat many people, who could all engage in the discussion thanks to the table's shape. Ingeniously, the proprietor also had a passage cut into the middle of the table so that he could deliver the coffee

without interrupting discussion.<sup>21</sup> The introduction of large round tables further increased the informality and enforced mixing of the English coffee house.

Due to their accessibility and their ability to foster conversation, the early English coffee houses quickly became popular with the scholars, writers and political thinkers of the day. All manner of intellectual activities were to be found in coffee shops, from debates on the proper form of government for the commonwealth, to critique of the latest plays and works of popular authors, and even public dissections of animals and conducting of scientific experiments.<sup>22</sup> Different circles and disciplines became identified with the specific coffee houses that they frequented, and it was not uncommon for those wishing to take the pulse of London on a particular issue to travel from coffee shop to coffee shop in order to hear all of the different sides of the public's opinion. The informality and accessibility of the coffee houses meant that anyone could join in the discussion of the day, and the strong focus on open conversation and debate amongst all patrons ensured (at least theoretically) that the most rational and meritorious opinion would prevail. Due to this buzz of intellectual activity, the coffee houses became nicknamed "Penny Universities", with the joke being that for the price of a cup of coffee, anyone could receive a complete education by merely listening to the constant coffee house debates.<sup>23</sup> In practice, the discussion in any specific coffee house was often dominated by the views of one particular person or set of people, and anyone seeking a complete education in the coffee houses would receive a highly polarized and rather spotty education at best. However, the

flourishing of the coffee houses did coincide with one of the peaks of prominence for English literary and political thought, and it would be hard to deny that the intellectual exchange fostered by the coffee houses had a large role in creating that prominence.

It is important to note that the English coffee houses were not solely identified with intellectual exchange and not all seating in the coffee house was open and communal. As the coffee houses increasingly became sites of business, there was a move towards more privatized seating arrangements. The most common form of more private seating was booth seating. The booths would have their own private tables with bench-style seating on either side, but in contrast to the booth seating one might find in a diner or coffee shop today, the booth of the English coffee house had very high backs on the seats which created a greater degree of privacy.<sup>24</sup> These booths were often used to conduct private business deals, with some of the booths even incorporating doors or curtains that could be closed to give the occupants full privacy. As it became more common to conduct business in coffee houses, some enterprises would even rent out a booth or booths in a coffee house and use those as their main or only offices.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the need for more private arrangements for some activities, the accessibility of English coffee houses made them fantastically fertile grounds for business. Anyone could enter the coffee house and engage any other patron in conversation, and new forms of business developed that took advantage of this free

exchange. The first form to develop was the public auctions of commodities, which would often take place in specialized rooms with dedicated auctioneers. It was common for coffee houses to advertise the specific auctions or types of auctions that took place on their premises.<sup>26</sup> The second form to develop was the exchange of stocks, bonds and other financial instruments. Specific coffee houses became known as the places where masses of financial traders would gather to do business, and there developed a specialized language of trading that would fill these coffee houses with a constant dull roar of shouted offers and counter-offers. These fledgling financial markets eventually outgrew the coffee houses, forcing the government to create the London Stock Exchange as a new venue for the traders to conduct their business.<sup>27</sup> As we can see, the foundational principles of free exchange upon which much of the modern capitalist machinery is built has its roots in the social conventions of the English coffee house.

The conduct of business in coffee shops created a need for private spaces and specialized knowledge that certainly went against the accessibility and informality that the coffee houses were known for. However the coffee house as an institution still retained much of its accessibility and informality, especially outside of the financial center of London. This can perhaps be attributed to the other central role of the coffee house: the distribution of news in the form of both newspapers and daily gossip.

The coffee houses did much to foster the fledgling newspaper industry, with coffee houses serving as the main points of distribution for many newspapers. Some coffee houses even created their own newspapers, such as *The Tatler* in London.<sup>28</sup> Coffee houses would take pride in providing as many different newspapers as possible from all throughout Europe, and especially in the more provincial towns, the coffee houses became the “chief point of dissemination for news”.<sup>29</sup> Beyond the formal distribution of newspapers, coffee houses were notorious for their patrons' constant gossip on everything from Society scandal to political turmoil. This association between coffeehouses and the news would prove to be one of the most enduring characteristics of the coffee shop, with most modern coffee shops still providing a range of local and national newspapers for perusal and purchase.

Despite playing an instrumental role in the elaboration of the new public sphere in English life, the English coffee house had a relatively short life as an institution. By the mid-Victorian period, almost all of the coffee houses in London—estimated to be as many as ten thousand at their height—had closed or re-opened as exclusive gentlemen's clubs.<sup>30</sup> Some of the factors that contributed to this rapid decline were: the increasing popularity of tea due to shifts in price and prestige based on Britain's new colonial conquest of India; the re-stratification of English society along more capitalist class lines; and the creation of more specialized venues for intellectual and business exchange.

## **The Continental Café**

The “café” proper was a type developed primarily in 18<sup>th</sup> century Paris and 19<sup>th</sup> century Vienna. Much as the London coffee house was tied to the first emergence of the political public sphere, the café institution was intimately intertwined with the great social revolutions of its time: “the social and functional differentiation, newly established distinctions between spheres of production and leisure, the everyday and the ceremonial and the crystallization of a bourgeois public sphere”.<sup>31</sup> These social changes are directly related to the much more pronounced informality and overlap of public and private spheres in the café as compared to the English coffeehouse.

Though there are some substantive differences between Parisian and Viennese cafés, they are still variations on the same central theme of an often large, usually purpose built space, almost always with indoor as well as outdoor seating, that combined the coffeehouse's provision of coffee and newspapers with the provision of alcohol and (usually) simple food.

The Parisian café concept emerged before the Viennese, with the first cafés in Paris opening at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Parisian café was a well established type that had become integral to the political, intellectual and cultural life of the city.<sup>32</sup> As a retail space, the Parisian café grew out of a combination of the English coffeehouse concept with earlier French restaurant and bistro (very small, family-owned neighborhood restaurant) styles. Socially, the café had a strong link to the French literary and philosophical tradition of the *salon*, a tradition of semi-private gatherings of artists, intellectuals and the upper-classes,

usually held in the homes of wealthy patronesses.<sup>33</sup> The Parisian café came to largely replace the *salon* as the center of intellectual life, and some observers identify this change with the increased democratization and accessibility of French public life generally, as reflected in the more overt class mixing and politicization in the café.<sup>34</sup>

Compared to the English coffeehouse, the Parisian café did not rely as heavily on the home metaphor, especially in its physical design. The café was much more open to the outside world, and much more permissive of a broad range of social uses: With its series of doors open to the pavement, the café provided a choice of modes of public presence; its visitors could occupy a table on the terrace, in full view and as a stationary participants of the moving tableau of the boulevard, or they could retreat indoors, sheltered during the day by the lower light level inside, or in the even more private spaces upstairs.<sup>35</sup>

Though the café offered a varying range of publicity to its customers, in general there was a strong preference for the fully open terrace seating, which combined with the extensive use of large windows and mirrors to give the café's social life what Oldenburg calls a sense of "legitimacy born of visibility".<sup>36</sup>

The greater flexibility and openness of the café space created a more informal atmosphere compared to the coffeehouse, although the often sumptuous decorations of the early cafés appeared to counter this informality<sup>37</sup>. The coffeehouse had only large central tables and occasionally booths located in common rooms or occasionally in rooms set aside explicitly for business, whereas the café had a range of usually two

to eight person tables situated in a variety of different zones of accessibility and visibility, with none of the zones being rigidly typed to one usage.<sup>38</sup> As the Parisian café evolved, they emerged a much wider range of decorative styles and levels which greater fit this spatial informality. After 1839, the Parisian café also incorporated a zinc bar counter where the customer could order and also choose to stand and consume their beverages. The introduction of this counter had a profound effect:

On the one hand, it allowed a higher degree of social mixing, allowing strangers to meet and interact, on the other, it emphasized the authority of the landlord.....The landlord acquired a new social role, as an arbiter of the affairs of the neighborhood....<sup>39</sup>

This social mixing at the counter reproduced some of the camaraderie and intermixing to be found in the English coffeehouse, but did so in a much more informal manner since customers were freer to engage or disengage with other customers at their discretion.

The many possible ways of inhabiting the café space combined with the provision of food and alcohol allowed cafés to be profitably open for up to twenty hours of the day. This was enabled by the broad range of social functions that the café could be used for. The morning hours were in fact the slowest for the Parisian cafés, with the only a small stream of usually bourgeois and working class patrons getting a hot beverage to start the day. In the more fashionable cafés, lunch and the mid-to-late afternoon were the province of more upper-class socializing. Any city dweller who could afford to would try and frequent their local café for a few drinks in the evening, since the café was one of the main centers of local community, and their was

no division between the coffeehouse and tavern as in England.<sup>40</sup> At all times of the day one could find the bohemians, students, artists, intellectuals and the other traditional habitués working and socializing in their favorite café haunts.

The Parisian cafés ranged in size and distinction, with the main contrast being between the more fashionable boulevard café and the more working class corner café.<sup>41</sup> The corner cafés were more informal in that they were generally more open to the street, more utilitarian in their design, more accommodating of customers passing through quickly on their way to other things, and their terrace seating interfaced more directly with the hustle and bustle of the busy street corners. The boulevard cafés were often grander in their design and products served, and offered a more leisurely and potentially private environment because of their more closed plans and separation from the busiest parts of street life. The side-street cafés took this separation to another level, with their mid-block placement in more out of the way streets countering the informality of their often pedestrian design and services.<sup>42</sup>

It was in the out of the way side-street cafés especially that the intellectual and artistic circles would gather, with leading artists or thinkers often assembling a coterie of friends and admirers around specific tables in a specific café. Because these cafés were smaller and less highly trafficked, it was possible to have specific tables virtually (and sometimes even in actuality) reserved for these specific people or groups.<sup>43</sup> Many proprietors would attempt to woo these favorite regulars with privileges and choice food and drink as a way to enhance the image of their café. This spatial formality was

further increased by the small size and predictable patronage of these cafés, which allowed the artists and intellectuals to exert a larger influence on the relative formalities surrounding their presence in the café, with different academic and artistic circles exhibiting varying degrees of approachability or inaccessibility—expectations which were communicated more by common knowledge and the behaviors of the circle than by any stated expectations. In these ways, the café was excellently suited to the transposition of *salon* culture into the more semi-public sphere, leading to the enduring identification of the café with artistic and intellectual foment. After a relatively short time, the London “Penny Universities” ceased to be the centers of political and literary thought, but the continental café maintained its intellectual and artistic relevance well into the twentieth century.

The early development of the café type was centered in Parisian intellectual and cultural life, but this was certainly not the sole determinant of the form. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries saw increased circulation of people and ideas throughout Europe, including circulation of concepts of public life and retail space. The trans-national café concept took much inspiration from the English coffeehouse, but it was also heavily influenced by Italian and Viennese public culture. The concept of the semi-public terrace seating that directly interfaced with the city crowd has its antecedents in the public ambulatory community culture of the Italian Piazza, with cafés such as Caffé Concerto Paszkowski and Caffé Gili in Florence, or Caffé Degli Specchi in Trieste serving as some of the earliest and most canonical examples of the terrace /

piazza seating type.<sup>44</sup> As we will explore in the section on the “espresso bar”, the Italian influence would become much more prominent as cafés became more informal in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially with the introduction of espresso coffee and the corresponding development of the *gran bar* and espresso bar styles.

The Viennese influence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century took the café in a more formal, higher-class direction. Compared to the Parisian cafés, the Viennese café or *kaffeehaus* generally offered higher quality and more substantial food, as well as more privatized spatial arrangements.<sup>45</sup> The cafés still usually had outdoor seating, but in contrast with Parisian café seating's open interface with the street, the Viennese usually marked off the terrace “with a barrier of potted plants or an ornate iron fence”.<sup>46</sup> The Viennese cafés were still designed as a series of large rooms and shared much of their decorative language with the Parisian cafés, but the functional aspects of the decoration and especially seating created a more private, less accessible space. As Grafe explains, “one particular feature of the Viennese *Kaffeehaus* was the window niche into which a banquette was built, allowing its user to hide comfortably”, and in the Viennese café the traditional large decorative mirrors were oriented to allow the thus hidden customers to “to lean back leisurely and observe, address and partake in the street life outside”.<sup>47</sup> The Viennese cafés were also famous for their attentive and highly proper waitstaff—head waiters often even wore tuxedos—and as such these cafés very rarely incorporated a bar or other counter-style service.<sup>48</sup>

The more formal nature of the Viennese café space and service reflected the more regimented role these cafés played in society, in comparison to Parisian cafés. Viennese society was in general more conservative than Parisian, and the city had a long history of fairly static inhabitation and layout. The café integrated into this urban culture by serving as one of the primary backgrounds for the upper class evening promenade, with the grandest cafés appearing on promenade's traditional route along the *Ringstrasse*. Gentlemen would also usually start their day off with a breakfast and perusal of newspapers in the café. Interestingly, the cafés were seen as respectable spaces for women in Vienna much earlier than elsewhere, with the early afternoon being the time when society women would traditionally gather in the café for a few hours of socializing and gossip.<sup>49</sup> This may be partially explained by the *Konditorei*, one of the Viennese café's historical antecedents, which were cake and pastry shops that were frequented by society women and incorporated coffee and tea service.

The Viennese café also incorporated much of the tradition of intellectual circles to be found in Parisian cafés, though even here the expression was more formal. The customs for occupying specific tables and for engaging other patrons in conversation were more rigid and were enforced not only by the different cliques but also by the waitstaff.<sup>50</sup> Viennese cafés were also usually more multi-use, with the artists and other café haunts usually clearing out at meal times and during the women's afternoon socializing.<sup>51</sup> The Viennese café was certainly a center of

intellectual and cultural production during various periods, but the producing groups to be found in the Viennese café reflected the generally more exclusive, class differentiated nature of Viennese society generally.

The common theme running through all of the variations on the café is the greatly increased presence of activities that used to be confined largely to the home or other more private arenas. With the eating of daily meals, engaging in Society gossip and socializing, the formation of intellectual and artistic circles, and many other more subtle trends, the café customers went far beyond the public, political and commercial orientation of the English coffeehouse. In so doing, they expanded the conception of what parts of social life could or should be conducted in the semi-public of the café. Further, the greater overlap of public and private created newly acceptable forms of public presence, such as the lone individual who goes to the café to write, read,<sup>52</sup> or become a sort of sedentary flâneur by “people-watching”.

If the English coffeehouse was one of the first sites of the articulation of a new political and intellectual sphere played out in the public, then the café could be said to be one of the first sites of society's negotiation of how physical publicness and the new “public sphere” could interface with the persistent need for semi-privacy in some activities. By providing a greater range of spatial, geographic and social configurations, the café created a broader range of levels of formality which could in turn be used to define a range of degrees of personal and group privacy within the urban public stage. It is in the classic European café that we begin to see the

contested, amorphous overlapping of notions public and private that give the café institution its protean power to help customers define and mediate their interface with the urban crowd.

## **The Espresso Bar**

I identify the espresso bar as a type of café that developed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coming out of the Parisian and Italian café models that incorporated a zinc bar. It was a markedly more informal and commercially oriented style of shop that focused on maximum customer throughput and would often have little or even no seating available. Initially identified with early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italy, this style came to define much of the coffee retail landscape up until the introduction of the coffee shop / coffee lounge towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As may be inferred from the name, the espresso bar draws much of its inspiration from the alcohol bars that emerged out of English and American pubs, taverns, and gin palaces in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The espresso bar utilized what in his discussion of pubs Grafe refers to as a “rationalized distribution of drinks” that focused on counter service of customers, usually from an elongated and often curved or even U-shaped bar.<sup>53</sup> This change in service configuration went hand in hand with the introduction of the new steam boiler espresso machines, which allowed a much rapider production of drinks. The term espresso does not translate exactly but carries connotations of “expressing” the flavor of coffee, making it rapidly, and doing it

“expressly” for each customer. In an espresso bar, customers would approach the bar, order and pay for their drink at the bar, and then usually quickly consume the drink standing up before continuing on with their day. This led to an extremely high customer turn over that allowed shops to be profitable just by selling coffee, without the need to serve food. However many if not most espresso bars also served alcohol in continental Europe, and there was often a rather unclear distinction between a more espresso focused bar and a more alcohol focused bar.

One of the most striking aspects of the espresso bar is its lack of seating. Due to the higher customer throughput and more utilitarian approach to providing products, espresso bars were free to do away with some or all of the masses of seating options to be found in the café. Especially in Italy, many classic cafés were renovated to include espresso bars in the back, which served as the central point for drink production and service for the customers who just wanted to grab a quick coffee and the poorer customers who could not afford the fee required for table seating. However there were also many purpose built espresso bars that would often occupy extremely small spaces with either minimal or zero seating available. If the espresso bar did provide seating, it would usually consist of a few very small tables that encouraged only brief stays since their size was only suitable for holding a drink and perhaps a newspaper.

In the social imaginary, the rapid, transient mode of consumption associated with the espresso bars became associated with Italy's transformation into a modern

industrial nation in the 1930s.<sup>54</sup> Though the old café styles continued and still continues to exist, the idea of rapid service that did not require the extended presentation of public presence entailed in sitting down at a table became very popular and was integrated into many different retail service environments, from gelato and pastry shops to alcohol bars. This style of service was radically more informal than previous styles of coffee service, which in some ways further encouraged conversation between customers and between staff and customers, since everyone would be standing in close proximity to one another waiting at the espresso bar. However the much more transient nature of this service style also meant that customers would feel less obligated to engage other customers in conversation, or to stay engaged in conversation for any length of time.

This tension between informality increasing accessibility and accessibility decreasing socializing points to the potentially instrumental nature of the espresso bar. Though the espresso bar, and certainly the cafés and other shops that incorporated an espresso bar, were still able to function as semi-public spaces for social exchange, the bar service allowed the customer to approach their interaction with the space as a purely economic exchange if they so chose. Because they did not have to take a seat nor interact with the service staff beyond the barest minimum of a single ordering and paying interaction, there was nothing forcing the customer to have any sort of identification with the institution or the other customers. Social conventions could still enforce a certain sociability in the espresso bar, but this

enforced sociability no longer had the physical reinforcement of the space's seating and service design.

As it developed, the espresso bar as a type experienced significant overlap with the Continental café, especially outside of Italy. 1950s London in particular “experienced what the author John Pearson described as an 'espresso revolution’”<sup>55</sup> that consisted of many new shops opening up that served espresso, were often cramped in sized, but still often incorporated substantial seating options. These shops catered to a young, hip clientele that would often hang out for hours on end enjoying musical performances, poetry readings, or simply talking.<sup>56</sup> In America, this same overlap could be seen in the “coffee houses” associated with the beatniks and other sub-cultures in the 1950s and 1960s. America also developed the unique retail form known as the “diner” or “coffee shop”, which incorporated much of the publicity of the coffee house with the communality and food service of the café, while showing the espresso bar influence in its emphasis on fast, no hassle service that did not absolutely require any commitment from customers.<sup>57</sup>

It is in these early variations on the Continental café and espresso bar types that the articulation of the modern coffee shop can begin to be seen. There was no longer a simple historical progression of café types that built upon and largely subsumed previous iterations. There was instead an explosion of variations of café types that responded to the expanding range of activities conducted in public and the expanding spectrum of the population that expected to take part in public life. These

variations incorporated different degrees of the informality and social exchange of the coffee house, the communality, accessibility and management of public presence of the Continental café, and the utilitarian efficiency of the espresso bar, as suited the needs dictated by their specific location and clientele.

A proper analysis of the evolution from café and espresso bar to modern coffee shop must be situated in a larger discussion of the radical changes in ideas of public life, individual identity, consumerism, and cultural production that occurred from the 1950s through the 1990s. Unfortunately, such an analysis is wildly beyond the scope of this work, and so I have chosen to fast forward to a description of the current idea of the coffee shop based on my own experience and the descriptions given by Christopher Grafe and Erling Holm. In the process, at least some of the issues that went into the evolution of the modern coffee shop should become more obvious, especially once I explain Holm's view on the sociological functions of the coffee shop. While it can be hard, though not impossible, to find establishments that follow the classic café or espresso bar form, it is very simple to find the influence of these forms in the modern coffee shops that seem to dot every street corner.

## **The Coffee Shop / Lounge**

The term “shop” is the simplest and most general way to refer to a retail space. It does not imply any particular products, size, configuration, or class orientation—whether we visit a supermarket, a newsstand, a flea-market, a bookstore, or a fashion

boutique, we are “going shopping”. The commonality in all of those spaces is that we go there first and foremost to buy goods. To call something a “shop” is to designate it as a space for an economic transaction. The modern coffee shop, or as Grafe refers to it, the “coffee lounge”,<sup>58</sup> is often interchangeably referred to as a “café”, or occasionally even “coffee house”, and taken to be interchangeable in form and function with both. While certain coffee shops do certainly exhibit many characteristics of the café and/or the coffeehouse, there are also many coffee shops that upon closer inspection exhibit at best only the thinnest veneer of these characteristics. “Café” and “coffee house” are terms that describe a spatially enacted set of social relationships first, and a provision of products second. “Coffee shop” is a term that describes a spatially enacted provision of products first, and a set of largely atomized, individualized social expressions second. There are substantial differences in physical and service design between the coffee shop and earlier forms, but what truly sets the coffee shop apart is the relationships between customers, workers and the shop that is occasioned by these physical differences.

The coffee shop as a type was hugely influenced and largely promulgated by Starbucks. Howard Schulz was inspired by the cafés and espresso bars he visited on a trip to Italy, and sought to bring their ambiance and social function back to the United States.<sup>59</sup> However, he wanted to turn his chain of coffee shops into as successful a business enterprise as possible, and so pursued an extremely aggressive expansion plan that would eventually have the company opening hundreds of new

stores nationally and internationally each year.<sup>60</sup> This massive corporate expansion necessitated creating a visual and functional design style that could be easily applied to many different locations and spaces, which inevitably led to a uniformly “branded space” that was instantly recognizable as a Starbucks when you walked in the door. Though this design incorporated aspects of the café and espresso bar, because of its corporate nature, the design was oriented first and foremost towards the economic concerns of maximum customer throughput and maximum ease of roll-out, creating a much more generic and uniform spatial condition than the earlier styles. There are of course a multitude of independent cafés that also had and have a large influence on the development of the coffee shop style, but almost all of these still share Starbucks' economically focused design.

The defining feature of the coffee shop is the wholly integrated “bar” that rigidly divides the space into the “service area” and the “customer area” . In the coffee shop, the physical and service style of the espresso bar has overtaken the entirety of the shop's functional design, leading to what could be called a hyper-rationalization of service oriented towards maximum throughput. All of the elements of service, from pastry and cold cases, to register, to coffee machines, and often even condiment bar, are integrated into one monolithic wall of service that stands between customers and staff. The area behind and immediately around the wall is rigidly typed as the service area since that is the primary activity that takes place there, while the rest of the coffee shop space outside of the service area becomes then rigidly typed as the area for

customer concerns since staff members rarely go there and economic exchanges do not happen there.

This service wall is often referred to as a bar, but that term is actually misleading, since the height of the wall is much higher than in an alcohol or espresso bar, and there is rarely if ever any space along the wall where the customers could rest their drink while consuming it standing up. Functionally, the wall is oriented towards the shop's rapid provision of products, not towards the customers' inhabitation of the space. A customer is expected to start at one end of the wall, perusing the pastries and other goods thrust in their face by glass-front cases as they wait in line. They then proceed to the register where they are expected to order as quickly as possible. After ordering, the customer is expected to stay close enough to the drink-serving end of the wall to hear their completed order called out, though under no circumstances should the customer lean against, or even stand too close to the wall in a way that would prevent other customers from retrieving their orders. Once they have received their order, the customer is expected to vacate the service area by either leaving the shop or taking their order to one of the tables in the customer area—a table they are usually expected to bus themselves when they leave. The staff only leaves their side of the wall to clear dishes and debris that are left on tables, restock the externally facing goods on the condiment bar, or deal with some sort of crisis in the customer area. All other functions of the staff's provision of service to the customers is conducted over,

and mediated by, the wall. As Grafe points out, “the entire arrangement relies on the thorough acceptance of self-service by a young urban clientele”.<sup>61</sup>

This service wall obviously takes inspiration from the espresso bar in its service style and method of delivering products, but instead of generating informality as in the espresso bar, it actually generates more formality. The relationship between worker and customer becomes more formal because there is physical separation between the two parties and instead of the ongoing service interaction of table service there is only the rapid ordering and paying at the register and then the passing of the completed drink over the wall. This relationship is cast in very overtly economic terms by the flow created by the service wall, and so the interaction tends to follow an extremely predictable form, often extending no further than the minimum number of words necessary to convey an order. It is possible for there to be social interaction between the worker and the customer, but it is certainly not a default part of every interaction since there is nothing about the physical or service design that particularly requires or enables it.

The service wall also creates a greater degree of formality between customers because it casts their spatial relationships to one another in purely economic terms while they are waiting in the service area. This is because while in the service area, each customer's reason for being present is the receipt of their own order only, and once they receive that order, they are expected to leave the service area. In addition, presence in the service area is not voluntary since every customer must pass through it

to receive their order. The compulsory nature, individual aims and forced short duration of each customer's presence in the service area all serve as disincentives to customers engaging each other in conversation. Unlike taking a seat at a coffee house table, or even choosing to linger a bit at an espresso bar, a customer's presence in the coffee shop service area does not function as a signal that they are open to any sort of social relationship.

Beyond the service wall and service area, the coffee shop is most often typified by a reintroduction of themes of domesticity and privacy into the functional, and sometimes decorative, design.<sup>62</sup> This is expressed most clearly by the seating's orientation towards the individual. There are often armchairs that a customer can use to “get comfortable” and read a book or newspaper, or use their laptop, for as long as they like. Sometimes these armchairs are even arrayed in front of a fire place. Tables are often two-person sized, which is much more encouraging of isolated individual usage because compared to four-person or larger tables, you can fit more tables into the space and someone sitting alone at a two-person table is less conspicuously taking up extra space. Whether two person or four person, tables are usually spaced as far apart as possible, maximizing individual space. There are occasionally multi-person trestle tables, but these are not communal in the same way as the coffee-house tables, since these trestle tables are usually clearly marked for laptop usage by the mass of power-outlets available either below or right in the middle of them. It is not uncommon to see couches in cafés, which we tend to associate with leisure in the

home. This association is spoken to by the couches usually being wholly occupied by groups of friends or family socializing. Though at first glance the seating arrangements of the coffee shop may appear to be quite similar to those of the coffee house or café, their functional details belie the coffee-shop's orientation towards privacy and individuality versus public exchange and community.

The privacy and individuality of the coffee shop leads to a certain sense of social formality between customers as compared to previous typologies in that there are more barriers to sustained conversation and socializing between customers who are strangers. At the same time, the coffee shop has a much greater degree of informality in terms of the expectations of behavior for customers. Customers do not have to engage in any sort of exchange beyond an economic one if they do not want to, and even when sitting at a table for multiple hours at a time, customers can expect to not be approached by staff or other customers. This informality is occasioned by the economic and individual focus of the physical design, and leads to a very high degree of accessibility for the coffee shop in that there are few social expectations or rituals that would serve to exclude certain customers. Obviously this is not a universal accessibility in that the presence of certain classes of people, such as the homeless, or certain behaviors, such as public breast-feeding or playing your own music from a laptop without headphones, often face social censure, but in comparison to the coffee shop or café, there is still a much greater degree of social accessibility.

Erling Holm points out how this accessibility is linked to design transparency, which is in turned linked to the class aspects of the accessibility. One of the primary design commonalities that Holm identifies in coffee shops is the presence of many large windows that reveal much of the coffee shop space to the street. Mirroring Oldenburg's assertion that the Continental café's visibility relative to previous spaces gave it a social "legitimacy born of visibility", Holm says that these large windows soften implicit class divides of the urban landscape by engaging the coffee shop with the street outside:

As many of the informants express, these design aspects makes [the coffee shops] more accessible; customers can look at the street scene, and the people walking can look in at them, and some do; this contributes to openness, and an involvement with the world outside.<sup>63</sup>

Passersby on the street are able to look into the coffee shop to see if there are seats available, and see what sorts of people are occupying the coffee shop, in essence gauging how accessible the coffee shop is for them without needing to enter. At the same time, customers in the shop are forced to be at least somewhat engaged with the street scene outside, without the mediating distance of the Continental café's mirrors, window niches or darkened interiors.

Holm further points out that though "at a larger structural level [it is] evident that specialty coffee, among other things, has been a watermark of the emerging culture-oriented middle class", as a spatial condition, the coffee shop is "hard to identify as high brow or low brow".<sup>64</sup> I think he is quite right in that in this late stage of coffee shop penetration into modern life, the coffee shop as a broad retail typology

is not explicitly marked as high brow or low brow. However it is important to point out that though the typology of the coffee shop is not necessarily high brow or low brow, each specific variation of that typology that is expressed in a given real coffee shop is usually rather strongly typed as high brow or low brow. Holm's own work on four different coffee shops in Oslo showed that each shop had a specific cultural and economic clientele that tended to make up the majority of its business, though there was still significant variation within the total clientele of each coffee shop.<sup>65</sup> Though I do not know for certain, I would hazard a guess that a study in the United States would find an even stronger typing of clientele based on specific coffee shops due to the highly diversified and stratified coffee shop market in the U.S. With the U.S. coffee shop market spanning from the ultra-premium, high-design, top independent specialty coffee shops to the communal, middle of the road local chain and independent coffee shops, to the plethora of Starbucks outposts, and even to McDonald's McCafé, it is all but inevitable that different versions of the coffee shop will attract wildly different cultural and class level of customers. Still, Holm is right to point out that the use of coffee shops as a general type is a practice that is shared across a vast swath of the population.

Grafe sees a rather bleak reflection of postmodern society in the universality of the coffee shop typology:

Rather, it could be argued, the phenomenon of the coffee lounge as a global brand and as another type of generic spatial condition entirely fits a culture that has repressed many forms

of public display and a society of atomized individuals whose common denominator is the demand for a *large* *caffè latte*.<sup>66</sup>

Based on the ways that coffee shop design encourages relationships defined largely along economic lines and discourages much of the communal and social functions of previous types, I see where the pessimism in Grafe's assessment comes from. There is no denying that the patterns of consumption and inter-relation in the coffee shop are markedly more individual and atomized compared to the *café* or especially the coffee house.

The death of Habermas's traditional public sphere is implicit in the individualization and atomization reflected in the coffee shop. For Habermas, the public sphere is where public opinion was formed via “rational-critical debate”.<sup>67</sup> For him the coffee house was able to constitute a public sphere because it was open to all citizens and was the home of sustained public conversation between private individuals where the principal claim to legitimacy was the merit of the argument, not the arguer's social standing or relationship to the place. By coming together in debate, relationships of citizenship and mutual interest were formed between individuals, relationships which in total constituted a “public”. Habermas claimed that “when this system falls apart, the deliberative practices are substituted by leisure and intensified life style orientations”,<sup>68</sup> and this claim certainly reflects the increased focus on leisure and individualized lifestyles in the modern coffee shop.

However, while it is true that the English coffee house and the Parisian *café* played vital roles in their political eras, there have been many significant criticisms of

Habermas' theories. One of the most compelling for me is Joan B. Landes' criticism in *Feminists Read Habermas*:

Western cultural representation has eclipsed women's interests in the private domain and aligned femininity with particularity, interest, and partiality. In this context, the goals of generalizability and appeals to the common good may conceal rather than expose forms of domination<sup>69</sup>

Landes starts her essay by pointing out that Habermas's idea of the public sphere as universally accessible is a quaint fiction that at the immediate level largely ignores the ways in which access to public spaces such as coffee houses was (and is) often denied to women, different ethnicities and the lower classes. However the ultimate thrust of Landes' criticism is that, in the case of women, this exclusion from the public sphere contributes to the massive symbolic domination of women's interests in Western society. The fact that women were confined to the home made their interests limited to the private sphere, which is inherently opposed by the public sphere in Western tradition, and so consequently women's interests could therefore not be questions of universal rights or welfare because women's issues were not being articulated in the sole domain of universal political discourse, the public sphere. This critique and others make it clear that while the loss of rational-critical debate in public is certainly a cause for concern, the passing of Habermas's unitary public sphere—inasmuch as it ever truly existed—should not be met with complete sorrow.

After explaining the loss of Habermas's public sphere in the coffee shop, Holm largely sidesteps the issues brought up by the new-found lack of spaces for rational-critical debate in society. He instead chooses to look at how the coffee shop

fulfills new roles in modern life. Without denying the individualization and atomization of society, Holm points out the “coffee bars' ability to harvest the unintended fruits of modernity and cultivate them into a shape that somehow can be described as a reconnection to a sort of community life”.<sup>70</sup> His argument is that while the coffee shop may no longer function as Habermas's public *sphere*, it still provides customers with a public *space* that uniquely enables certain functions that enrich their public and private life.

These functions center around what I would call the “mediation” of certain tensions and desires common to (post)modern life. One of these tensions is the individual's ever-present relationship to acts of consumption and the way in which so much of the idea of “fulfillment” in the current world has been defined in terms of consumption. As Holm says, in the coffee shop “the postmodern individual seeking self-fulfillment and control over his or her consumption can address that need by ordering a tailor-made coffee”.<sup>71</sup> Though it is important for individuals to feel like they have some measure of control and individuality in the face of un-differentiated mass consumerism, this is an extremely individual tension that the coffee shop resolves wholly based on its made-to-order individual service, which is but one small aspect of the coffee shop.

Beyond the individual's relationship to consumption, there is for Holm an over-arching social tension that the coffee shop as a total spatial experience is uniquely suited to negotiating:

Today's coffee bars are public spaces that foster another type of publicness, and that is the publicness a new type of urbanity has created. This urbanity is characterized by the blurring of a broad set of distinctions, the openness for both social practices and solitude. . . . coffee bars creates spaces for self-confrontative work.<sup>72</sup>

Holm describes the coffee shop's potential for a new form of publicness as its ability to create a "soft urbanity". In Holm's usage, soft urbanity describes "situations where the social norms are less stiff, which make possible an environment where many distinctions also appear less rigid".<sup>73</sup> In light of our discussion about more formal relationships between customers and staff above, it may be surprising to see Holm refer to the coffee shop as a place where social norms are less stiff. However the informality that Holm is referring to is of a very specific type related to the radical accessibility of the coffee shop and the way that that accessibility affords customers the ability to regulate their "intimacy" in public in new and profoundly useful ways. This is the "openness for both social practices and solitude", the "self-confrontative" work that Holm refers to.

To understand the import of this new publicness, we need to backtrack a bit and look at the explanation Holm gives for the postmodern urban condition. First off, I choose to use the term "postmodern" when referring to this condition although Holm and other writers use the term "modern". I believe that postmodern is a more apt adjective due to a set of changes in public life that this condition has emerged from. Holm points to the first change via Richard Sennet's discussion of the changing idea of the public "game". According to Sennett, since the 1800s, there has been a change where people are were now seen as having "immanent" meaning as opposed to

having an external meaning largely defined by their place in society. Before this change, it was understood that a person's actions in public were a performance, were simply them playing the role in the “game” prescribed to their position in society and that their true character was displayed in private. With the shift towards immanent meaning entailed in the move towards ideas of democracy and universal equality, “everything a person does in public is seen as an expression of his or her character. Behavior is therefore taken more seriously, and the public “game” disintegrates”.<sup>74</sup>

This idea of immanent meaning as fully expressed by public actions rests on a modernist view of an essential identity that stands apart from the social (public) stage on which it is enacted. Postmodern thinkers across a vast range of disciplines have questioned this idea of essential identity and expression, countering that it is necessary to understand the individual and the collective society as mutually constituting identities that are in a constant state of negotiation and reproduction, relying intrinsically on each other for coherency and intelligibility. This means that there is no longer the possibility of immanent human identity, whether in public or in private. Instead, all meaning is derived from the individual's continual performance of a set of social constructions through which they understand themselves and are understood by the world around them. The public “game” then is to be seen as a game in that the individual has a degree of control over the performances (the behaviors) they engage in, and as such their performances cannot be taken to be unmediated reflections of their identity. However the public “game” must also be

taken very seriously in that it is only through one's actions in and relationship to this “game” that an identity can be formed or expressed. The power of the coffee shop that Holm identifies as “soft urbanity” is at its root the ability for the individual to more fully control their expression in and relationship to the public game via the methods of presence available to them in the coffee shop. As such, I think it is most accurate to say that the coffee shop's new version of publicness is responding to the *postmodern* condition.

But what exactly is the tension that the coffee shop allows its customers to address? To answer this, Holm turns to Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin's ideas of “how the urban personality develops through the conflict between intimacy and distance”.<sup>75</sup> This idea, most famously advanced in Simmel's The Metropolis and Mental Life, revolves around the tensions placed on the individual by their interface with the urban crowd. There is an intimacy to city life in that so much of the individual's life is conducted in very close proximity to other people, and as we have seen above, the ways in which the individual conducts themselves are taken by those around them to be reflective of either the individual's immanent character or the socially-constructed identity that they have semi-freely chosen. However there is also a great distance to city life in that though life is conducted in such close proximity to so many people, the individual has actual direct human contact with very few of those people, and what contacts they do have are often partially or fully in the context of economic transactions or other exchanges necessary for the day-to-day conduct of city

life. This essential contradiction in city life “produces freedom, but also loneliness that appears to be an inherent, unavoidable and painful part of it”.<sup>76</sup>

Holm claims that the power of the coffee shop lies in its ability to transform that loneliness that comes from the tension between intimacy and distance into a productive state which he deems “solitude”. Based on extensive interviews with coffee shop patrons, he describes the solitude they seek like this:

...characterized as a positive experience...as a pragmatic and important tool for managing stressful work and everyday life...thinking and creativity require solitude...solitude is something you choose...it allows us to get (back) into the position of driving our own lives, rather than having them run by schedules and demands from without.<sup>77</sup>

Astute readers may have noticed that we have returned to Alfred Polgar's aphorism that the café is the perfect place for those who need company to be alone. However the being alone that Holm is describing is fundamentally different from the café habitue who chooses to embed their individual aloneness in the site of socializing that is the café. In the age of the postmodern urban condition that the coffee shop is responding to, everyone is unavoidably in some way in the company of others when they are alone; first since the urban crush constantly surrounds them with other people, second because their identity is constructed out of social symbols and ideas that in their deployment unavoidably conjure up the spectral mass of society, and third because the actions and priorities of our life are always to some degree “run by schedules and demands from without”. The power of the solitude provided by the coffee shop is that it allows us to suspend ourselves in the milieu of society in the manner and towards the ends that we choose.

It is in this idea of solitude that we finally find the unique informality of the coffee shop. The coffee shop is an informal setting in that it is acceptable, and perhaps even encouraged, for someone to be there by themselves. Further, the coffee shop is informal in that the social expectations placed upon an individual by their presence in the coffee shop are very few and quite lax in comparison to other public spaces. It is perfectly normal for a customer to come in alone at almost any time of day, take up a whole table to themselves, and spend minutes or hours staring through the windows at the world outside, or reading newspapers or a book, or sketching on a pad, or working on a laptop, or engaging in conversation with acquaintances who come into the shop, or even (usually to a considerably lesser degree) engaging strangers in conversation. Customers can also come into the coffee shop in pairs or small groups and chat, or have business meetings, or study, or whatever else they like as long as it does not unduly inconvenience other customers. The customer in the coffee shop is still living out their life in intimate proximity to others, they are still distanced from those others based on the anonymity of urban life, and this tension still results in loneliness. The difference is that in the coffee shop, it is possible and acceptable for an individual to sit with their loneliness and make use of it however they desire, in a way that is not nearly as acceptable or possible in other public and semi-public spaces.

Due to its open, transparent design, its accessibility borne out of an economic focus, and the central role it plays in the daily lives of a wide swath of city dwellers,

the coffee shop is unavoidably a public space that is directly tied to urban crush of city life. However the coffee shop is a mediated space that is not reducible to the urban crush—there is a set of formalities to the inter-relations between individuals in the space that has the paradoxical effect of creating a unique informality of expectations, or perhaps authorizing an informality of expectations that is present in all parts of urban public life but is deprecated in other situations. The postmodern urban condition is made up of the atomization of the individual, the city's tension between intimacy and distance, and the inescapable seriousness with which the individual must approach the game of public life. The coffee shop then is a “reconnection to a sort of community” in that it presents its customers with a space that allows for forms of public presence which negotiate the tensions of the postmodern urban condition. In acknowledging and mediating those tensions, the coffee shop allows the individual to enter into social relationships at their discretion, and further allows the individual to present their public self in the way they choose when they do enter into those relationships. Thus, being constructed out of the tensions of postmodern urban life. the coffee shop is a public *space* that enables community formation attuned to the realities of that life, even though the communal functions that the coffee shop space provides are no longer (principally) the public *sphere's* formation of consensus opinion based on rational-critical debate.

## **Conclusion**

Though the discussion of the coffee shop started off with the identification of the type as oriented first and foremost towards the economic concerns of all “shops”, we have seen that the coffee shop is in fact a distinctly socially oriented space. The sociality of the coffee shop is not the public sphere debate of the coffee house, nor is it the variably-public personal presentation and inter-relation of the Continental café. Instead, the coffee shop's sociality is focused on the needs of the individual in postmodern urban society. It acknowledges that for the individual, being in public is an inescapably social act. As a spatial condition, the coffee shop enables the individual to define the level and form of sociality entailed in their public presence in a way that authorizes their solitude, their individual identity detached from the urban crowd.

Since the coffee shop is in fact a social place, for the rest of my thesis, I am going to refer to it as a café. First off, café just sounds so much better—“coffee shop” does not roll off the tongue, and it sounds gauche in the way that it foregrounds the economic and implicitly denies the social. Secondly, are you in the habit of saying to your friends “let's all go down to the coffee shop”? No. Café is by far the more common term used in both professional and consumer circles, especially when referring to the more premium, quality focused cafés that I will be using as examples in the subsequent chapters. Lastly, and most importantly, I choose to use the term café aspirationally. Most coffee shops at first visual appraisal look almost the same as a café, with the exception of the self-service “bar” wall and the lack of table service, and in terms of the components of their design and furnishing, they largely are. As I

have explored above, the arrangement of the coffee shop is oriented towards individualism, and there is a kind of informality created by the arrangement that uniquely serves individual social needs. However, I do not believe that the coffee shop is incapable of also addressing communal social needs.

If we can get our noses out of our laptops and get comfortable talking to each others' postmodern presentations of self, comfortable letting people sometimes be in solitude, and comfortable expressing that sometimes we need to be in solitude, then I think that we may be able to find the café's communal public life in the coffee shop. Hopefully the rest of my thesis will suggest some ways that the coffee shop's social environment can be manipulated to encourage a simultaneously communal and individual public life. So from here on, my object of study is “the café”.

## Chapter Two: Analyzing Social Performance of Barista and Customer Roles

Holm claims that the barista is engaged in a performance of the informality of the café environment, via what Arlie Hochschild calls “deep acting” emotional labor. As I have already stated, I very much agree that the environment of the café is collaboratively produced by the repeated performances of baristas and customers. I think that approaching the café's social relationships from a performance perspective is valuable because it allows us to see how social expectations surrounding service shape the day-to-day texture of the interactions performed in the café. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides a model that can explain what it means to produce a social construction through repeated performance. Joe Muñoz' theory of disidentification demonstrates how that process of production can contain powerful possibilities for reshaping social expectations. I will begin this chapter by summarizing these theories and explaining how their focus on gender and sexuality roles can be transposed into a discussion of the barista role. To demonstrate the power of this perspective, I will present Karla Erickson's work on food servers in an informal restaurant and show how the similarities and differences between informal restaurant service and café service creates a tension between the general expectations of “service” that a barista is expected to adhere to and the unique aspects of café service that often run counter to those expectations in unexpected ways. To show the

pragmatic implications of this tension, I will then look at how the alternative barista service style advocated by David Schomer in the training materials he distributes to Espresso Vivace staff has positive long-term effects on tipping, the emotional labor required of baristas, and the formation of café regulars.

Judith Butler's seminal work *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* is a widely applied, discussed, and criticized piece that presents the foundation of her theory of gender performativity. Though the scope and some of the definitions and assumptions she makes use of have been challenged by others and even amended by her in later works, I still think that the piece retains its usefulness as an exploration of some of the consequences that come from taking a seemingly monolithic social form like “gender”, or “the barista”, and analyzing it not as a static role but instead as constituted by the continual re-performance of a living set of nuanced and specific expectations that are in a constant state of re-negotiation with social and physical realities.

Mirroring my discussion of the “public game” in chapter one, Judith Butler's base assertion is that the 'self' is irretrievably constituted within social discourse, 'outside' of the individual.<sup>1</sup> Butler is quick to point out that in her theories “the existence and facticity of the material or natural dimensions of the body are not denied, but reconceived as distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings”.<sup>2</sup> What she means here is that though an individual has a physical

body with nominally<sup>1</sup> specific sexual organs, the individual only comes to understand those organs as marking them as gendered “male” or “female” through the absorption of the cultural knowledge behind those terms. The uneven and culturally produced fit between physical sex and social gender can be clearly seen in the historically varying opinions on what secondary sex characteristics are considered “more masculine” or “more feminine”, such as the 1970s association between facial and chest hair with virile masculinity, versus the early 2000s preference for the heavily muscled, clean shaven/hairless look.

Butler points out this defining power of culture by taking Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that “the body *is* a historical situation” and extending it to say that the body “is a manner of doing, dramatizing and *reproducing* a historical situation”.<sup>3</sup> This idea of reproducing its own historical situation is crucial to understanding the power of Butler's argument. She is first claiming that we use the specific cultural context—the historical situation—we are embedded in to understand and define what implications our bodily reality has for our social self. She is then asserting that in making use of that specific cultural context to define the nature of the link between our sex and gender, we are engaging in an act which reproduces that

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1 I say nominally since it is possible, and more common than most believe, for a baby to be born with sex organs that exhibit some or most traits of both sexes.

cultural context. Going back to the chest hair example, when a man<sup>2</sup> in the 1990s shaved his chest because he wanted to appear more masculine, or when a men's fitness magazine only put bare-chested men on its covers, they were reinforcing the idea that bare-chested men are more masculine, further re-producing and strengthening the cultural context that caused the man and the magazine to take their actions in the first place. Put in concrete terms, this idea may not seem that striking, however when integrated with the idea of gender identifications as performed acts, it has very important implications for how the gendered self is constituted and how that constitution can be changed.

Butler describes gender identity as:

...an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.<sup>4</sup>

It is here in this definition that we begin to see the true applicability of Butler's theories for understanding the barista. Butler is arguing that gender identity develops its definitions due to the specific style in which acts are repeated. For example, the

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2 For all the queer theorists out there, I acknowledge that I am painting all of my applied examples in broad binary-gender terms and that doing so is theoretically problematic. However referring to “male identified” and “female identified” people in all of my examples and trying to explain what that implies definitionally and theoretically while simultaneously trying to explain the basics of gender construction is wildly outside the scope of this work. Further, I do not think it would provide substantially more insights in my application of these theories towards barista role production, and I think it is likely that any attempt to do so would simply confuse and turn-off non-academic readers.

cultural idea of womanhood becomes (infinitesimally) more identified with meekness in the workplace every time a woman bows her head or avoids eye-contact when speaking to a male supervisor. The implication for analyzing the barista role is that the style in which a specific barista executes all of their actions in a specific café reproduces and reinforces what it means to be a barista in that café. From the words used to greet customers to the way they pour a drink, each time a barista goes about the actions of their job, they are subtly either challenging or reinforcing the barista identity.

If gender is all a performance than all that should be necessary for one to alter society's idea of gender is to alter one's performance style. While this is true, it is important to realize that individuals are always powerfully coerced in their gender performances by the norms and values of society. As Butler explains, “surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that one does it *in accord with* certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter”.<sup>5</sup> As members of society, we do not have the option to simply not perform our gender—other people in society will read our acts as gendered performances whether we wish them to or not because gender is one of the primary lenses through which people define and understand others' actions. Just as we have little control over our actions being read as gendered, we also have little control over the fact that the people who are reading our actions make use of certain social norms in mapping our actions onto what they understand to be expressions of gender

identity. These points are perhaps easiest to understand by appealing directly to the barista identity: while on shift, the barista is expected to style the performance of their repeated acts in a certain way prescribed by both the management and the implicit social norms of service interactions because while behind bar the barista's actions are unavoidably read as an expression of the café institution's relationship to its customers. If a customer asks a barista a question over the bar and the barista does not respond, the customer is likely to take that as an indication of rudeness and insufficient care for customers, regardless of whether the barista simply didn't hear the customer, was finishing making a drink before responding, or was genuinely uninterested in responding to the customer's needs.

The example of the barista behind bar not responding to the customer illustrates another important part of Butler's theory:

Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance... so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.<sup>6</sup>

Performing an identity is a performative act that always takes place *on a stage*, and that stage functions as a set of terms which enforces and constrains the possible interpretations of the individual's performance. For gender, we are always already on stage since in our current society gender is inextricably a part of (almost) all social identifications. However in the barista example, it is the fact that the barista is behind the bar that causes their actions to be read as a performance of the barista identity in that café. When standing in the bar area, or wearing an apron or towel, or carrying a

bustub through the seating area, all of an individual's actions become unavoidably cast as that individual's interpretation of what the proper way to be a barista is in that café. This is why it is so common for cafés to insist that all employees on breaks or off shift not hang out in the bar area—because even if the employee believes themselves to be “off work” and no longer representing the café, the customer has no way of ascertaining this and will still read the off-shift employee's actions as representing the café because that employee is in the bar area. By the same token, an off-shift employee sitting in the customer area who tells a customer not to do something will not be read as speaking authoritatively for the café because that employee is not on a stage which causes their actions to be read as authoritative.

In the barista not responding to the customer example, the final piece of Butler's theory is reflected in the fact that though the customer does not know the specific reason the barista has not responded to their question, and may not have ever witnessed the barista respond or not respond to any other customers' questions, the customer is still likely to take the lack of response as indicative of the overall barista identity in that café. Butler observes that though gender identity is constructed through the internally discontinuous repetition of stylized acts, gender identity is taken to be a fixed, unified whole.<sup>7</sup> We believe that every action of an individual we witness is a reflection of that individual's overarching gender identity, instead of seeing each action as only one extremely contextually specific performance of the always shifting continual re-production of meanings that taken in total constitutes

that individual's socially constructed gender identity. It is the difference between seeing the act as a product of the identity and seeing the identity as a product of the acts. Obviously this is not a hard and fast rule, people often do take into account the context of actions and accept that individuals cannot always present exactly the performance they wish to. However it is still the default assumption that each isolated act is in some way reflective of the larger identity—a quick perusal of the Yelp reviews for any café will show you that there are people who believe that the amazing drink they received means that the café's drinks are un-erringly fantastic, and there are people who believe that the one time the barista did not respond to their question means that the customer service at the café is uniformly aloof and horrible, regardless of whether not the barista in that specific instance simply failed to hear the customer's question over the noise of the espresso grinder.

This assumption of a continuous identity reflected in each individual act certainly has the alarming consequence of requiring that a café's baristas repeat every act in the exact same style every time if they wish to present the same barista identity to all customers. However Butler points out that there is also a powerful potential for affecting change inherent in this assumption of continuous identity: “possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style”.<sup>8</sup> There is no inherent link between the individual performed acts and the identity they are taken to be expression of, beyond the fact that the acts'

performance on a social stage will cause the acts and identity to be read as linked. An individual is able to choose the style of their acts, though there may be social sanctions for specific choices, and the more acts an individual perform in a given style, the more that style will be taken to be linked to the identity society, and they themselves, believes they are expressing. Applied to the barista and presented in layman's terms, this insight may not seem particularly noteworthy: the more that each barista at a café performs service acts that are read as attentive to customer demands, the more customers will believe that the café's barista identity includes being attentive in general. To understand the import of Butler's theory, we have to look at exactly *how* the deliberate changing of a performance's style can affect a change of social perceptions.

To explain the transformative possibilities of shifting identity performance styles, I turn to Jose Muñoz' concept of 'disidentification'. This concept comes out of his work studying drag and camp performances of queer<sup>3</sup> performance artists of color in 1970s and 1980s New York City, specifically the way that the conceptual load of those performances arose out of the differences between what society expects of the artists and the roles they were portraying versus how the artists actually performed those roles in their works. He calls the identities of these artists in their performance pieces “identities-in-difference. These identities-in-difference emerge from a failed

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3 I use “queer” as a catch-all term for anyone on the LGBTQI spectrum—i.e. anyone who is gender/sexuality nonconforming in some way.

interpellation<sup>4</sup> within the dominant public sphere”.<sup>9</sup> It is this failed interpellation that occasions the term disidentification. Society sought to interpellate the artists as individuals whose acts of identity performance should fit within the dominant society's preconceived notions of what stylizations marked “people of color” and “queers”. These artists' identity performances reflected some of the styles that society expected of their identities, but subverted other expectations. This hybridization of styles caused society to fail to fully interpellate the artists, with important consequences according to Muñoz' reading of Butler:

What are the possibilities of politicizing disidentification, this experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong? Butler answers: “it may be that the affirmation of that slippage, that the failure of identification, is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference.”<sup>10</sup>

The seed of the artists' resistance comes from the artists failing to express their identities in the styles that the dominant society prescribed, instead expressing their identities via styles that were explicitly predicated on the dominant society's confusion at the artist's failure to conform.

To understand how the artists' non-conforming identity performance can have subversive power, we need to look at Muñoz' assertion: “what stops

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4 For those not familiar with sociology jargon, interpellation is when a dominant individual or system attempts to forcibly identify a subjugated individual to further some sort of interest of the dominator. The canonical example is a police officer pointing at you and saying “Stop! Don't move!” The policeman has just interpellated you as a citizen subject to their legal authority so that they can exercise that authority over you in some way. By stopping, you affirm your identity as a citizen subject to their legal authority.

identification from happening is always the ideological restrictions implicit in an identificatory site".<sup>11</sup> In other words, what prevents the artists from fully identifying with the performance expectations ascribed to their identity by the dominant society is the fact that those performance expectations are part of the dominant society's ideological position which restricts the artist's identities in ways they do not wish to be restricted. The artists did not fully identify with the stereotypes that society ascribed to queers and people of color, and so they chose not to express all of the aspects of those stereotypes. What is important here is that Muñoz is arguing that the linkages between specific performed acts and the identities that the dominant society attempts to enforce always carry the implicit political goal of causing the subjugated individual to accept the dominant ideological definition of that subjugated individual's relationship to society. In essence, identity performance expectations always contain a power relationship that attempts to serve the ideological interests of the dominant party.

I promise I'm going to apply this all to the café in a second and it will make a lot more sense. But first, we need one more quote from Muñoz:

Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology...tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles.<sup>12</sup>

What Muñoz is talking about here is the idea of performing an identity that is explicitly constructed out of both the differences *and similarities* between the

subjugated individual's identity expression and the identity expression expected of them by the dominant society. Because the dominant society's prescribed identity expression is unavoidably an ideologically loaded act linked to a specific social stage of identity performance, an individual is able to work to change that dominant ideology by performing an act on that stage that engages with the ideology but does not totally accept it.

Here is an application to the barista identity: You have a heavily tattooed and pierced barista working at a high-end café—this is the subjugated individual. A customer comes in who in general holds a very negative perception of tattoos and piercings and believes anyone with them to be stupid and degenerate—this perception is the dominant social ideology. The customer reaches the front of the line and is forced by the social stage of the café service interaction to interact with the barista. The customer understands that the social stage of the café service interaction places them in the dominant position and so the customer feels free to address the barista curtly and disdainfully, perhaps asking some sort of sneering question about the type of coffee used that implies the customer does not believe the barista is capable of making them a premium drink—this is the dominant customer's attempt to interpellate the barista as stupid and not worth common courtesy. The customer expects the pierced and tattooed barista to either respond impolitely or completely acquiesce to the power dynamics of the café service interaction by responding subserviently, though in a way that reflects the barista's incompetence at their job—

this is the interpellation's ideological goal of affirming the customer's social and intellectual superiority over heavily tattooed/pierced people. Instead of doing either of these things, the barista responds to the question warmly and gives a detailed answer about the farm the coffee comes from, how it was grown and processed, and what sort of flavor notes to expect in the cup—this is the barista engaging in a disidentificatory act. The barista is accepting the fundamental framing of the attempted interpellation by responding to the customer's question instead of not responding and saying something like “why'd you ask that like you think I wouldn't know the answer, you jerk?” but the barista is not accepting the ideological implication that they should be responding in a surly or subservient way. Because the customer has defined their expectations of the barista's performance as reflecting the identity of tattooed/pierced people, by responding warmly and very competently, the barista is able to subvert the customer's expectations about tattooed/pierced people, which has the effect of to at least some degree permanently altering the customers expectations going forward because the customer approached the interaction ideologically.

“You can change people's beliefs in stereotypes by acting in a way that doesn't line up with them” certainly isn't a particularly radical statement. The important part of the application of disidentification to this situation is that it identifies the factors that force those beliefs to be changed. The nature of the café service interaction forces the customer into an act that performs their identity vis-a-vis their beliefs about the barista. However that act is legitimated and reaffirms the customer's identity

performance only if the barista responds with the expected style of performance. As Butler has pointed out, identity can be changed by changing the style of the performance of the acts associated with it, and so this reliance of one act upon the other means that a change of style by either the customer *or the barista* can change the identity being re-produced. Even though the café service interaction is a stage where the customer is afforded the dominant position, the barista is still able to within certain limits effect how the barista and customer identities are performed on that stage. There are even certain aspects of that stage that give added power to certain styles of performance by the barista. The café service interaction as a stage emphasizes performances of coffee craft competency and knowledge by the barista, making them seem more authoritative because such performances by staff are expected in, or at least within the standard terms of, the café stage. Of course the café service interaction also expects and emphasizes performances of subservience by the barista. The customer made use of the expectations of subservience in their performance, and by responding to the question instead of lashing out, the barista accepted those expectations and to some degree performed subservience. However the barista did not accept the additional expectations the customer had based on the barista's appearance, and chose to “work on and against” those expectations by countering with a performance of competency and knowledge that was particularly emphasized by the café stage. In this way we can see that though the café service interaction places restrictions on a barista's identity performance, if the barista is willing to accept some of those

restrictions, the café service interaction also provides the barista ways to counter other attempted restrictions on their performance, and especially restrictions that come from the customer.

## **Analyzing Barista Performance: Emotional Labor, Tipping, Regulars and the Professional Barista**

David Schomer, one of the pioneers of the specialty coffee movement and the owner of Espresso Vivace, the first café I worked at, begins his new-staff training packet with the following definition of the barista:

“The espresso pro is so many things at once, a host, an artist in a highly technical culinary art, a performer on an exotic glittering stage, counselor, listener, friend and let us not forget...a drug dealer.”<sup>13</sup>

This definition clearly matches up with the ideas of baristas performing a specific and nuanced role in the café, and David's definition suggests many possible aspects of that performance that we could analyze. In the rest of this chapter, I want to focus narrowly on one of the aspirations in David's definition, and one of its omissions: the barista as a service “professional”, specifically the barista as a *tip-earning* service professional.

Labeling someone a “professional” suggests that a high degree of seriousness, skill, and personal investment is involved in their job, and the requirement of a certain amount of professionalism is widely understood as a requirement for a job to be socially acceptable as a possible “career”. Though society does not always understand

food servers<sup>5</sup> as professionals, many servers are able to find satisfaction and professionalism in their job and some servers are able to make it into a successful, rewarding career.<sup>14</sup>

In the expanding world of high-end gourmet cafés<sup>6</sup>, the amount of training and experience expected of baristas has greatly increased. Based on my own experiences in terms of wages, tips and interactions with customers, as well as my conversations with other baristas, I think this expectation of increased training and experience has outstripped the increases in baristas being understood as professionals engaged in a possible career. There has certainly been an increase in public appreciation for quality coffee, and average consumers are increasingly realizing the level of skill and dedication that goes into excellent drinks, beautiful latte art, and carefully prepared and fully explained per-cup drip coffees. However I still think that the levels of reward, both monetarily and emotionally, have not increased sufficiently. Moreover, the general public still does not view the job as particularly challenging. I saw this clearly when I started hiring for the student-run college café I started and

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5 I interchangeably use the gender-neutral terms “server” or “food server” throughout this section to refer to the full-service restaurant staff-people often referred to as “waiter” or “waitress”.

6 I have chosen to limit the scope of this section to addressing the top end of the cafe market since that is the segment I have the most experience with and the segment that is most likely to require career-level dedication and professionalism from their staff. Many of the issues discussed still hold true for less premium independent cafes, though usually to a lesser degree. Corporate and franchise cafe operations are markedly different and the issues discussed here can change radically in those contexts.

many people were surprised when I asked for a full resume and written responses to a set of questions, and I think the hiring and retention difficulties that I know many cafés experience, especially in the North East, further speak to this. This disconnect requires a critical examination of what it means to be a tip-earning service professional with an eye towards better understanding the evolving role of the barista and hopefully expanding the possibilities of being a career barista.

By examining the key ways in which the barista service interaction differs from food server interactions, I hope to show the particular challenges that have largely precluded the possibility of baristas being understood as tip-earning professionals. Most of these challenges take the form of performance style expectations that are at odds with constraints imposed on baristas by the unique stage of the café. Comparing the areas of congruence and difference between baristas and the understanding of food servers in critical literature will help us to see exactly what the differences are between the café stage and the restaurant stage, hopefully suggesting ways to bring the style of performance expected of the barista more in line with the café's restrictions.

I will begin by explaining the model of food server labor and compensation according to existing research. The academic work on servers I have found focuses on servers in informal or casual dining establishments, and I think that this focus works quite well when attempting to compare to the informal, accessible café establishment. I will use my own experience as a barista and interviews with James and Brian, two

other professional baristas, to demonstrate the ways the role of the barista relates to the model of servers in informal restaurants. This should provide us with a clear understanding of what creates specific performance expectations for the barista and what the consequences of those expectations are. I will close by applying this understanding to an analysis of the causes and consequences of the alternative barista performance expectations presented by David Schomer in his training material for Espresso Vivace.

### **Challenges and Rewards for the Career Service-Worker**

Food-service workers in general, be they servers, bartenders or baristas, are rarely understood by wider society as professionals,<sup>15</sup> despite the finely tuned mental, physical and emotional skills that can be necessary in these jobs. This can be attributed to many things, from the perceived dirtiness of working with food, to the historical association between serving and low-class “servants”, to the belief that all service-work is low-skilled, to the unseemly associations of receiving a large part of one's income in cash in the form of tips. Despite these negative perceptions, there is ample research attesting to the fact that, while difficult, it is possible for servers to emotionally invest in their work and find personally rewarding, successful careers in serving.<sup>16</sup>

Though some are able to make successful careers in serving, it is not possible to do so based solely on the rewards of the average customer interaction and the base

salary of a server. Research on servers has shown that the two forms of compensation that allow servers to maintain long-term emotional and financial health are the personal connections they form with some customers and the income they receive from tips. These forms of compensation are intimately related to one of the primary requirements of the server: emotional labor.

Emotional labor, tips and emotional rewards will each be explored in their own section of in-depth analysis, but first we should understand in broad terms what emotional labor is and how it is related to the career-enabling rewards of tips and personal connections. In her seminal work *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Hochschild describes emotional labor as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; intended to produce a particular state of mind in others”.<sup>17</sup> Erving Goffman calls this management of outward indicators of feeling “face-work”<sup>18</sup>, and when this skill becomes a part of the necessary skills of production for a job, the worker's face-work becomes an alienable form of labor. Service roles generally and food server roles specifically are excellent examples of the ways in which face-work can be an integral and largely unacknowledged or denigrated part of a worker's labor.

The emotional labor done by servers is a large part of the total labor of the job<sup>19</sup> and often goes unacknowledged. Because of this, emotional labor is one of the primary sources of emotional detachment and burnout in servers, and this burnout is one of the main reasons that people quit the job.<sup>20</sup> To counter this emotional burnout,

servers can form interpersonal bonds with customers, transforming the commercial exchange with the customer into a social exchange<sup>21</sup>, creating a relationship of genuine caring and connection that gives the servers meaningful emotional rewards in return for all of the emotional labor they must do in their jobs.

Tips are the more widely acknowledged and studied form of compensation for servers. Though tips make up anywhere from 50% to 90% of servers' incomes<sup>22</sup>, their significance for serving as a career goes beyond the explicitly financial: “the occupational structure of serving offers little or no advancement, benefits, or rewards for seniority...the only structural reward for excellence is access to lucrative shifts that might result in more tips”.<sup>23</sup> Increased tips and increased strength of personal connections with customers are two of the very few ways that servers can develop a feeling of advancement and achievement in their jobs.

Especially in more informal settings, increased tips and strong personal connections coalesce in the figure of the “regular”. The regular is someone who comes into the restaurant repeatedly and has some form of connection with the place. “Becoming a regular requires consistent visits over a period of time, usually several years”,<sup>24</sup> and the connection that is formed is usually between the customer and one or more specific members of the waitstaff.<sup>25</sup> Regulars tend to tip more,<sup>26</sup> and because of their repeat patronage the service interaction becomes more predictable so that less time is spent explaining the menu, restaurant etc. and more time can be spent in social conversation.<sup>27</sup> Regulars are the lifeblood of most successful informal

restaurants with career servers because in addition to the financial rewards, their repeated presence, predictability and connection to the place helps form the communal social fabric from which servers draw their emotional rewards.<sup>28</sup>

Nurturing regulars is one of the primary goals of the career server because of the economic and emotional benefits. One of the primary distinctions between restaurants and cafés is the differences in the forms regulars take and the ways that regular patronage is encouraged. In order to understand how these differences reflect the larger differences between the café and restaurant performance stages, it is first necessary to unpack the issues of tipping and emotional labor.

### **Economic and Social Negotiation: Tipping for the Performance**

In his work *Tipping: An Anthropological Meditation*, David Beriss states: “tipping is an interesting mode of communication between workers and customers, partaking simultaneously of the symbolic and the utilitarian, the meaningful and the functional”.<sup>29</sup> The base of the tipping exchange is economic, yet research and theorizing has shown that purely economic arguments only partially explain the practice. It is important to understand the economic arguments because our explorations later in the paper will show that certain aspects of café service actually strengthen the economic argument compared to restaurant service. However in both service contexts it is necessary to integrate a social-symbolic explanation to fully understand what the tip is “paying for”.

The basic idea of the economic explanation of tipping is to be found in one of the legends surrounding the origin of the word: many claim that it is an acronym for “To Insure Prompt Service”, “a sign displayed over boxes that received customer change in London coffeehouses”.<sup>30</sup> Economic explanations rest on the belief that the “tip is simply a payment for something extra”, compensation for servers whose performances go above and beyond the minimum expectations of their job by providing additional physical or emotional labor. Every person responds to social performances differently and what exactly constitutes “above and beyond” service is not easily quantifiable, and so the tip can be understood as a flexible economic response to this variability.<sup>31</sup> This explanation of the function of the tip has been borne out in a small number of studies on the effects of the timing and size of the tip, for example Hsieh and Wu's finding that the earlier in the interaction that tour group operators received their tip, the more service effort they expended.<sup>32</sup>

The idea that the tip is paying for “good” service is the most commonly understood explanation for tipping, even though it implies certain assumptions that do not hold particularly true in restaurants, though they are one of the largest tip-based industries. The economic explanation implies that there is a strong correlation between the quality of service and the size of the subsequent tip, when in actuality the size of the tip in restaurants has been found to only weakly correlate to quality of service, relying at least as much on factors such as the socio-economic class and psychological profile of the tipper.<sup>33</sup>

This weak correlation may be attributable to one of the fundamental inconsistencies between the economic explanation of tipping and the realities of restaurant service: in a restaurant the tip is given after service has concluded, and so an economic motivation explanation of tipping must rest on an assumption of repeated service interactions between customer and tip-recipient. In other words, “the customers have to trust that they will get the same server next time and that the server will remember their previous tipping behavior”.<sup>34</sup> For many if not most restaurants, repeat service interactions with the same customer and server happen rarely unless the customer is a frequent regular. With the tip coming after the conclusion of service, the money can only be seen as “insuring prompt service” in the abstract way that a server will attempt to perform what they believe to be “good service” because they believe that doing so will obligate the customer to give a large tip. However there is no concrete requirement for a customer to tip and the amount they leave cannot affect the already concluded service of the meal. As such, a customer leaving a large tip would be an example of a customer acting against their own economic interests unless that customer is a frequent regular.

Boas Shamir provides a possible explanation for the disconnect between the economic explanation and the timing of the tip: if the tip is not actually operating as an economic motivator, it is most likely operating as a performance of a particular identity by the customer. In Shamir's analysis, the tip operates as a “defense against gratitude”, a performance of generosity by the customer which serves to affirm the

superior status of the customer by preventing any imbalanced obligations of social reciprocity between customer and server.<sup>35</sup> This idea of imbalanced obligations is one of the main themes of the social explanations of tipping, most of which are based on an understanding of tipping as a symbolic ritual in which the tip occupies the social role of a gift. It is the symbolism of the tipping ritual which creates a de-facto social requirement that a customer tip, explaining why they do so against their own economic interest.

Symbolic explanations of tipping focus on tipping as a gift exchange ritual in the Maussian sense.<sup>36</sup> In Mauss's analysis, the exchange of gifts is a universal social practice that serves to establish and reinforce social hierarchies by demonstrating the gift-giver's power over the recipient. By performing a show of generosity, the gift-giver is presenting themselves as both economically strong enough to be able to easily make the gift, and self-less and grateful enough to bestow that gift on the receiver. If there was an equal and contemporaneous giving of gifts between parties, this would be a trade instead of a gift because neither party is being generous. Gift-exchange creates bonds of debt and reciprocity between the parties to it—the gift-giver's performance of economic and emotional strength implicitly rests on the receiver's insufficient or non-existent gift-giving, and so the receiver must “return the gift” at some point if they wish to right that social imbalance. Once again, identities are constituted through continuous re-performance of acts, so if one wishes to be seen as generous and having economic power, one must continually give gifts that are more

generous than the receiver's. Though subsequent theorizing has questioned Mauss's understanding of the gift as always a unilateral act of dominance, research has affirmed that gift exchange, like tipping, may seem voluntary but is "in fact highly obligatory" in the social situations that call for it.<sup>37</sup> Because of this, gift exchange is greatly valued as a practice across all cultures for its ability to build and strengthen social cohesion, leading to the practice being understood as all but obligatory.

Applying this model to tipping, customers tip in restaurants because they wish to discharge the reciprocal obligation that comes from the customer having received something more than the food they have paid for: namely, the "service" from the server. "The customer is both unwilling to be dependent on the service-giver and interested in denying any possibility of the server's superiority" and so the customer reaffirms their social superiority by giving the gift of a tip.

The fact that the amount of the tip is voluntary is crucial to the symbolic functioning of tipping since a set price for service precludes the tip being construed as a gift. Along these lines, there may be productive arguments to be made for fixed service charges as a way to intervene in the customer's social dominance in the service relationship. However, construing the tip as a gift also forces one to understand the provision of service as a gift. This can open important avenues of agency for the server: for example, if giving service is a gift and therefore optional though highly obligatory, then when a customer is being particularly demeaning the server has the option to not perform the servile attitude the customer might expect. Unfortunately

this is not particularly an opportunity for disidentificatory changing of the social relationship because the server does not have enough control over which parts of the interpellation they accept and which they deny. If the server chooses to not perform the servility the customer expects, the customer is free to not tip, continuing the customer's desired interpellation of the server as a "bad server" not worthy of civility.

Beyond the basic reciprocal obligation of returning the gift of service, the symbolic load of the tip as gift serves to ameliorate important consumer anxieties. One of the main consumer anxieties that is negotiated via the tip is the anxiety of having the "primary-group ... intimate service" of food provision "transacted in the public sphere of market exchange".<sup>38</sup> Sharing of food is one the oldest and most symbolically loaded human rituals, and allowing a stranger to perform it in the semi-public space of a restaurant can suggest a violation of normal rules of intimacy, especially since the economic terms of the exchange could be seen as cheapening or parodying that intimacy. The symbolism of the gift is the key to the tip's ability to counter this violation and reestablish the social boundaries and superior status of the customer. The tip forces the exchange back into the private realm because the exact amount of the tip is (usually) known only to the tipper, perhaps the other diners in the tipper's party, and the receiving server. Social boundaries are thus affirmed, and the social hierarchy is reinstated. The act of tipping is a performance of the customer's supposed identity as the one who has the power to dictate what parts of the service interaction will be performed in public vs private, even though in actuality

the entire service interaction is highly regimented and largely set in its levels of publicity. However the impression created by the performance still holds, so the tip still reproduces and reinforces the customer's position of superiority vis-a-vis their ability to dictate how the tip will be exchanged and how much of a gift the obligation of the service exchange requires, or if it does not require a gift at all.

Tippling can also soothe consumer anxieties by performing and reinforcing a customer's desired self-image.<sup>39</sup> By giving a tip above the base level of social acceptability, the customer is engaged in an action against their economic interest that may demonstrate to themselves and the other people party to the tip that the customer “is not fully trapped in the non-individual, unhuman market mechanism”.<sup>40</sup> Conversely a customer leaving a below average tip or no tip at all may be performing an understanding of themselves as someone who stands by their convictions about what is bad service that should be punished, or perhaps someone who has “figured out the angles” by cheating social norms to their own advantage. Each time that the customer tips, they are presented with the opportunity to perform an act in a generous or stingy style as befits what they see as their identity.

In all of these symbolic examples, the gift of the tip is functioning as a performance that negotiates the uneven fit between emotions, social ritual and economic exchange, in some way “personalizing” the otherwise economic service transaction. This personalizing can be problematic in that it opens up the transaction to connections with other acts of social dominance. For example, the tip may be

consciously or subconsciously seen as authorizing the flirtation and sexual objectification between customer and worker that is so often a part of service work.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the emotional labor done by servers is an unavoidable part of service work, and so tipping's ability to force an emotional/social component onto the economic exchange with the customer can be seen as an important structural response to the uneven power relations between server and customer.

Whether acting as a primarily economic motivator or as a symbolic negotiator of the complex symbolic terrain of service, the tip as gift occupies a powerful place within tipping cultures. To understand why customers tip or do not tip in a particular service relationship, it is crucial to examine the social symbolism at play within that relationship. In particular, attention to the personalizing aspects of the tip is necessary to understand the ways that the perceived interplay between the economic and the social registers in a service performance can dictate how the customers approach that service relationship. In general, the more that a service interaction seems to integrate the discretionary performance of emotions and knowledge by the server, the larger the tip will be for that interaction.

The social demeanor and actions of customers do much to determine the nature of the emotional labor required of servers, and this can make or break a service worker's ability to approach their job with sustained dedication and professionalism. Being able to receive a sufficient income in tips is crucial for the career server, but the

emotional and social issues that the the tip symbolically negotiates can be just as important.

## **Emotional Labor and Personal Connection**

The issue of emotional labor presents a perfect example of the serious implications for the server that result from the coercive performance requirements of the restaurant. Hochschild defines emotional labor as the management of one's display of feelings intended to produce a desired feeling in another. The norms of the service interaction coerce the server to perform a pose of attention to customer's wishes, also referred to as "deference": "To defer is to show regard or respect to another through symbolic gestures. Hochschild refers to it as a symbolic bowing to another."<sup>42</sup> The research of Hochschild, Robin Leidner and Erickson all use the idea of emotional labor as constituted by acts of "face-work", an idea first presented by Erving Goffman that refers to the conscious attempt to modulate the social impression created by one's facial expression, tone and gestures.<sup>43</sup> Face-work could be said to be the conscious manipulation of Butler's point that in the observer's mind, the social identity of the person being observed is constituted by the style of the specific act being observed.

Hochschild, Leidner and Erickson all state that a service worker may perform the expected deference at the level of "surface acting", where only their outward appearance in the moment matches the emotional impression demanded by their

labor role, or they may use “deep acting” to try and manipulate their own internal emotions to match the expected performance.<sup>44</sup> According to Butler's theory, both of these options should be equally effective since it does not matter if the server curses the customer while talking in the kitchen, as long as the performance the customer sees reflects deference. However Erickson and Holm both make the point that it is hard to consistently present an enthusiastic, genuine-seeming service performance if the server or barista does not truly feel that performance to be a reflection of their identity.<sup>45</sup> This makes a lot of sense in light of Butler, because the surface-acting server is constantly performing acts in a style that runs opposite to their identity, and since the constant repetition of acts comes to constitute identities, the server will inevitably experience internal identity conflict and strain.

Regardless of the level at which a server performs deference, skill with expressing deference to the customer's emotions via face-work is integral to serving:

Perhaps the greatest difficulty servers encounter is in learning how to put on multiple emotional performances simultaneously. As servers' bodies move between locations and slip between tables, they adjust their faces and affect to react to irate customers in one booth, a favorite regular celebrating a birthday in the next...<sup>46</sup>

By paying for a meal and tacitly agreeing to the social contract of the tip, the customer has bought the right to have their emotions take precedence over the server's. Having multiple sets of customers who all expect this precedence, the server must juggle many different emotional performances at once. The extent to which a server feels drained at the end of a shift has much to do with how emotionally demanding and particular their customers have been that night. Mirroring the strain

that comes from the repeated performance of surface acting, the broader the range and the greater the intensity of emotional performances required of the server in a particular night, the more the server will feel exhausted by their emotional labor. Quite simply, it is hard to quickly shift through multiple emotional performance styles and it is hard to not let the many emotional styles you are required to perform pull your internal emotional state in all those different directions.

The expectation of emotional labor can create serious problems for the long-term server. Emotional burnout caused by the strains of emotional labor is one of the leading reasons that servers leave the profession.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the expected types of emotions for servers can have different negative effects based on gender: female-identified server's emotional labor may be more thoroughly exploited because of the association of caring with femininity; and male-identified servers may have trouble “finding meaning in service work and developing work identities in feminized work cultures”.<sup>48</sup>

Formalizing the discussion of the tension created by face-work, Hochschild's analysis states that “the demands of emotional labor intensify workers’ alienation, estranging them from their own feelings as the organization encroaches on previously sacrosanct parts of the self”.<sup>49</sup> However, research has shown that in jobs with higher degrees of autonomy, especially food serving, emotional labor is actually positively correlated to job satisfaction.<sup>50</sup> Understanding how emotional labor can lead to

greater satisfaction despite its many possible negative consequences is crucial to encouraging professionalism and career-orientation in service work.

One possible explanation for the increased job satisfaction is that the emotional labor of servers can result in more personalized interactions with customers, providing emotional rewards to the server and minimizing the distance between the expected emotional performance of the server and the internal feelings of the server because the server has an increased identification with the communal feeling of the restaurant. Erickson and Taylor both develop this idea in their work on long-term servers in informal, regular-oriented restaurants and diners.<sup>51</sup> In their analysis, the key to extracting emotional rewards from emotional labor is the way that interactions with regular customers become more personal and emotionally significant over time. As the server and regular get to know each other, the server no longer has to spend time on the unavoidably superficial performance of explaining the menu or asking the regular what they want to drink. Instead, the server and regular can spend time in actual sociable conversation and over the years this conversation can lead to remarkably strong social relationships—many of the career diner waitresses interviewed by Taylor even referred to their regulars as their “family”.<sup>52</sup> Even with non-regular customers, some servers are still able to receive emotional rewards from providing excellent personalized service to customers and knowing that they “made a customer's night”.<sup>53</sup>

Emotional labor and emotional rewards are central to the lives of professional servers. Particular configurations of restaurant style, workplace culture and customer behavior have a tremendous impact on the nature of the emotional labor and emotional rewards in a server's job. Manageable forms of labor and positive rewards are crucial to a server's long-term ability to maintain emotional and physical health, invest in the community of their workplace and derive dignity and satisfaction from the work they do.<sup>54</sup> Attention to these relationships in a particular service context is critical to understanding the ways that context enables or precludes enduring professionalism and career workers. In the informal restaurant, and especially in the café, understanding the link between emotional labor and emotional reward requires paying particular to the figure of the regular, and especially how the regular relationship can be cultivated through conversation.

### **Conversation and Connection in Restaurant Service**

In a restaurant or diner, the interaction between a customer and a server can last anywhere from twenty minutes to several hours. During that time, the server will come and go from the table multiple times: seating the customer, taking drink orders, providing information about the menu, taking food orders, serving food, refilling drinks, and of course handling payment. While the server is doing so, they are also juggling many other tables with the same demands. The multiple, concurrent service

requirements of food servers provides the servers with powerful tools to personalize their emotional labor to each individual customer.

The associations between serving and “caring” emotional roles means that servers are expected to try and create some form of connection with the customer. The many sub-interactions a server has with each customer allow the server to use face-work to modulate their emotional performance style over the course of service if their initial attempts at establishing a connection fall flat.<sup>55</sup> Each sub-interaction also contains a certain amount of time for the server to talk to the customer and further connect with them. Outside of the required time of the normal sub-interactions, the server is also able to (within limits) spend additional time having personal conversation with customers if they choose, since the tasks the server must complete are not strictly time sensitive and other customers have an understanding that servers must juggle many competing demands, meaning that their own needs will not always be immediately addressed.

The flexible and ample opportunities for conversation afforded to the server are key to the server's ability to form personal connections and nurture regular customers. By personalizing the service interaction with sociable conversation that goes beyond the simple performance of deference, long-time servers who emotionally invest in their work are able to build up a loyal following of regular customers, transforming their shift into “social time” with people they often know quite well.<sup>56</sup>

This allows them to see their emotional labor more along the lines of the emotional labor that we all must do in creating and maintaining friendships.

Experience and supportive regulars can also allow seasoned servers to develop a sense of confidence in their own personality and service style which they can then project in all service interactions, irrespective of a customer being a regular or not. A new server may try and present numerous different performance styles, such as brash and sassy or warm and homey or flip and funny, based on what they think each individual customer will respond to. However as the server becomes more seasoned, they will inevitably tend to settle into a smaller range of performance styles because it can be so emotionally exhausting to try and constantly switch through a wide range. If customers respond positively to the narrower range, the customers may be more likely to become regulars because the server's stable style of performance causes the customer to read the server as being more "genuine" in their identity. As the server re-performs a specific style more and more, and hopefully gets more rewarding social connections from it, they will tend to view that performance style as part of their actual identity and become more confident in the appeal of that identity. This confidence and the connections formed with regulars are crucial to countering the alienating aspects of server's emotional labor. The way that this cycle creates self-reinforcing emotional rewards explains why successful career servers invariably engage in the "deep acting" of performing a service style that they feel matches their identity.<sup>57</sup>

## Café Service: Integrating Production Into Service

The defining difference between the server's and the barista's interaction with the customer is that the barista is simultaneously engaged in a performance of production and a performance of service. The need to produce drinks as well as serve them forces the barista in a high-end specialty cafés<sup>7</sup> to remain attached to their stations behind the service-wall and severely limits the length and number of the barista's interactions with the customers. The stationary requirement of the barista constrains the possible styles of the barista's performances in numerous ways. To understand how, I want to first break down what acts are entailed in performing café service and why those acts are largely restricted in form.

Having worked in seven different cafés and visited countless others, I have observed a good deal of variability in the way that the production and service tasks in a café are accomplished based on the particular volume and design considerations of a café. In lower-volume cafés or during slower times in busy cafés, one person may handle all of the service tasks, from drink making and handling money at the register, to serving pastries, and doing the “barback” tasks of cleaning dishes, stocking service items such as cups and brewing drip-coffee. Higher volume cafés require splitting up the tasks among a multi-person bar team. The basic split is having one person handling register, pastries and all of the other miscellaneous barback tasks while

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<sup>7</sup> Please see footnote 2 for comments on this limiting of scope.

another person focuses solely on making coffee.<sup>8</sup> Depending on the barista's skill this sort of split can handle the morning rush of a low to medium volume neighborhood café. Higher volumes require more complicated setups, possibly with the staffing of multiple register and bar stations, or having barbacking be a separate job from handling the register and pastries.

The norms and restrictions of café service that arise out of these possible configurations can fracture the unitary narrative of what “service” entails when compared to food servers.<sup>9</sup> Though the customer may understand ordering, paying, waiting during the production of and then receiving their drink as all part of the same service interaction, from a labor perspective the production requirements of the café isolate these tasks into separate procedural and conceptual roles. The reason for this split is that making coffee drinks properly requires a very specific order and timing of execution for production tasks such as starting an espresso shot's extraction or

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8 Handling the economic transaction is usually referred to as being “on register” while making drinks is usually referred to as working or being “on bar”, or simply being “barista”. This implies an interesting tension between the workers' understandings of working bar vs. register, though a customer might call workers in both positions baristas

9 Exceptions to this description can be found in the Stumptown Coffee cafes in the Portland, OR and NYC Ace Hotels, as well as in Intelligentsia Coffee's Venice Beach cafe and a few other ultra-premium cafes. These cafes do variations on the idea of a barback supporting multiple baristas that are each working their own combined bar/register station so that a customer interacts with one staff person start to finish. Exploring the ways that this more “luxury” service model does and does not bring barista's tipping and emotional labor more in line with servers is a fruitful paper topic unto itself.

steaming milk. To make excellent drinks for all customers, the barista is beholden to these production requirements over any individual customer's needs.

It is this precedence of production requirements over ordering and other “service” requirements that causes the task groups of “barista” and “register” to operate as separate conceptual roles. With multiple workers, the duties are commonly split between the workers so that one person may focus solely on the production requirements, which allows many customers' orders to be taken quickly by the register person and then queued up to be produced in batches by the barista. Even when just one person is working the café, the execution of bar and register tasks are physically separated in the space and must be executed as discrete blocks. Though American culture has a strong bias towards paying for a good before receiving it, the order of bar and register tasks is not set in stone: Espresso Vivace and some other high volume cafés arrange their bar layouts such that one or more baristas take and queue up multiple orders while simultaneously executing drink production tasks, and each customer pays after their drink is produced.

Whatever the order of tasks, the worker inevitably spends much less time per customer executing the register role compared to the barista role. Because cafés have low per-ticket sales, a successful café must maintain a constant high volume of customers. In a busy café, it is not uncommon for there to be five or more people waiting in line to be served. This can be the case for several hours straight during a morning rush, even with a three person bar team working full-tilt. The ever-presence

of new customers means that as little time as possible must be spent on each individual customer. The timing sensitivity of production dictates that a worker must spend a relatively fixed amount of time making a drink, whereas they are free to ring people through the register as quickly as they can manage. Consequently, the register interaction often lasts as little as twenty to thirty seconds, while the bar tasks will usually take between one and two minutes.

Despite this imbalance in duration, in the fracturing of service, many of the aspects of service that are common to both restaurants and cafés wind up resting on the register role. As James explained in our interview:

Working the cash register, you're point person. You have to be relatively nice to everyone that comes through. You have to be professional. You're the face of the company at that point. If people are going to tip, it depends on you.<sup>58</sup>

As James points out, the tip is almost always given at the conclusion of the economic transaction, regardless of whether or not the drink itself has been made. Based on the server model of service flow and tip compensation, this would suggest that the “service” work in a café is wholly contained within the register station.

In actuality, a large and under-appreciated portion of the service responsibilities are handled by the barista role. Firstly, in every bar-service<sup>10</sup> café I

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10 I specify “bar-service” since cafes that operate on table-service or modified bar-service such as Oddfellows Cafe & Bar in Seattle can present a different set of considerations that are much more sensitive to the specific ways in which that café approaches their service. Oddfellows for example incorporates alcohol bartending duties into the barista role, and so fully analyzing that sort of service would require integrating a substantial analysis of the performance identity of the bartender.

have observed, the physical act which ends the service interaction—the “serving” of the drink to the customer by passing it across the bar—is done by the person in the barista or barista/register role, not by someone who is only in the register role. This fact speaks to the strong link between the production performance and the “service” provided by the café, as demonstrated by things such as the pouring of latte-art: as the last step of making a milk-based drink, highly skilled baristas will usually pour the drink in view of the customer, using finely controlled movements of the steaming pitcher to create designs in the milk on the top of the drink. As a performance of production skill and professional style, this is always a crowd pleasing display that can very much be understood as part of the service being provided.

Most importantly, the task of having an actual conversation with customers can only realistically be accomplished during the barista role due to the extremely short duration of the register interaction, at least during high-volume period. While in the barista role, a worker remains largely stationary in front of the espresso machine, and most cafés are designed such that after ordering a customer will stand next to the espresso machine while waiting to receive their drink. During this production/waiting time, any reasonably skilled barista is able to go through all the steps of making coffee while simultaneously carrying on a conversation with the customer over the service wall. As we have explored above, conversation with customers is crucially linked to emotional labor, and so the fact that barista can only realistically engage in conversation while in the production performance means that

attempts to affect the emotional labor and rewards of the barista must focus mainly on the stylization of acts performed during production.

The “service” work of workers in a café is as much about production as it is about the type of “service” work that food servers provide. At the same time, what many customers and even baristas understand as appropriate service is still very much predicated on the food server model. The ways in which production requirements complicate the performance of this type of service is central to the differences in tipping and emotional labor between baristas and food servers.

### **Fast Service, Fast Regulars: Implications of Café Service for Emotional Labor and Tipping**

The most immediate difference between the emotional labor expected of baristas and that of food servers is that the barista must perform much more surface-level face-work. Since a worker will spend from twenty seconds to maybe three minutes with each customer, the workers are required to switch from one emotional performance to the next with great rapidity. At the same time, the expectations of each individual emotional performance are extremely shallow, often extending no further than “Hello, How are you doing? What can I get you?” This shallowness is extremely accented when the café is busy enough that one worker is required to only be working the register station, locking them into endless mandatory, extremely short performances.

Because of the need to constantly re-perform the same act, most baristas develop a standard set of gambits designed to quickly provide deference to customers and maximize tips. In our interview, Will explains: “I always gives each customer a smile, ask how their day is going, and make sure that they feel welcome, like they just walked into my house”. From there, in order to increase tips he will often “try to make a joke, compliment them on their clothing, their outfit, or their hairstyle”.<sup>59</sup> Often these quick things will fill the entire time of the service interaction. Because there is such a short time available for these performances and the performances must be repeated so often—as many as three hundred times or more in a shift—baristas will tend to develop a very narrow range of performance stylizations much more quickly than food servers.

The short length of the service interaction means that it's harder for any individual customer to negatively impact a barista emotionally,<sup>60</sup> which can be helpful in countering some of the alienation caused by customer's abuse of the performance of deference expected of the barista. However, this surface level impact also means that it can be much harder for baristas to emotionally invest in their expected service role, furthering the alienation caused by the difference between the organization's expected emotional performance and the internal emotional state of the worker.

While it is possible for baristas to develop a performance style that constitutes a social identity they feel matches their own, that identity will inevitably be rather two dimensional because the performative acts which constitute it are rather two-

dimensional. This means that even if the baristas engage in deep-acting and genuinely feel the emotions they are performing, they will still not be presenting an identity that fully reflects “who they are” in any serious way, and even when deep-acting, having to re-perform a consistent identity style so many times over is inevitably emotionally tiring. This increased alienation can be a huge deterrent to long-term barista work when combined with the fact that the short interaction with customers means that it can be much harder to quickly form emotionally rewarding personal connections with customers.

Food servers receive emotional rewards for their emotional labor from their relationships with regulars and from the satisfaction they get from connecting with a customer and “making their night”. The barista's analog to making someone's night could be said to be the satisfaction derived from making a delicious drink or pouring beautiful latte art that makes a customer ooh and ahh in appreciation. However this emotional reward is being derived from the barista's production labor, not their emotional labor, which may mean that the barista will derive professional satisfaction from the reward but not feel particularly emotionally compensated. In talking about how he gives service that he is proud of, James says: “I'm a professional...you [the customer] know that I'm going to make you a beautiful drink and it's going to taste phenomenal”.<sup>61</sup> This suggests that enabling this sort of reward is helpful in articulating an understanding of baristas as highly-skilled professionals, which can lead to increased job-satisfaction. However, it is necessary to look deeper into the

service interaction to find the emotional rewards that counter the burnout from emotional labor.

As with food servers, baristas largely find personal connection and emotional reward through interaction with regulars. Working at a large, popular café that is a center of the neighborhood, James explains that “Of the regulars I brought in, I’m friends with probably half of them on facebook, and if I see them around the neighborhood, I’ll say hi and chat with them, or if I run into them at a bar, I’ll have a drink with them”.<sup>62</sup> Personal connections such as these can powerfully enhance a barista’s feelings of belonging and worth in their community. However the ways that baristas form these connections differs radically from food servers.

James points out that personal connection is not necessarily the reason a customer becomes a regular at a café. Often, someone may be a regular for the simple reason that the café is close to work or on their commute,<sup>63</sup> or they prefer the product/atmosphere of the café only inasmuch as it’s the best within a short distance. This belies a massive difference between regulars at a restaurant versus regulars at a café: caffeine is a drug, and the average regular will come into the café three to four times a week to score a hit.<sup>64</sup> Compared to the one or more years it may take a customer to be understood as a regular at a restaurant<sup>65</sup>, if a customer is coming in three times a week consistently, they can become a regular with a personal connection to the barista in as little as three months.<sup>66</sup> The connection that this regular forms however is not necessarily a particularly personally rewarding one for either party.

Because the conversation in the café service interaction can be so short and superficial, someone who is even a quite frequent regular may not have much of an emotional connection to the barista. However, the sheer volume of regulars in a café means that there will inevitably be some who the barista is able to engage in conversation and develop a personal relationship with, as attested to by James' description of his relationship to some regulars above. Even the regulars who do not form a personal connection still have a positive effect on the emotional labor requirements of the barista.

The large volume of customers handled by high end cafés combined with the frequency with which regulars visit means that even those regulars who do not develop a personal connection are invaluable in that regulars are “easy”. When going through hundreds of customer interactions in a day, having easy interactions can be crucial. Regulars are easy because usually order the same drink every time, so the amount of conversation required to execute the basic service interaction can be reduced to “The usual?” Further, because the customer has been coming into the café consistently, the barista does not have to work as hard to provide a performance that presents exactly the right style every time—the customer has seen the overall style that the barista performs by witnessing many individual acts, and so the customer is more likely to have some compassion and understanding if the barista does not present the correct style in one individual act. The barista knows that the customer's view of the café's identity is constituted through experiencing many acts, and so the

barista does not have to try to perform the total identity of the café in each interaction. In essence, the barista is allowed to have a “bad day” in front of a regular because the regular has already demonstrated that they like the café and are more likely to understand that barista is simply having a bad day, perhaps even asking what's wrong.

As we can see, beyond allowing baristas to serve more customers quickly, regulars can provide a welcome break from having to go through the superficial face-work of the standard customer interaction, allowing the barista to maintain their reserves of emotional labor capacity. In an interesting inversion of Beriss's assertion that if they do not tip well customers can still return the gift of service “by becoming listeners, or becoming involved in dialogues”,<sup>67</sup> James and Will both agreed that if the service interaction with a particular regular was always quick and unobtrusive, then whether or not that customer tipped wasn't as important<sup>68</sup>.

The benefits of regulars go beyond the possibility of personal connections for baristas and their crucial role in handling high customer volume rapidly and without emotional burnout. Once again mirroring food servers, James and Will both agreed that on average regulars tip much more than non-regulars.<sup>69</sup> The increased tips received from regulars are hugely important to a barista's long-term financial stability, and I would say that this is one of the reasons Espresso Vivace and other premium cafés that successfully encourage more career-oriented baristas tend to have a much higher percentage of regulars than other cafés.

Our earlier analysis of tipping suggests that its symbolism goes beyond the simply economic, and James agrees, saying that he understands regulars as tipping “because they appreciate us as people, they know we don't make a lot of money and they like coming there, they know that it's like a social lubricant almost”.<sup>70</sup> This social lubricant function is an important way for regulars to signal that they have an emotional connection to the café and the baristas working in it. By giving a tip, especially a large one, the customer is acknowledging that the barista has given the customer a gift of service beyond the drink provided which the customer should feel obligated to return. This is especially important to the barista because the overall café service relationship is construed in such production focused economic terms that it can be easy to feel like the customers don't even realize that the barista is engaged in a stylized service performance. Receiving tips from customers signals to the barista that their performed service identity was noticed and appreciated.

The tip as a humanizing social lubricant is not the only possible symbolic significance of a customer tipping in a café. David Schomer points out, “the first reality of the barista: seeing and greeting people that may not be ready to face the world”.<sup>71</sup> This provision of coffee when customers are not at their best could certainly be understood as the provision of an intimate group service in the same way that the food server's serving of food is. So customers in the café may use tipping to correct the imbalance created by the barista seeing them in a vulnerable state, or more generously, the customer may be performing their appreciation for the barista's kind

help in getting the customer's day started right. Once again mirroring the restaurant, by tipping, a customer may also be performing their own understanding of themselves as generous, especially since tipping is not as obligatory in the café.

Though there are social symbolic functions of the tip in the café, the nature of café service and regulars actually also reinforces the economic argument for tipping in comparison to tipping in restaurants. Regulars who come into a café often are all but guaranteed to be served by the same workers within one to two visits. Because of this frequency, though baristas will not necessarily notice the amount of the tip every time, they do quickly develop a sense of how much a customer tips. This means that the level of a customer's tip can actually function as a powerful economic motivator for better service. This motivation is attested to by the way that barista's discussions of specific customers and barista's feeling about having to serve them usually includes a comment on whether or not the customer tipped well—a habit that was reflected in almost every anecdote told during the course of my interviews.

The economic motivation of tipping baristas ties the tip conceptually to the act of production. By tipping more, a customer is ensuring that the barista will expend the extra effort to make the drink as speedily and correctly as possible. As mentioned in James' quote on social lubrication, the tip still carries a symbolic social charge of reciprocity and personalization. However the validity of the economic explanation in the café means that the social understanding of the tip is by no means a required implication of the service relationship. This may help to explain why

tipping a barista is understood as much less obligatory than tipping a server. The lower prevalence of tipping for baristas may also be partly explained by society's conceptual linkage between production labor and a set wage. In addition, the tip being tied to the more definite and quantifiable act of production as opposed to the subjective issue of emotional service may authorize the customer to feel more strongly about their conviction to give a low or no tip.

### **Case Study: Tipping's Relationship to Professional Demeanor and Transaction Order as Shown in David Schomer's *Alternative Service Style***

I want to close this paper by applying our new-found understanding of the differences between the performance expectations and constriction of baristas and food servers to a seeming contradiction in the relationship between tipping and barista service style. In our interview, James claimed that tips usually come out best when he avoids the usual opener of asking people how they're doing and otherwise attempting to perform a highly social identity that quickly create a connection with each customer via surface-acting face-work patterns.<sup>72</sup> In his training materials, David Schomer strongly advocates for the style of service that James has found success with: "I teach my staff to try to stay away from leading questions such as how 'ya doing today?...Focus the encounter right away on the customers' order".<sup>73</sup> This service pose would seem to be at odds with the show of deference to the customer that most

baristas, including Will,<sup>74</sup> perform. So why does a restrained, perhaps seemingly cold service style result in better tips?

It is my contention that the belief that a barista should provide a shallow, “high personality”<sup>75</sup> style with lots of chatting with every customer is a relic of service work's association with restaurants and that the application of this style to the café context actually prevents the barista from obtaining the full potential of emotional and economic rewards from café work. I believe that the barista as a service-worker identity is a relatively new phenomenon in the United States and that the identity is taken to encompass everything from the headset wearing Starbucks drive-through employee to the coffee professional with eight years of experience working in a top-end café. Because the identity is so new and diffuse, I think that both customers and barista look to food servers and bartenders as models for how baristas should approach service, even though the realities of the café social stage create very different circumstances than either the restaurant or the bar. Schomer gets at the basic mechanism of the idea this way:

How ya doing today? Is not the way to open an order. It demands a response and forces the interaction into personal territory. This subtle distinction is what allows a professional to remain approachable day after day, year after year.<sup>76</sup>

Here David is highlighting the crucial difference in frequency of patronage between cafés and restaurants. Because regulars come into the café so often, they may not need or want their visit to always be construed as a social call, even if they do have strong personal connections with the barista.

This issue of not forcing the interaction into personal territory gets at the unique social stage of the café in a number of interesting ways. At a broad level it's easy to understand that it would be presumptuous to call up a friend four times a week and ask them how their life is going, and a barista asking that same question of a customer every time they see them could be seen as just as intrusive. If we unpack the idea though, we can see that asking a personal question every day is uncomfortable because it creates unwanted performance expectations, which in turn decrease the informality and accessibility that are so much of the allure of the café in the first place. By being asked how they are doing by the barista, the regular is forced to engage in superficial face-work and perform something warm and non-committal like “well, the sun is shining so I can't complain. How are you?” even if the customer is not feeling good that morning and doesn't particularly want to hear how the barista is doing because they have other things on their mind. Either that or the regular must drop their impersonal performance and respond honestly to the barista's question, which may make them feel vulnerable, especially since the potential length of the conversation between barista and customer is quite short, and so an actual personal discussion of how they are doing is not necessarily possible.

A food server has the time to actually pause and talk with a customer about how they're doing but sees that customer fairly rarely, so the server must make a much more active attempt to connect. The barista / regular relationship is the inverse, and so the barista should not approach the service interaction in the same way. As we saw in chapter one, so much of

the social utility of the café for the customers comes from the ways in which the café's informality and accessibility enable the customer to define how they want to inhabit the café space. If a regular customer feels like they must always either disclose personal details or engage in a superficial performance when they go to a café, they may be less likely to feel like that café is refuge where they can go be in solitude, free from the demands of postmodern urban life.

However this does not mean that a barista should never ask a customer how they are doing or otherwise try to connect personally, just that they should do so in ways that are organic to the circumstances of café service. James explains it this way:

I never feel the need to chat it up. I struggled with this a lot when I started at [my café] because it is such like a regular place. What I realized is I don't have to chat it up, I'm there every day, I see them every day, if we're gonna make friends and like strike up a conversation, it's gonna happen and it's not because I'm making this big thing.<sup>77</sup>

David echoes this by saying that when a customer wants to talk and it is appropriate to make a personal inquiry “you'll know”.<sup>78</sup> The fact that there are so many re-performances of the social relationship between a given barista and a given regular means that slowly orienting the style of the service interaction acts over time can create a strong, nuanced personal relationship between the regular and the barista. By spending so much time with a customer over the course of years, a barista comes to recognize the emotional cues that friends use to communicate with each other, creating an easy, low-hassle relationship that mirrors the easy, low-hassle nature of café service, without any particular need to force the formation of this relationship in the first few service interactions.

The effect this organic form of social relationship has on tipping can be explained partly by the idea of tip as personalization and partly by the tip as negotiating consumer anxieties. A restrained service interaction allows the customer to define for themselves what having a personalized relationship with their barista means, preserving the informality of the café and making the customer more likely to see the relationship as personally enjoyable and worth a tip. Related to tipping in restaurants, the customer's ability to define the service relationship for themselves also serves to counter the anxieties that arise from having the “primary-group ... intimate service” of the café transacted economically and publicly. One may question whether providing coffee is an intimate service in the same way that providing food is, but I believe it is if anything more intimate because it is the provision of a drug, it becomes an integral and extremely regular part of a person's daily routine, and it can be provided by the same person for years at a time. If there is an easy relationship between the barista and the regular that does not demand any particular social connection but allows space for it when desired, the regular is able to utilize the café as both an informal space to satisfy their habit day-to-day, and a place to informally socialize when they wish to.

Beyond the economic benefits for the barista and the informality benefits for the customer, the restrained service style can have massive benefits in terms of emotional labor. Engaging in this service style frees the barista from the need to engage in much of the superficial face-work performance of standard high-personality

café service. This can greatly decrease the emotional fatigue of the barista and be integral to the long-term prevention of emotional burnout. By encouraging organic, rewarding personal connections with regulars, the emotional labor that the baristas do expend reaps much greater emotional rewards. Restrained service also focuses more of the attention in the service transaction onto the act of production, further allowing the barista to stylize their service acts in a way that cultivates an identity that reflects the confident, skilled demeanor of a “professional”.

So the next time you go to a new café and the barista seems aloof, try to keep in mind that they may simply be waiting for you to connect with them in the way you want connect. Moreover, that barista will interact with hundreds of other customers that day, many if not most of whom will be regulars, and so it does not matter as much if their service style does not create an instant connection with you as long as it is able to nurture and maintain connections with regulars. By approaching café service in this way, a barista is able to concretely affect the economic and emotional rewards they receive from their labor, potentially enabling them to much more successfully approach their job as a professional career. Though you may not initially see it as such, the barista is also benefiting you the customer because they are helping to perform social informality in a way that is attuned to the restrictions of café service, doing their part to enable you to find semi-public solitude or sociality in the café as you desire.

This is just one example of the ways that understanding the barista / customer service interaction as a set of identity performance acts enables us to analyze the effects specific styles of those performances can have on the social relationships in a café. Using this lens to look at issues of tipping and emotional labor with attention to the differences between restaurant and café service, we can better understand ways in which our expectations of café service help or hinder the development of professional baristas. There are many other aspects of the customers' and baristas' identities that could benefit from a performance based analysis.

I'll end this paper with the same fascinating suggestion for further analysis that David Schomer used to end his memo "Professional Barista—Mission, Style and Artistry":

I end with a technical point regarding the drug dealer. Caffeine is present in ground coffee and goes into solution as a function of brewing time...that means that having a consistent pour on your espresso machine will give the customers a consistent dose of caffeine...Fast short pours...will have far less caffeine as well as taste sour and astringent.

The barista is not merely serving a good, they are producing it. By making a drink that tastes delicious, they are increasing their likelihood of receiving a tip not only because production is part of the "service" they provide, but because the coffee they produce is a good operating in the symbolic relationship of "drug" as much as with "food". I cannot think of clearer proof that understanding a barista's "service" requires paying close attention to the many differences between the barista and the standard service model of the food server.

## Chapter Three: Physical Design, Service Design and the Social Stage of the Café

The discussion of the different historical forms of the café typology in chapter one gave us a general introduction to the effect that physical design decisions such as communal tables, stand-up bars and large windows can have on the social environment of a space. Chapter two presented a performativity based method of studying social interactions in the café, demonstrating the analytical power that comes from seeing the barista and customer as engaged in continual stylized re-productions of their social roles in the café. I now want to expand on the theme of physical design's effect on the café environment by using the performance perspective to understand how a café's design conditions social performances. Going beyond the previous focus on restrictions and possibilities within the socially expected styles of performance in service interactions, I want to show how the physical constraints placed on modes of presence and action in the café can create much more rigid conditioning of social performances, and hence possible social identities, within the café. Speaking on gendered expectations of performance, Butler says:

There are social contexts and conventions within which certain acts not only become possible but become conceivable as acts at all. The transformation of social relations becomes a matter, then, of transforming hegemonic social conditions rather than the individual acts that are spawned by those conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the perceived rigidity and inevitability of physical space, the physical design configuration of a café exerts a powerful ideological influence on the social

performances in the café by manipulating the stage on which those performances are enacted, defining what performances are appropriate or even possible on that stage.

The social relations created by physical design cannot be changed with a disidentificatory stylization of social performance; they can only be permanently and effectively changed by changing the physical design. This sense of legitimacy and permanence also gives particular strength to physical design based methods of encouraging regular customers' continued identification with and use of a given café.

This analysis rests on the belief that physical, conceptual and social space are mutually constructing entities engaged in a constant state of re-negotiation and re-construction, not static and separate entities that are in anyway “inevitable” in their forms or inter-relation. When discussing social performances, it is common for people to take space as a neutral backdrop upon which all acts can be equally determined to be either socially normative or transgressive. In fact, space plays a powerful role in determining how acts are interpreted, as belied by the commonness of referring to a non-normative person or performance as “out of place” or “not belonging here”. Tim Cresswell points out that “in fact our consciousness of place all but disappears when it appears to be working well”.<sup>2</sup> This is what I mean when I say that space is taken to be inevitable—we are so used to navigating spaces and performing in them that we do not see the configuration of a space as restrictive unless it is actively preventing us from engaging in an act.

Laptop usage in cafés provides a very clear example of this: if we are sitting in a café working on a laptop, we may experience the café as perfectly lovely and wholly conducive to our desired form of presence in the space; however if our work winds up taking much longer than expected and our battery starts to die, and upon looking around we find that there are no outlets in the café where we may plug in our laptop, we suddenly see the space as incredibly restrictive, potentially completely disallowing our desired presence in it. When we first sat down to work, the café was just as restrictive of types of customer presence, with the lack of outlets meaning that customers could not sit and use their laptops for hours on end. However when we first sat down, we were not expecting to spend a lot of time working and so did not check for outlets beforehand. It was only once our battery started to die that we realized that the café's design explicitly defines long-term camping out on laptops as non-normative, and indeed not even possible, in the café's space.

I contend that in defining long-term laptop usage as not possible in the café's space, an ideological position on the performance of laptop usage is inevitably being articulated. In *What Is Ideology* the most common understanding of the term ideology is explained by quoting John B. Thompson: "to study ideology ... is to study the way in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relationships of domination". I am claiming that by disallowing long-term laptop usage, the café is preventing certain styles of social acts in that café, which in turn prevents the construction of certain social identities through the repetition of those acts, thereby unavoidably creating a

form of meaning (what acts are not acceptable in the café) that dominates the customer by excluding certain identity expressions from the café.

Now, “person who uses laptops for a long time in cafés” may not be what we normally understand as an “identity”, but when I return to the laptop example in much greater detail later in the chapter, I will show how performance restrictions surrounding laptop usage can have profound effects on how we understand the identity of a café as a whole, and on how we understand our identity in relationship to that café. However, to fully understand how physical performance restrictions can affect the identities of and in a social space, we first need to get a clearer theoretical idea of how physical space exercises its ideological power. Towards this end, I will first present Doreen Massey's take on the dangers of understanding time as fluid and space as static, with an eye towards how proper analysis of social domination requires an understanding of space as dynamic and relational. From there, I will explore Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre's idea of social spaces as social constructions that can have a symbolic rather than direct relationship to physical and social reality. By applying Tim Cresswell's theories on spatial discourse's ability to advance ideological domination, we will see that the symbolic relationship between physical, conceptual and social space is one that often causes both symbolic and physical domination of non-normative identity performances

The applied portion of this chapter will look at the seating configurations of two of my favorite cafés in Seattle, WA: the 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue Stumptown Coffee, which is

the café I have probably spent the most time in as a customer in the last two years; and Oddfellows Café + Bar, which is where I developed most of the thoughts behind this thesis while doing participant observation working as a barista there this past summer. Both of these cafés will be analyzed in terms of how their seating design affects issues of informality and accessibility for regular customers. I believe that both of these cafés have seating that is finely tuned to a specific range of uses, with the exclusion of certain uses and the promotion of others profoundly affecting the overall identity of the café and its regulars. Stumptown is able to organically discourage long-term laptop usage, preserving their identity as an upscale, lounge-y neighborhood café that provides comparatively high levels of accessibility and informality for being a high volume coffee shop, though the possibilities for solitude in the space are somewhat restricted. Oddfellows provides a vast array of different seating options that allows the café to adapt to the needs of customers throughout its open hours from eight a.m. to two a.m., capturing a number of distinct groups of regular clientele and presenting a surprisingly varied range of possibilities for both solitude and socializing by creating an extremely informal but not necessarily wholly accessible space.

As social spaces, I believe the Stumptown café on 12<sup>th</sup> avenue is one of the best expressions of the possibilities of the coffee shop typology, and I believe that Oddfellows is one of the most successful modern American translations of the Continental café typology. Hopefully this chapter will demonstrate how the physical

designs of these cafés conditions the social performances within the cafés in ways that ensure the continual re-production of these successful social spaces.

## **The Construction of Social Space**

In *Space, Place, and Gender*, Doreen Massey presents a feminist critique of some of the dominant strands of academic thought on how space and time come together to constitute “place”. In her work, the “place” is what I have been calling the “social space”: the arena of human action that is located in a particular physical location (space) and produced by the interplay between the physical space and individuals' actions through time within that physical space. Her critique is oriented towards the concerns of political science, with the goal of demonstrating the necessity of understanding the possibility of political subjectivity and action in a given place as necessarily contingent on both the spatial form of the space and the temporal actions undertaken in that space.

The first academic approach to space and time that Massey identifies is the Marxist critique that “so-called spatial relations and spatial processes were actually social relations taking a particular geographical form”.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Marxist preoccupation with issues of production and class creates a view that sees the spatial relationships in a place such as a factory as the end-products of a. the material relationships between products and b. the means of production and the social relationship between capitalists and laborers. Using a well-worn example, this view

would say that the prolonged usage of child laborers in Industrial Revolution English textile mills was the outcome of children's greater efficiency in working the mills due to their small hands and capitalist's ability to exploit the children and their families' need to make a wage for subsistence. An analysis that saw physical and temporal (social) space as mutually constructive might agree with the Marxist analysis in terms of why the textile mills first started using child laborers; but then point out that this exploitive system was able to initially develop and continue without challenge due to the barriers to communal political organizing created by the physical separation of child and adult workers from their families caused by the design of the mill work flow and the separation of the mill workers as a class from the rest of society caused by the construction of densely packed mill-owner backed tenement housing in remote areas of cities that lacked basic communal infrastructure.

Massey identifies the second academic approach to space and time in the Post-Marxist works of Ernesto Laclau. Laclau presents space and time as fundamentally different systems that operate within wholly different logics.

According to Massey, Laclau's view works as follows:

The essential characteristic [of the spatial system] is that all the causes of any change which may take place are internal to the structure itself. On this view, in the realm of the spatial there can be no surprises (provided we are analytically well-equipped). In contrast to the closed and self-determining systems of the spatial, Time (or temporality) for Laclau takes the form of dislocation, a dynamic which disrupts the predefined terms of any system of causality. The spatial, because it lacks dislocation, is devoid of the possibility of politics.<sup>4</sup>

This idea of space as a closed, self-determining system is a manifestation of the tendency I pointed to earlier where space is taken to be somehow “inevitable”.

Laclau's thinking allows for more two-way interaction between the spatial and temporal dimensions than the Marxist approach, but it still places all potential for disruptive change in the temporal dimension. In other words, if there is a change in the spatial dimension of a place, that change can be one of only two types: 1. the logical, inevitable outcome of the relationships already inherent in the spatial system; or 2. a changing of the inherent relations in the spatial system or creation of new forms of relation in the spatial system that comes from a change in the temporal system, since it is only the “dislocation” of time that allows for the generative escape from causality. Referring back to chapter one and the example of seating in the Turk's Head coffee house in London, to illustrate this rather simplistically, Laclau might say that it was the revolutionary formation of a club for the public discussion of political issues by James Harrington and his associates that caused the owner of the Turk's Head to create a special round table for their discussions. The only other option that Laclau would allow for the cause of the table's construction would be some sort of logical necessity within the spatial dimensions, such as if the spatial arrangement of the Turk's Head interior was somehow shaped and sized such that circular tables were the only way to fit the maximum amount of seating into the coffee house.

This first explanation of the round table's formation makes a certain intuitive sense. The proprietor of the Turk's Head would not have commissioned the table if

he did not believe there was a need for it—if he had not witnessed multiple instances over time where the spatial needs of his customers were being inadequately filled. This explanation suffices from a historical perspective, but from a theoretical perspective it is problematic because, according to Massey, “this manner of conceptualizing space and time takes the form of a dichotomous dualism”.<sup>5</sup> By positing space and time as independent entities instead of a mutually constituting continuum, Laclau predicates the rest of his theorizing on a binary division between entities that are inescapably social. As every feminist or queer theorist knows, viewing social entities of any form in terms of binary divisions is inherently problematic.

The dichotomous dualism that comes out of a binary understanding of space and time is problematic because such dualisms “are related to the construction of the radical distinction between genders in our society, to the characteristics assigned to each of them, and to the power relations maintained between them”.<sup>6</sup> Binaries inherently lend themselves to the outsider / insider, majority / minority logics of domination, and the usage of binary thinking in any social theorizing opens up that theorizing to the possibility of unintentionally (hopefully not intentionally) reproducing relationships of domination in society. For example, Massey points out that in Laclau's thinking, the static, internally consistent view of space presents space as inherently “ordered”, and so anything “disordered” must be opposed to space. Massey quotes Elizabeth Wilson to explain one problem with this association:

“women have fared especially badly in Western visions of the metropolis because they

have seemed to represent disorder. There is fear of the city as a realm of uncontrolled and chaotic sexual license, and the rigid control of women in cities has been felt necessary to avert this danger".<sup>7</sup>

There are also theoretical problems that go beyond the reinforcing rhetorical similarities between Laclau's view of space as ordered and the misogynistic view of women as disordered. By associating space with order and consistency, non-normative social actions must inevitably be read as either naturally inevitable due to the order of space, or as dis-ordered and being caused totally by temporal realities. For example, when taking space as implicitly ordered, there are two possible views of a homeless person pan-handling on the street: 1. the pan-handler is part of the order of the city, since cities as a spatial form inevitably have a certain amount of homelessness and the only way to change that is to change the temporal realities of society, not the forms of the city; or 2. since the homeless person as an individual is a violation of social order as reflected in the spatial order that designates sidewalks for walking, not pan-handling, the homeless person must inevitably be homeless due to some sort of temporal reality in their own life, and not any of the spatial realities of the city.

Massey instead advocates for an understanding of space and time as dimensions that are in a constant state of inter-relation and reproduction, mirroring Butler's contention in that as a social reality, space/time only has meaning in terms of how it coalesces moment to moment, much as gender only has meaning in terms of

how it is re-performed in each act. Massey asserts that, “seeing space as a moment in the intersection of configured social relations (rather than as an absolute dimension) means that it cannot be seen as static”.<sup>8</sup> In this view, the possibility for revolutionary transformation in social space is inherent in both the physical and temporal dimensions, since spatial objects come to bear meaning only through the operation of a unitary space/time system that has causal progression as a tendency, but not an inevitability. The only unavoidable causality in the system lies in the mutually constructing nature of space and time as they come together to form social space: a change in social space must unavoidably entail a change in either the physical form of the space, which in turn reconfigures the temporal usages of the space; or it must entail a change in the temporal usages that the physical form of the space is put to. What is most important here is that a change in either the physical or temporal dimension is functionally equivalent to a change in all dimensions from the point of view of the social actor, even if only the spatial or temporal has actually changed. Since there is no inherent causality beyond the fact that the temporal usage and physical form of an object or space are mutually constructive, a reconfiguration in either dimension can equally serve to create the same reconfiguration of social space.

Let's get back to the café before things get too abstractly phenomenological in here. The discussion of revolutionary change and causality amounts to this: taking all of the bar stools out of an espresso bar or somehow changing all patron's social conditioning such that they believe bar stools are meant as places for them to rest

their drinks instead of places for them to sit equally effect the social change of having customers stand up as they consume their drinks. Returning to the circular table in the Turk's Head example, Massey's view of mutually constructing space/time would analyze the commissioning of the round table like this: James Harrington and his associates constructed a new social space for ordered public political discussion (the Rota Club) by engaging in the temporal act of discussing politics within the physical space of the Turk's Head coffee house, specifically around the Turk's Head standard rectangular trestle tables.<sup>1</sup> The initial revolutionary change came from the temporal dimension in that the Rota club engaged in a sequence of specifically stylized social acts over time—the public, ordered discussion of politics by commoners—that in their repetition created a new possible social meaning or identity for the Turk's Head as a social space. This temporal change also occasioned physical changes: a larger number of patrons than normal were all sitting at the same trestle table and attempting to engage in the same conversation, which most likely created a crowding in the space, increased the volume because people had to shout the length of the table to be heard, and the proprietor had to reach farther and more intrusively around tightly packed patrons to serve the coffee. Demonstrating the cascading effects of space/time's mutually constituting nature, the physical changes produced temporal

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1 I actually have no idea if the Turk's Head had rectangular trestle tables before, but I think it is a fairly safe assumption based on design tendencies at the time, and regardless I am going to assume it for simplicity's sake in this example.

changes themselves: the discussions of the group grew louder and more chaotic as their membership grew, the discussions were more frequently and fully interrupted by the proprietor's serving of coffee, etc. etc. The cascading and magnifying physical and temporal changes occasioned by the initial change of the Rota Club gathering to discuss politics eventually suggested to the proprietor that he should make a deliberate physical change to accommodate the new realities of the social space created by the Rota Club's initial temporal change. So he commissioned his round table, which allowed more ordered and quieter discussion, sat more people comfortably, and meant that his serving of coffee did not interrupt the debates.

As we can see, when analyzing from a distance it is possible to break down changes in social space into a long series of inter-related temporal and physical changes. However this does not mean that any of those individual changes can stand alone as objects of study. The meaning and identity of the social space of the Rota Club's discussions at the Turk's Head was at every point experienced as an inter-relation of spatial and temporal realities, and trying to analyze the constitutive parts of those realities without the larger context can easily lead to misunderstandings. For example, if one were to attend the discussion of the Rota Club that came right before the critical point was hit and the proprietor realized a change need to be made, it would be easy to see the disordered, shouted discussion and assume that either the Rota Club as a temporal assembly was generally loud and disordered, or that the Turk's Head, or coffee houses generally, were not physically suited to public political

discussion. The actual truth was that the Rota Club at its size in *that specific moment* was loud and disordered (or more so than it might otherwise be) due to the specific physical configuration of the Turk's Head in that moment, and conversely the physical form of the Turk's Head was unsuited to the public political discussions of the size and nature of the Rota Club *in that moment*. However a change in the physical configuration of the Turk's Head or a change in the temporal amount of people gathered for discussions could greatly change the nature of the social actions being observed, even though the participants would still understand the social space as “the Rota Club”. Going back to Butler's gender performativity, the specific style of the social act that we were witnessing was an expression of the specific realities of that moment, and the style suggests certain things about those realities, but the specific style in that moment does not *necessarily* have implications for the past or future styles of social acts, and the specific style in that moment does not *necessarily* have implications for the styles of possible social acts based on either the temporal or physical realities in isolation.

The outcome of Massey's analysis is a view of social space as a set of structures that govern social relationships. The continual re-enactment of these relationships constitutes the social space experientially, bringing together physical form and temporal usage of that form into a culturally legible, though largely taken for granted, stage for specific social performances. A social space is then not a generic “space for socializing”, but instead a specifically located arena for a specific subset of social life,

constraining the performance styles within that subset due to both its physical form and the temporal accumulation of stylized performances within the location that have come to define the expected or normative ways of interacting with the physical form of the location.

Now that we have seen how the production of meaning functions in social spaces, it is important to understand that social spaces are not neatly ordered or mutually exclusive. As Henri Lefebvre states: “social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another”.<sup>9</sup> A single physical location, and certainly a single class of physical locations, may contain many different social spaces. This is not surprising since a social space is constructed via the interrelation of physical form and temporal usage patterns, and so if there are multiple accumulated patterns of social usage associated with the physical form of a given location, then that location is associated with multiple social spaces. Conversely, if there is a single general pattern of social usage in a location, but that location contains multiple areas with different physical forms, then the location must contain multiple social spaces. Since each of those areas has a unique physical form and changes in physical form inevitably affect temporal usage, each area inevitably has its own somewhat nuanced style of the general pattern of social usage within the location and is hence a at least somewhat differentiated social space, even if the social actors generally take the location to be one cohesive social space.

A moment's thought about seating in cafés should make this idea of overlapping social spaces intuitively clear. A reasonably large neighborhood café is likely to have a number of different physical forms of seating, say: counter and bar-stool seating along the front windows; two and four-top tables in the main seating area; and three plush couches in the back. All of these areas are part of the café as a location, and customers may refer to their actions in all three areas as “hanging out at the café” or “stopping into the café”, and yet the actual social performances in the three areas will exhibit specific variations on the overall theme of the café social space. Customers seated in the couches may be more likely to talk to one another because they are less physically distant from each other and the seating feels more informal and comfortable. Customers seated in the main table area are likely to sit alone or with the groups they came in with, and will probably feel discouraged from engaging with strangers due to the physical and mental isolation created by each party's initial restriction to its “own” table. Customers seated at the window bar may feel more comfortable sitting in solitude or sitting for just a short time, since they are not taking up excess space as with a table and they are able to look out onto the street scene instead of feeling compelled to “do something” such as reading the paper or working on a laptop. These social spaces may be fairly clearly bounded by their associated seating areas, but they are all still overlapping with “the café” as an overall social space, and the social performances in any one area are at least somewhat visible to all

of the patrons in the café, so the social spaces clearly relate to and influence one another.

## **Social Space, Conceptual Space, Symbolic Space**<sup>2</sup>

In his work *Of Other Spaces*, Michel Foucault explores how overlapping or inter-relating social spaces need not have a physical or temporal relationship to one another. Instead, social spaces can have a symbolic relationship to one another.<sup>10</sup> His work is concerned with the complex networked symbolic spaces that he terms “utopias” and “heterotopias”. Before we deal with those more abstract spaces, we should understand how general social spaces can exist as conceptual objects.

A social space exists as a conceptual object when it is comprised of a set of expected physical and temporal relationships that are not directly predicated on one's current physical/temporal location. You could call this the “idea” of a place, and we make use of these ideas all the time. When someone asks you to meet them at a café for coffee, you assume that they are inviting you to a retail shop that sells a standard array of coffee beverages and provides some subset of the standard array of seating options, all of which will allow the two of you to engage in a social interaction where

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2 Warning: Here be dragons. Or more properly, Sphinxes, because things get really confusing and abstract in this section. The takeaway is this: A social space can be a concept about a type of space or how a specific space was or should be. As concepts, social spaces can have complex symbolic relationships with aspects of the larger society.

you are both on relatively neutral ground and the norms of social performance are informal and generally well understood by all.

The idea of a social space can refer to beliefs on a general category of social spaces, such as in the example I just gave. The idea could also refer to a conceptual social space that you have come to associate with a particular physical location, such as when someone talks about their favorite café and how its baristas are especially nice, or the seating is particularly comfortable, etc. The person is referring to the types of physical and temporal inter-relations they have come to expect from that space based on the accumulated style of acts they have engaged in and observed in the café: the baristas are generally friendly people and the physical configuration of the café allows them to have conversations with customers, so this person has often had pleasant conversation with them; the seats are comfortable to sit in and so the person has spent a number of enjoyable afternoons lounging in the seats and reading the paper, or whatever else. It is this remembered social space that causes regulars to become so attached to a café—they know what acts they will be able to perform when they go to that café, and they are familiar enough with the style that an act must take based on the physical configuration of the café that they do not even have to consider it. This is also what causes people to be so upset when a place they are a regular at changes in physical form or general customer performances: the conceptual social space that they are carrying around in their head is now at odds with the actual enacted social space they find themselves in.

In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault presents two specific types of symbolic social spaces: the utopia and the heterotopia. These spaces differ from the “idea of a place” in that they are predicated first and foremost on an ideological position, which is then mapped onto the temporal and physical only after its formation, if it is mapped at all.

Foucault begins by defining the utopia:

Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down.<sup>11</sup>

In this view, a utopia is a social space that is defined via a direct symbolic relationship to society, however the symbolic relationship is with the concept of society, not its actual currently existing form, since the utopia is a site (space) with no real place. A utopia is inevitably ideological in that it is an application of social meaning—the perfected or turned upside-down image of society—that is figured as a social space, and hence a set of expectations about performance styles in relation to physical configurations. Since the utopia is a social space without a real physical space, it is doubly ideological in that it is a purely social construction, defining certain social performances or relationships as proper and improper without any necessary relation to the more “natural” or “inevitable” social expectations that arise from constraints imposed by actual physical form or accumulated temporal performance patterns.

I believe that we all carry around sets of at least somewhat utopic ideas of what different types of space could or should be in their perfected form. As a trite example, some customers may believe that the perfect café is one that allows them to plug in

their laptop from every possible seating location in the café. This belief is likely not based on any specific physical location that the customer may have experienced since few if any cafés could possibly satisfy this requirement. The belief is certainly not based on the necessary realities of physical form because it ignores the fact that designing a café where you could plug in your laptop from anywhere would either severely restrict the possible seating options in undesirable ways, or result in a mess of cords stretched criss-cross through the seating area in a way that would almost inevitably trip other customers. So this belief in the perfect café social space that the customer is carrying around operates ideologically in that it is a set of expectations about ideal temporal/physical relationships that ignores certain physical realities that necessarily condition the actual possible temporal/physical relationships of a real space. You may not think it, but plugging in your laptop is inescapably a social act in that it is an enacted or performed way of being in a social space that influences or restricts the possible ways of being for other people in that space. Therefore, in carrying around a utopic idea of an ideal café where they can always plug in a laptop and measuring all real cafés against this utopia, the customer is deploying a form of social meaning—the utopic idea—in a way that furthers social domination because that utopic idea ignores some of the implicit social effects that this utopia would have on others.

The second form of symbolic social space that Foucault analyzes is the heterotopia. He describes the heterotopia as a “counter-site, a kind of effectively

enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted”.<sup>12</sup> A heterotopia is similar to a utopia in that it stands in symbolic relation to society, advancing a specific ideological position, but in contrast to the utopia, those expectations are predicated on a specific, real physical location or class of physical locations. Crucial to Foucault's theories is the way that the heterotopia functions as a sort of mirror of society, as he says, simultaneously representing, contesting and inverting society.<sup>13</sup> A heterotopia could be understood as a spatialization of an aspect of society, the forceful imbuing of a physical place with social symbolism, creating a constructed social space that mirrors society's dominant ideologies by enshrining them as explicit performance expectations or requirements.

One example of a heterotopia is a prison, what Foucault calls a “heterotopia of deviation”, a place where “individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed”.<sup>14</sup> Those people who are deemed deviant are separated from the society at large, with the totality of their temporal existence defined as staying within the four walls of the prison, their specifically designated physical domain. This incarceration in a deliberately constructed social space is an implicit attempt by society to deny any possible link between the performances it deems deviant and the physical locations where “normal” society constructs its social spaces. However, by sequestering its deviants in a prison, society precludes discussion of what it is in the “normal” social spaces of society that causes these individuals to

carry out the performances that are labeled as deviant. In attempting to symbolically purify its social spaces, the society at large holds a mirror up to itself, with the intensely materialized reality of the prison serving as a constant reminder that the deviance within its walls came from the social spaces beyond its boundaries.

The defining characteristic of the heterotopia is the unavoidable creation of excess social symbolism that comes from the heterotopia's enactment of an ideology in a real physical place. Being partially defined by a real place, the heterotopia inevitably comes into contact not just with the concept of society, but also with the real society at large in which the heterotopia's real place is embedded. Though the heterotopia may be formed as a spatialization of only a small number of aspects of the society, the act of choosing those specific aspects, and the way those aspects are invariably related to other aspects of society (since all of society is inter-related) necessarily creates ideological implications that go beyond the immediate social space of the heterotopia. Foucault believes that there are two possible ways in which the heterotopia may stand in symbolic relation to the rest of society:

The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory ... Or else, on the contrary, 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.<sup>15</sup>

The prison presents a clear example of the second role: it is a created space that presents the idea that deviance can be excised from the social space of the larger

society and perfectly contained within the prison; while of course in actuality prisons contain many innocent people and individuals that many people consider to be horribly criminal walk the streets.

Heterotopias are able to incorporate and affect multiple social spaces at once via both their deliberate interrelating of conceptual social spaces with physical spaces, and the unintended way that the heterotopia's formation reflects and contests social spaces beyond its initial conceptual and physical spaces. The heterotopia is capable of “juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible”.<sup>16</sup> By operating simultaneously at multiple symbolic levels, contradicting social spaces are able to be brought into relation. Foucault gives the example of the theater, which “brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another”.<sup>17</sup> The social spaces of the different scenes are all incompatible in that they cannot overlap in direct relationship to one another—the audience experiences each sequential scene as discontinuous from the ones that came before it, though of course conceptually linked to them by the narrative. Further, if there are two (or more) scenes taking place on the stage at the same time, the audience does not experience each scene as isolated since they are occurring simultaneously, but they cannot be experiencing them as directly overlapping in the social space of the play-world because then it would just be one scene, not “two scenes taking place on the same stage”. Instead, the audience experiences the two scenes as distinct sub-scenes that overlap within the larger

heterotopic scene of the play, due to the physical linkage of the sub-scenes' common location on the stage. That physical linkage with the stage, the “effective enactment” of the heterotopia, creates a symbolic relationship between the scenes: they come to be construed as parts of the narrative of the play that are taking place at the same time.

As we have already seen, a social space, such as a scene in a play, is constructed out of the relationship (or the idea of the relationship) between a specific physical location and a specific set of temporal performances or performance expectations. The social space of the larger scene created by the two simultaneous sub-scenes is then a rather tricky beast, containing contradictions that can only be addressed symbolically. The larger scene is contradictory in that it contains (conceptually, in the world of the play) multiple physical locations where the audience is witnessing multiple simultaneous performances. Through the heterotopic stage, the audience is able to experience conceptually what is impossible physically—being in two places at once—and in so doing experience a relationship of mirroring and contestation between the two scenes.

This mirroring and contestation comes from the fact that the sub-scenes share the same temporal component (occur at the same time) but have different physical location and content. By occurring at the same time, these scenes contest each other in that they are both presenting an account of “what is going on right now” and trying to force the audience to see their account as the correct one. However the overarching

heterotopic symbolism of the theater stage forces the audience to read both scenes as equally authentic accounts of “what is going on right now”, because the space of the stage authorizes everything occurring on it as perceptually authentic from the point of view of the constructed social space of each scene in the play. As such, the audience is forced to experience a complex symbolic relationship in which both sub-scenes are necessarily true accounts of “what is going on right now” within their scene, but those accounts are insufficient to totally describe “what is going on right now” conceptually within the narrative of the play. The conceptual load of the play at that point in the narrative can only be represented through the over-arching scene that is created by the simultaneous performance of two sub-scenes. This over-arching scene is a heterotopia in that it is a physically enacted, complexly networked set of symbolic relationships between physical and temporal realities within the world of the play. And of course the play itself, as enacted on the stage, is a heterotopia in that is a complexly networked set of symbolic relationships between the conceptual physical/temporal relationships presented in the play and the actual physical/temporal relationships of society.

Hopefully this will make the idea of the heterotopia clearer: I believe the café is one of the heterotopias *par excellence* in modern society. As I have been exploring throughout this thesis, the café is a social space where a great many different social spheres are reflected and contested. These spheres are often taken to be contradictory: public vs. private, economic vs. social, leisure vs. work, etc. Each of these social

spheres are able to be played out in the micro-scenes of the individual acts of social performance that different customers engage in. The confines of the café force these different micro-scenes to overlap in that they occur at the same time and are visible and permeable to all other social scenes in the café, but due to the informality and accessibility created by the physical form and social expectations of the café, there is enough constructed social isolation between scenes to allow for their contradictions to occur simultaneously. The café is the over-arching heterotopic scene of the theater stage example above. It is the complex, networked social space created by a deliberate spatialization of an aspect of society that creates intended and unintended symbolic relationships between the spheres it contains and is embedded in.

The café is a spatialization of the fact that social life, especially in cities, cannot be neatly divided into binaries. Needs such as solitude within the urban crowd, or neutral space for social exchange cannot be addressed by spaces that operate within public/private dichotomies because these needs are inescapably defined by aspects of social life that fall under both categories. To address these needs, it is necessary to have a liminal space, such as a café, whose entire form is predicated on the idea that social life is a continually re-enacted continuum created by acceptance of and negotiation with conceptually contradicting social spheres. By bringing all of these social spheres together within one over-arching, though segmented, scene, the café reflects the symbolism of these spheres, and in so doing puts them into contestation. Symbolic beliefs about the correct performances and interrelations in social life are

constantly contested in the café, and it is for this reason that the café has played such an instrumental role in the evolution of the structuring and conduct of social life. The café is a heterotopia where we are able to negotiate the contradictions of social life, accepting them and contesting them as required to fit the daily exercise of our lives.

As with all heterotopias, the forceful imbuing of the café's physical space with the symbolism of these contradictory social spheres also creates excess symbolism that reflects and contests society. The deliberate, desired contestation in the café is between social spheres, while the excess symbolism being reflected and contested is the idea of social informality. The physical enactment of the café's ideological position on the blurring of social spheres necessarily creates the peculiar form of rigid informality that is expressed in the physical and service design of cafés. An analysis of this informality's production is thus an analysis of how rigid informality in social relationships is the glue between social spheres in the total society beyond the café. As we have been exploring throughout this thesis, the rigid social informality expressed in café design is a characteristic that has emerged more or less organically out of the constantly evolving tension between social spheres in the café. Studying the how and why of this emergence in the café presents a demonstration of the academic utility of studying the café as a heterotopia, a microcosm of society that reflects the total society, in that if we can use specific social theories to explain how and why this informality has evolved in the café, then those same social theories should function

reasonably well as explanations of how society at large necessitates and is shaped by a looseness or informality in the social identifications and relationships.

## **Ideology and Transgression in Space**

To speak of social spheres such as public or private is to speak of social spaces, because as with gender or any other socially constructed concept, the idea of a social sphere only has meaning inasmuch as it conditions the performance style of actual social acts within an actual social space. So then, much as we need to ask how social expectations embedded in social roles like “barista” and “customer” condition our possible performances, we must also ask how the interrelation of *the physical constraints* and *the social expectations* embedded in the social space of the café conditions the way in which we perform the interrelation of different social spheres within the café. By sitting alone at the window of a café, staring out onto the street and pondering our life, we are performing solitude—a private pose conducted in public, a pose that is outwardly leisurely but inwardly hard at work. Working on a laptop for hours in a café, we are performing the 21<sup>st</sup> century dislocated work ethic—that belief in the near total permeability of occupational and personal life, the pose that takes economic enterprise out of the physical boundaries of the office and places it anywhere that is sufficiently public that we are free to setup camp, yet private enough that we will not be unduly disturbed or goaded into unwanted social

interaction. These acts are created out of the needs of modern society, but they are given their specific form by the cafés in which they are performed.

As we have seen in the previous section, the contradictory social spheres given in the above examples are able to come into contestation and be re-figured because the café functions as a complexly networked, symbolic social space that is able to contain those contradictions because of its physically and socially enabled informality. This power<sup>3</sup> of the café is the defining aspect of its social utility in modern society, but it is important to understand that in deploying this power, the ideological power of spatial discourse is also being deployed. Tim Cresswell points to this in one of the central points of his work *In Place Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression*: “just as it is the case that space and place are used to structure a normative world, they are also used (intentionally or otherwise) to question that normative world”.<sup>18</sup> Social space exists as internally normative in that it is an elaboration of a specific set of expectations about how to behave in a physical location, yet the social space can stand in relation to the larger normative world of society in a way that questions that normativity—such as solitude in a café’s questioning of the need to always be public while interacting with the urban milieu—or in a way that affirms that larger

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3 This could read “This heterotopic power of the café...” but I have decided to largely drop the term heterotopia from the remaining sections of this chapter so as not to unduly confuse with jargon any readers who decided to skip over the intense arcanum of the preceding discussion of the café as heterotopia. Please take it as understood that all of the fancy symbolic relationality I refer to in the rest of the chapter is operating thanks to and in the mode of the heterotopic nature of the café.

normative world, such as when a customer orders their drink, receives it, and leaves without socializing within anyone, thereby affirming the normative divide between economic and social relationships.

For Cresswell, the most crucial aspect of social space (what he refers to as place) is the specific cast it gives to the expectations it creates:

Place is produced by practice that adheres to (ideological) beliefs about what is the appropriate thing to do. But place reproduces the beliefs that produce it in a way that makes them appear natural, self-evident, and commonsense.<sup>19</sup>

The beliefs created by the physical component of social space lend a feeling of legitimacy to the total system of beliefs created by the intertwining of the physical component of the social space and the accumulated history of performance styles within the space that come to define the expected ways of being in that social space. Going back to the beginning of this chapter, this legitimacy is born out of the tendency to take physical space as ordered, logical and inevitable.

My friend Stephen pointed out a particularly helpful example of this legitimizing effect in the café. He said that if you have a visible cash register in a café, people in America will inevitably approach the cash register first and order there, instead of approaching the espresso machine first. He said he thinks this would hold true even if you put up signs specifically telling people to order at the espresso machine and then pay at the cash register, which he believes is a reflection of American's preoccupation with paying for things before receiving them since “you get

what you pay for". Without delving into the validity of his socio-cultural explanation, I must say that I agree with him about registers and signage. The first café I worked at, Espresso Vivace, was laid out with the intention of having the line of customers curve around the rounded espresso bar such that they would be in front of the espresso machine first, where they would order their drink from the barista, and then they would wait in line, still in front of the espresso machine, while their drink was made, and as drinks were made the line would progress until they finally reached the cash register, where they would pay after receiving their drinks. There was indeed signage above the espresso machine instructing customers to order there first, and in general, customers would adhere to this system, getting in the back of the line when they arrived without much thought. As long as there was a line, things proceeded smoothly, and most customers probably did not give the inverted order more than a moment's thought. However when there wasn't a line of customers queued up, customers would often walk in and head directly towards the register without pausing to look at the signage or notice that the barista was standing idly by the espresso machine.

The inversion of the espresso machine and register order creates a specific social space that is in fact very transgressive of the normative expectations of cafés in the larger society, since as I alluded to somewhat in chapter two, the placement of the customer line in front of the barista for the duration of the (comparatively) long process of drink production means that the baristas are given the maximum possible

time to talk with each individual customer while still engaging in a continuous act of production. This is a powerful challenge to the standard service flow model where the customer is free to wander away from the bar area after placing their order, making it much harder for the barista working the espresso machine to engage them in conversation. The presence of a line of customers arranged in this way acts as a performance of this social space, reproducing for each new customer the expected mode of social interaction with the physical form of the bar layout. The expected form of social interaction is taken to be logical and inevitable since the physical form clearly enables the specific social performance style of the inverted espresso machine / register order social space. However if there is not a line of customers already in place, then the social space is not being performed, hence not being reproduced for new customers, and so a new customer will often default to their expected form of café ordering social space—one where you order at the register first—without even pausing to examine whether the physical form of the bar layout or the signage is in fact encouraging of this mode of social space. This demonstrates just how transgressive the inverted layout is, and how physical space can be taken to be inevitable when being understood as part of a social space.

In the Espresso Vivace example, the specific form of the customer line social space requires the physical form of the bar design and register / espresso machine placement. The system would simply not function without it. However the customer does not in fact pay much of any attention to the actual physical form of the space at

all, as evidenced by the fact that when there is already a line present, the customer accepts the social space and gets in line, instead of acting on their normal physical expectation of ordering at the register first. However, when there is no line present, the customer is apt to attempt to construct their normative expectation of café ordering social space by ordering at the register first, even if the physical form is explicitly arrayed in opposition to that.

Physical form and the performance expectations it creates operates very differently in these two possible scenarios, and in this difference lies the heart of physical space's ideological power. Physical form is taken to be inevitable and so becomes invisible, but at the same time, social performances that transgress the expected performance styles occasioned by physical form are clearly and immediately marked as transgressive. When the specific form of a general type of social space is actively and successfully being reproduced, such as with the line of customers already present at Espresso Vivace, the performance constraints created by the physical form of the social space are taken to be natural, even when those constraints are in reality heavily opposed to what we might otherwise consider natural or normal social performances in a given space. When the line is present at Espresso Vivace, customers do not realize that they are being forced into a social space whose physical form dictates that they spend more time in close proximity to the barista and exposed to the possibility of socializing with that barista than they would in other more conventionally laid out cafés. However when the specific form of a general type of

social space is not being actively reproduced, such as when there is no line at Espresso Vivace, then a person is likely to default to the performance styles that they expect based on the general type of social space. In other words, the customer walking into Espresso Vivace and not seeing a line will tend to act as they would in any other café and approach the register to order first. This act is immediately marked as transgressive because once the customer puts their normative performance style in relation to the actual physical form of the space by approaching the register, it becomes immediately clear that the social space the customer is attempting to create is at odds with the physical form because the barista must either walk from where they had been waiting at the espresso machine over to the register, or they must make a formal statement of the expected performance style by calling out to the customer and telling them to come order at the espresso machine first. This clear marking of transgression is what makes physical space, and by extension social space, so useful in questioning normative performance expectations.

When the transgressive customer is marked as such, the crucial ideological subterfuge of physical space occurs. By calling out to the customer and telling them to come order at the espresso machine, the barista is challenging the customer's idea of how one orders in a café. However, once the customer acquiesces to that challenge and comes over to the espresso machine to order, a social space is created that appears to be operating simply as a challenge to the customer's expectation of where to order, but is in fact operating simultaneously as a challenge to that expectation *and as a*

*challenge to the implied idea that a customer should not be forced to spend time in proximity to the barista.* The barista, and by extension the café as a whole, affects an ideological domination of the customer by forcing them into a social space where they are more open to socializing with the barista, but the customer is likely to understand the ideological domination only in terms of being forced to order at the espresso machine first because the performance constraints occasioned by the physical form of the space (the constraint of being made more open to social contact by the barista) are assumed to be springing from the internal logic of the physical space, not the total logic of the social space. Because physical space is not generally understood in ideological terms, the ideological implications of physical design choices that go beyond the immediate functional necessities of the social space are not taken to be cases of the café owner/institution engaging in deliberate acts of ideological domination.

The ability that social space has to shift ideological focus is particularly powerful in terms of creating social domination because as Cresswell states:

To make the establishment come out on the side of one set of classifications and expectations against another (heretical) set of expectations is a major victory for those, in any particular context, who are dominated.<sup>20</sup>

Cresswell makes this statement in the process of discussing Pierre Bourdieu's work on social distinction and classification, but its true import is made clear in the way that it relates to his discussion of James Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. In his work, Scott presents an analysis of forms of peasant resistance in

South East Asia that make use of the everyday conduct of their lives, such as engaging in acts of sabotage, gossip, work slowing and many other tactics that could be understood as specific stylizations of social performance that are oriented towards challenging the normative expectations imposed by landlords, large corporations and the government. Scott is specifically concerned with how the collective actions of the peasants come to represent what he calls a “hidden transcript”: a set of coded performances that are read by the oppressors as accepting of the status quo, while in actuality they are the dominated peasants engaging in resistance acts, but done in such a way that the resistance is not visible or legible to the oppressors.<sup>21</sup> The peasants' struggle becomes a constant negotiation of social boundaries and expectations, with the peasants trying to stretch their resistive acts as close as possible to the limits of what the oppressors would understand as unacceptably resistant. Scott's theories actually bear a striking resemblance to Muñoz' theories of disidentification applied to a macro political scale, however what is truly useful to us about Scott's theories is the observation they cause Cresswell to make above. Scott's analysis shows that in the continual back-and-forth social negotiation of the peasant's everyday gorilla resistance, it is in fact a major victory for the peasants when they can get their oppressors to actually come out and say that some specific style of resistance act is unacceptable because in doing so, the oppressors make their oppression concrete and visible, giving the peasants and their supporters an issue that they can directly challenge.<sup>22</sup>

Cresswell extends and generalizes this point to a broad observation on ideological domination and social space: if those who are being dominated do not understand that they are being dominated, or cannot point to exactly how they are being dominated, then it is all but impossible for them to resist that domination. Ideological domination is most effective when it is hegemonic and invisible—when people take it for granted or see it as inevitable. When the dominator is forced to openly state their ideological position, they open that position up to attack. This is the power of physical form's ability to create ideological subterfuge: because the ideological performance expectations created by physical form are taken as inevitable, the individual's attention is directed away from those expectations as a possible ideological position.

In the example of Espresso Vivace's bar layout, Espresso Vivace as an institution at no time makes any direct statement of its expectations that customers be available for conversation with the barista for as long as possible, even though that expectation is integral to Espresso Vivace's attempts to create a community-oriented social space that maximizes tips and emotional rewards.<sup>4</sup> Espresso Vivace is only forced into stating that it expects customers to order at the register first, and even then the barista is only forced to make that statement when there is not already a line of people already performing their acquiescence to that social expectation. Because

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4 See chapter two for a discussion of how maximizing customer time in front of the espresso machine, and thereby time for conversation, is integral to achieving these goals.

Espresso Vivace's main ideological position is masked by its expression through physical form, customers are much less likely to understand it as an imposition on the way they normally perform in a café. Taking an ideological position that a customer should be located such that they are able to talk with their barista if they both desire may not seem likely a particularly contentious thing (though you'd be surprised by how resistant some customers are), however the utility of deflecting challenges to ideological positions will become much clearer when we analyze laptop usage and seating arrangements later in this chapter.

Before we proceed to the more applied portion of this chapter, it is however important to understand one further point about the relationship between ideology and space: spatial discourse patterns much of our understanding of social ideologies generally, and is used especially to translate a singular act of transgression into a total transgressive identity. Put simply, we understand what is the proper thing to do socially as “what is the proper thing to do *here*”, and when someone engages in a behavior that we find non-normative or transgressive, we refer to them as “out of place” or “not knowing how things are done around here”. As Cresswell says: “an outsider is not just someone literally from another location but someone who is existentially removed from the milieu of 'our' place – someone who doesn't know the rules”.<sup>23</sup> “Belonging” in a social space means knowing what the performance expectations are in that space, and so anyone who is engaged in an unexpected performance must inescapably be someone who does not belong. This mirrors the

discussion in chapter two of how a single act of social performance, such as a barista's failure to respond to a customer, is taken to be indicative of an overarching social identity.

This idea has a number of particularly interesting applications in the café, especially in terms of understanding the regular customer. The regular customer is the one who belongs, who knows the specific wrinkles of a café's physical form and social space that differentiate the performance styles in that café from other cafés generally. A normal customer who comes in may have a general understanding of the performance expectations in cafés, but they do not know the specifics of a new café, such as in the example of the customer coming into Espresso Vivace and walking straight to the register. The regular is able to challenge and dominate the non-regular customer's ideas of social expectations because the specific social space of the café authorizes their performances, either by making them seem inevitable due to physical form or by otherwise encouraging and enabling them through the performance styles of staff and other customers. This concept will be examined in much greater depth when we look at how the seating arrangements in Oddfellows Café + Bar allow multiple different types of regulars to negotiate the overwhelming crush of non-regular customers in the café.

## **Laptop Usage and the Masking of Ideology in the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown's Seating Design**

There has been much attention paid in recent years to the issue of laptop use in cafés. Using laptops in cafés has become so expected that the two most common archetypes of laptop users are as easily recognizable as they are cliché: the “mobile professional” with bluetooth earpiece in and sales report in hand, and the college student with textbook by their side and headphones on. There has also been a growing backlash to laptop usage in cafés, with countless newspaper articles, blogposts and online comment-threads chronicling the often vociferous supporters and detractors. This debate surrounding laptops is often figured in rather explicitly ideological terms, with appeals to customer's “right” to use cafés as they see fit versus café owners and other customer's “right” to create social spaces free of the nuisance of laptop usage. Stumptown Coffee’s 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue café (which I will be referring to simply as the “12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown” from here on out) engages with the issue of laptop usage in a particularly interesting way: through the physical design of its seating choices, Stumptown opposes the long-term usage of laptops in its 12<sup>th</sup> Ave café, but because that opposition is enacted through physical form, the opposition is not understood as a direct act of ideological domination.

I should be clear at this point that I have no specific confirmation that opposing long-term laptop usage was a conscious part of the design process for this café. I am merely presenting an analysis that shows how, regardless of intent, the ideological position that Stumptown takes on laptop usage is masked by the ideological subterfuge that comes from performance restrictions created solely

through physical form. As we have been exploring throughout this chapter, whether or not Stumptown understands themselves as taking an ideological position is largely immaterial. The construction of social space out of physical form and accumulated performance expectations inevitably creates social meaning that promotes certain performance styles while discouraging others—in other words, social space is inevitably ideological. Hopefully this analysis of the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown will suggest ways that café owners and designers can accept their inevitable ideological production and consciously manipulate it towards purposes they deem beneficial.

Before analyzing the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown specifically, I think it will be helpful to have a thorough understanding of what the social implications of laptop usage in cafés are and why those implications are so contentious. To do that, we must first understand that laptop usage, as with any social act in the café, is the enactment of a specific set of performance expectations that reflects a specific symbolic belief on the interrelation of social spheres. Though the issue of laptops, if it is examined at all, is usually cast in the broadest public/private oppositions, within these issues there is in fact a complex intertwining of concepts of work and leisure, the personal and communal, and what exactly it means to “be social” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Social Symbolism of Using a Laptop in a Café**

To unpack the complex symbolism of laptop usage, let us first look at how laptops are actually used in a café. Though there are of course exceptions, the general

style of laptop use in a café is to come in, order a drink and maybe a pastry, and then camp out alone at a table and stare into the screen for anywhere from 30 minutes to several hours, often with headphones on to complete the isolation. The customer may be working on tasks for their job, studying for school, working on some personal project or interest, or simply amusing themselves on the internet. Sometimes there is a social component to the experience in that a customer may have a quick business meeting with others, or may come in to study with a group of friends and occasionally chat with them before returning to work, but by and large, the experience of the laptop is one of isolation. Laptop using customers may order multiple times, but often do not and never in sufficient volume to make up for the three to ten customer rotations the seating they occupy might have otherwise had. In addition, laptop users will often take up a two or even four-top table by themselves, only approaching another laptop user to ask to share a table when there are no available empty tables.

The direct effect these behaviors have on a café's bottom line is obvious.

Prolonged laptop usage in cafés is also socially problematic because it is at once too formal and too informal. As we saw in chapter one, so much of the social utility of the café is derived from the fact that while it is quite acceptable to be private and alone in a café, the individual in the café is also inescapably public to some degree. In a café completely filled with laptop users, there is a studious avoidance of eye contact and an eerie hush hangs in the air. Each customer is absorbed in their own individual social space, leaving only the thinnest veneer of public social space in the café as a whole.

The customer who comes to such a café looking for solitude will feel uncomfortable because their performance of solitude will stand out in marked contrast to the isolation of the other customers, marking the customer's sitting in solitude as aberrant since it is not focused on a laptop. Ditto the customers who come in for a quick and informal chat, since their voices will echo loudly in the café's silence, perhaps even attracting angry glares from those working on their laptops. A healthy café is an informal social space that can negotiate multiple social oppositions because it has many different styles of social performance going on at once, sharing the same physical location but putting it to different uses. The diversity of uses creates informality because it actively reperforms the fact that customers are free to engage in many different social performances in the café. When a café becomes filled with a single style of social act, it loses its diversity and hence its informality.

But what is to be said about the customer's desire to use a laptop in a café? Though I often complain about laptop users ruining the ambiance in the cafés I have worked for, I am at the same time a habitual user of laptops in cafés myself. I have observed numerous coffee professionals in a similarly contradictory stance, and the number of customers who share our conundrum can hardly be counted. We know that in using laptops in a café we are harming the sociability that makes cafés so compelling, and possibly even harming the café's ability to survive. So why do we persist? The answer cannot be simply that work goes quicker with coffee.

I believe the answer is to be found in the distance that has emerged between traditional conceptions of social spheres and the ways that those concepts actually play out in our current technological world. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, American society has experienced a radical reordering and blurring of the distinctions between different spheres of social life. In the more traditional urban societies of Europe, and to an extent pre-WWII America, life operated on a tripod of work, home, and informal public social life.<sup>24</sup> As we saw in chapter one, the classic Continental café, and to an extent the espresso bar, played an integral role in the definition and exercise of informal public life. You could come to the café without specific purpose or expectations, you were welcome to socialize or amuse yourself with a book, newspaper or your thoughts, you had a reasonable expectation of being comforted by the presence of familiar regulars from your community and being stimulated by newcomers, you could conduct the more informal networking aspects of business, and yet you could fraternize in an atmosphere that was to at least some degree free of the rigid hierarchies of work and home. Due to the heavy industrialization intra-war and the post-WWII growth of commuter suburbs, America experienced a radical reordering of this tripod, creating a sharp decline in informal public spaces that led to an increasingly rigid divide between the public, the realm of work, and the private, the realm of socialization and the home.<sup>25</sup> Activities and spaces became more strongly typed as explicitly related to productive work or leisurely socializing. You worked in the office and commuted to the home, and all

socializing occurred within these two spheres. (Of course this is a rather myopic view heavily predicated on the aspirations of the white middle-class, but it did exist as a general conception of the good life around which much of the social form of society was oriented.)<sup>26</sup>

However we have now arrived at a world in which social behavior norms are being governed by antiquated oppositions of social spheres that have lost coherency in the face of new technology and the revitalization of the American city. With the advent of the internet and transition to a more information based economy, work no longer must be conducted within the (semi)private space of the office, especially now that the ever-presence of laptops and wifi ensures we are always connected. These same transformations mean that the social need no longer be to any degree physically public or tied to a specific place, as evidenced by Facebook, instant messaging, texting, etc. Most importantly, we have arrived in a world where the emerging desires of our newly recombinant social spheres do not have suitable venues for their enactment.

In this environment, the usage of laptops in cafés represents a transgressive act that puts forth an ideological vision of possible new relationships between social spheres. Using a laptop in a café is ideological in that it makes a value statement on “good” relationships between social spheres and the “appropriate” behaviors that come from those relationships. These values, even the possibility of these values, have been produced by a reconfiguration and blurring of traditional spheres. Yet this

reconfiguration and blurring has not been total and has not yet produced new spaces predicated on these new relationships. So society plays out its desires for new social spaces within the generative, liminal social space of the café.

If you are using your laptop for work, you are desiring a space in which the sphere of work is decoupled from “the office” or “the school”, from its traditional opposition to the public and the social and its traditional identification with private space and impersonal space. You work in the semi-public gaze of the café; you work in a semi-public space that is also paradoxically somewhat your own space in that it is of your own choosing. It is a space where you may feel more “at home” because you know the baristas and the other regulars, because your peripheral interactions with them overlay a veneer of the immediate, leisurely social onto your private, productive work. It is this veneer of the social that makes “meeting” for coffee a particularly attractive business rendezvous: it brings “the home” into the transaction; it permits a certain informality that allows one to at least imagine business relations as not solely productive and anonymizing.

To use your laptop for leisure in the café is a more complicated and emergent world of desire. Before the internet, socializing, especially informal communal socializing had to be conducted mainly in person, with telephone and postal socializing being mainly limited to a circle of close friends/family. New telecommunication technology presents a social world that at least in theory can accommodate any form of socializing without the need for face-to-face or public

interaction. With the advent of laptops, an individual can access this social world anywhere. Here we have a massive reordering of social spheres: the social need no longer be explicitly semi-public (versus previous socializing in informal public spaces) nor explicitly private (previous socializing within the context of the private home or office); furthermore, the social need no longer be immediately, physically communal.

I will take it as understood that facebook, instant-messaging etc. do indeed deliver on some of this promise. However, I think that no matter what generation they are in, anyone who is being honest with themselves will agree that electronic interactions cannot replicate all of the emotional and intellectual benefits of in-person socializing. One example is the I think fairly agreed upon idea that spending time socializing face to face with a stranger can produce a durable personal bond more rapidly than spending an equal amount of time with them online. In the same vein, forming enduring communal sociopolitical coalitions of any sort all but requires sustained in-person contact, though of course things like MoveOn and President Obama's 2008 campaign have shown that the electronic can be a powerful catalyst for instigating the initial in-person contact.

This brave new online social world is not a complete sphere unto itself: it must rely upon contact with the older physical spheres of socialization. Though electronic socializing has become deeply embedded in young peoples' lives, previous societal conceptions of socializing still affect us. For example there is still a stigma about "being alone in your room creeping on people on facebook" that is somehow lessened

by performing the same act in a crowded café. Apart from mitigating the stigma of “being alone”, we may also socialize on facebook surrounded by strangers so that we can feel some of the comfort of the physical presence of humanity lacking in online socializing. Studying at a café with a group of friends, we might chat on IM or look at facebook photos and pause to share particularly interesting conversation or amusing pictures with the friends sitting beside us—replicating some of the immediacy of the communal recognition of common sensibility that can ring hollow when found solely online.

Socializing on a laptop in a café is not just a re-ordering and intermixing of public and private social spheres; it can also be a reconfiguration of the divide between work and leisure. Returning to the example of the student studying at the café, when they take a break from studying to surf the web or text on their phone, they are switching from work to leisure and back again. The ability to do so in the same physical space and with extremely minimal effort is another new product of electronic devices. Yet at least a residue of older physically grounded sensibilities of work and leisure are still observable. I have often heard friends discuss going to a café to study, but when they really need to “get things done” they will go study in the library, still a semi-public, semi-social space, but due to the way that it is more explicitly associated with a narrow range of work activity, a place where they say they are more able to focus.

We now have a better understanding of the desires at play in using a laptop in a café, and we can see that these desires take a current aspect of the world—the newly created possibilities of work, leisure and socialization outside of traditional locations and modes of relation—and magnify that aspect to an extreme, such as in the idea of the “mobile professional” whose sole office is a café. These desires could be said to be utopic in that they present an aspect of society taken to the extreme, while being decoupled from the actual constraints of the physical world. There is the immediate decoupling inherent in the fact that this laptop usage is detrimental to the continued existence of the café. If every customer of the café were to camp out and use their laptop for extended periods for work or socializing, the café could not continue financially. There is also a more abstract decoupling going on in laptop usage's dissolution of the traditional inter-relations of social spheres. It is true that laptops in cafés present an opportunity to bring leisure, the social and the public into new relationship with work, the productive and the private. However, as we have said, laptop usage destroys social informality in the café. It negates the social aspects of the café that create the novelty of these new relationships between social spheres. Working in a café is not truly more social if every customer is engaged solely in work and an air of focused, silent anonymity reigns; in the same way, electronic socializing in a café does not lend an air of the public and emotional *communitas* if the café has become functionally private since all focus and energy is directed into laptop screens.

Moreover, the interweaving of work and leisure that is found in some laptop usage undermines the strength of either state. This leads to a life in which work is less productive because of constant interruptions by leisure or the electronic, casually social. At the same time, leisure is less relaxing or rejuvenating since it is neither sustained, nor connected to the psychological benefits of the immediate, physical social. Perhaps most distressingly, behind our shallow, intertwined leisure there is always looming the knowledge that since we can slip in and out of leisure so easily, we have probably at least somewhat unintentionally entered into a leisure state through distraction, and that we should focus and “get back to work”.

Using laptops in cafés is thus thoroughly utopic in that it is a decision to behave in social space as if certain constraints of society and the café as space did not exist. This decision is an ideological act in that it attempts to remake the understandings of what is possible and proper within a space in ways that clearly dominate the desired social performances of non laptop using customers and café owners who wish to create an informal, accessible social space that is full of possible social uses.

## **Opposing Laptop Usage**

I wish to suggest that in discouraging or disallowing laptop usage in a café, the café owner is engaged in a similarly ideological act to the laptop user. The café owner may oppose laptops for purely financial reasons, yet due to their position of power in

defining the proper and possible actions in the café space, their opposition elaborates an ideology whether they wish to or not. Moreover, though it is beyond the scope of this thesis, I think that an examination of coffee professionals' discourse around laptop usage and discussions with café owners would show that much of the opposition to laptops is consciously figured as an ideological position that goes beyond simple financial considerations.

An opposition to laptops operates as an ideological opposition to the privatization of the public and the social and the total *publicization* of work. By eliminating the silence and avoidance of eye contact and conversation that comes from a forest of laptop screen, opposing laptop usage forces the customer to take part in the café as a semi-public space. This reinforces the linkage between the public and the social, and this reinforcement is furthered by the disallowal of the private-socialization-in-public of facebook, IM etc.

Opposing laptop usage does not create a total separation between work and the realms of the public and social, but it does enforce a certain distance between work and those realms. The customer is still allowed to conduct work in public, and to intermix work and leisure. What they are not allowed to do is conduct *all* of their work in public. Opposing laptop usage makes the statement that one should not spend multiple hours working alone on a project in a café. This is an opposition to conducting purely productive, private work in public. The customer is still allowed, and even encouraged, to conduct in public those aspects of work that have a social

component: informal business meetings; group study sessions; and chunks of work that do not require a sustained, alienating focus on a laptop screen, such as reading reports for work or articles for school.

It is easy to view opposing laptops in cafés as advancing an ideology of a more “traditional” relationship between public spheres. I do not doubt that some opponents do indeed desire a return to more traditional social relationships, but I do not think that this as a goal is an inherent ideological component or outcome of opposing laptop usage. Instead, I think opposing laptop usage contains an ideological opposition to the specific modes of the new relationships between social spheres that are destructive of the spheres those modes bring into relation. Cafés have been transgressively blurring the lines between public, private, social, work and leisure since their inception. In so doing they have dramatically altered societies' views of the possible formations and interrelations of those spheres, in opposition to traditional views. Laptop usage in cafés is a behavior enabled by this liminal meeting of social spheres in the café space, but it is a behavior that cheapens or destroys the ability of those spheres to continue to meet and generatively interact in the café. A café cannot reconfigure society's understanding of being social if laptops are preventing any socializing from taking place in the space. Ditto reconfiguring ideas of the public when the customer's laptop-focused gaze drains the café of all publicity. I think that this destruction is the fundamental source of the anxiety and vitriol in oppositional responses to laptop usage.

## Seating Design in the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown

The 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown's engagement with laptop usage via physical design is a great example of Cresswell's ideas of space's ability to normalize and mask ideology. The physical form of the café attempts to manipulate customers unconsciously so that “the 'quasi-perfect' fit of objective order and subjective beliefs makes the social world appear self-evident”.<sup>27</sup> The main seating area of the café consists of two long banquets facing each other, accompanied by six sets of low stools and tables set next to the banquets. The banquets are very shallow with high, straight backs, and the height and size of the tables make them almost useless for spreading out study materials or using a laptop, but the tables are just the right height to set your drinks and pastries on as you sit and chat with your friends. The result is a main seating area where it is uncomfortable to use laptops for any extended period of time, as evidenced by discussions with friends and baristas, participant observation and Yelp reviews.<sup>28</sup>

There is however a row of high bar-stool style seats in the back of the café that are more conducive to laptop usage, and in the downstairs roasting space there is another bar and set of bar-stools that can also be used for laptops if the customer is enough of a regular to know that the downstairs space is open to customers. Further, though they do so uncomfortably, customers do still use laptops in the main seating area. So laptop usage is not wholly prevented in the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown, it is merely strongly discouraged and carefully controlled. The two bar-stool seating areas force

more long-term laptop users to the absolute periphery of the café, clearly separating those social spaces from the main social space of the café. Having these seating areas be bar-style forces as much informality as possible on the laptop users in a number of ways: 1. bar style seating is associated with quick, individual occupation of service spaces, and so people will often sit down next to the laptop users for a brief moment to read the paper or simply savor a coffee before leaving, highlighting the laptop users intransigence and preventing it from dominating the seating area; 2. preventing laptop users from taking up a whole table to themselves makes it clear that laptop users do not have the primary claim to space in the café; 3. having customers seated so close together breaks down much of the social distance that comes from having tons of laptop users each at their individual, physically separate table, thereby making the laptop users more likely to socialize at least somewhat with the customers next to them.

If customers are using laptops in the main seating area, many of these same effects apply because the design of the seating area is so communal and informal. In addition, since the main seating area has horrible ergonomics for laptop usage, when someone does use a laptop there they are clearly marked as transgressive in the space. They look vaguely ridiculous hunched uncomfortably over their laptop. They are constantly juggling their belongings trying to find a way to accommodate their laptop and their books or whatever else between their lap and the small tables. Most of all,

the relatively cramped seating area and small number of tables highlights the effects their hoarding of space has on other customer's abilities to use the space.

These aspects of the 12th Ave Stumptown's physical form create an ideological world where laptop usage does not harm the social ecosystem of the café, a vision where customers naturally spend only a small amount of time on their laptops, or go to the periphery for longer usage, where they do use the space primarily for socializing and where the level of laptop use is never high enough to preclude that socializing.

Unfortunately this vision is one that cannot (currently) completely exist, that is not (currently) a completely real place in society. People still do camp out with laptops and one is sometimes confronted with that awkward silence upon entering the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown. However, since Stumptown has engaged with the issue of laptop usage through constrictions coming from physical form, over time they are able to affect positive change towards the desired ideological outcome. Physically enacted ideological constraints become part of the unconscious “common sense” because they condition the style of every single social performance in the café. There are still customers who come in and violate the desired forms of laptop usage in the space, but the physical space forces them to do so in a style that actively works against those violations by moving them to the periphery, enforcing informality, and highlighting their transgressive nature. These transgressive customers are to at least some extent reproducing Stumptown's ideological position on laptop usage with the style of

performance they are forced into. Of course the effect is greatly magnified for customers who agree with Stumptown's ideological position: instead of feeling constricted in their social performance, they will experience the social space of Stumptown as refreshingly encouraging of their desires to use the café as an informal social space. This will make them feel more like the café matches their identity, hopefully leading to increased patronage by these customers, which of course means even more social performances that reinforce Stumptown's ideological position.

We can see the immense ideological power that comes from physical space in the way that the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown's seating arrangements engages with laptop usage. This ideological power derives from the combination of the ideological subterfuge of physical space with physical space's ability to forcibly reproduce ideology through time. We have already discussed the ideological subterfuge of physical space when we examined Cresswell's theories, and the application to the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown is quite simple: most customers will be only dimly aware that they are being discouraged from using their laptop by the uncomfortable design, and even those that do realize it will not be able to conclusively implicate Stumptown in an ideological action, if they would even think to in the first place. How could the customer possibly challenge this? Approaching the barista and complaining about the size of the tables? Even if they were to do this, the physical space is already set, and it is taken to be inevitable—the barista has no other option but responding: “I’m sorry to hear that is inconveniencing you, but that is how this café is”. The customer must

either not use a laptop at all, use it in the back of the café where they are removed from the social action of the café that brings so much appeal to laptop usage in a café, or they must use their laptop in the main area uncomfortably for a shorter period than they would otherwise. Each of these options is an acquiescence to Stumptown's ideological domination. As discussed in the previous paragraph, the physical form of the space forces customers to into a performance style that reproduces Stumptown's ideological position. In the example of the bar layout at Espresso Vivace earlier in this chapter, the customer had some degree of choice in terms of how they approached the bar, and so Espresso Vivace's desired ideological social space needed the constant presence of customers already engaged in the correct performance style in order to reproduce itself as commonsense. In the Stumptown example, the customer has no choice—there is no possible social performance in the space that does not at least somewhat reproduce Stumptown's ideology. Physical space's ideological power is its ability to perpetually force an ideological position on a social space in a way that is largely invisible and incontestable.

To better understand the utility of the power of physical space, let us look briefly at an example of a café social space that presents its ideological position on laptop usage in terms of temporal actions instead of physical form. The Chelsea Café

Grumpy on West 20<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City<sup>5</sup> is a narrow, deep neighborhood café with a fairly standard array of seating options: a four-top and a few two-top tables in front, some bar height two-top tables with stools running down the side wall, and then another set of three regular two-top tables in the back area. The space is cramped, their business volume is immense, and rent in NYC is very high. For these reasons (as well as perhaps personal opinions of the owners), Café Grumpy explicitly states that they do not allow laptop usage in this café. They do this by having signs out on the tables and in the window that clearly state that Café Grumpy is a laptop-free zone. Café Grumpy was one of the first cafés in the city to do this, and they received a good deal of press and created a great deal of controversy when they first put up their signs.

Cresswell calls this direct statement of an ideological position the “orthodox” approach: rather than precluding awareness of other possibilities like in Stumptown's approach, Café Grumpy acknowledges the possibility of a café experience that is non-oppositional to laptops and then explicitly denies it by saying that, for their space, opposition to laptops is “the 'right' experience”.<sup>29</sup> Going back to the discussion of hidden transcripts earlier in the chapter, this direct statement of an ideological position opens Café Grumpy up to attack because it makes their domination clear and presents a direct point at which to challenge that domination. In so doing, Café

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5 The last time I checked, other Café Grumpy locations in the city allowed laptop usage, due to their different sizes and levels of customer traffic.

Grumpy creates a heterotopia that reflects “in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” by forcing customers to think about the ways in which laptop usage presents a problematic, possibly destructive blending of social spheres. By labeling this behavior as impossible, Café Grumpy enforces their vision of harmonious relationships between social spheres, enacting a utopia that “is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled”, and hence, creating a heterotopia<sup>30</sup>

Café Grumpy's orthodox approach forces their opposition to laptops to be read in ideological terms, which in turn figures the usage and prohibition of laptops as an issue of explicit domination and resistance,<sup>31</sup> as demonstrated by the impassioned online discussion that has surrounded media coverage of Café Grumpy's decision. By banning laptops Café Grumpy instigates a (small-scale) culture war, and in so doing force their opponents to articulate their position in similarly orthodox terms. A customer cannot appeal to an inherent naturalized right to laptop usage because Café Grumpy has created a heterotopia, a site that reflects and forces an awareness of the social spheres at play and the destruction that laptop usage can wreak upon them. The customer must now articulate why they have the right to cause that destruction, why their ideological vision of social relations should take precedence over others.

The approaches of both the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown and the Chelsea Café Grumpy have value in combating the socially destructive aspects of laptop usage in cafés. Café Grumpy forces a critical awareness of the issues at play upon the

consumer, which has the potential to expand the wider societal discourse's understanding of the social transformations being occasioned by laptops. Though the Chelsea Café Grumpy's ideological approach has its usefulness, it is crucial to understand that this usefulness is fragile and fleeting. This approach is very confrontational and so may limit the audience for this ideological message. If the café was sold and the new owners removed the signs, there would be nothing about the café that combated the negative effects of laptop usage. There is also an abundance of other cafés in the city, the vast majority of which allow laptop usage, and so it is quite possible for a customer to go to the Chelsea Café Grumpy once, see the signs and then decide to never return, with Café Grumpy's message swiftly fading out of their memory. Stumptown avoids these issues by precluding all confrontation, which allows them to win converts by providing an appealingly utopic vision of the social possibilities of laptop usage—a vision which the consumer may integrate into their own actions in space, and hence their own ideology, without necessarily being consciously aware of the transformation. The 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Stumptown's physical design engages with the reality that customers want to use laptops in cafés and have compelling reasons for wanting to do so. By accepting this reality and accommodating it in a way that attempts to reconfigure it towards a style of customer performance that preserves the social utility of the café social space, Stumptown effectively moves society (in a small and localized way) towards a more functional engagement with the

newly emerging overlapping of social spheres, while the Chelsea Café Grumpy merely shouts out its view that such movement is necessary.

## **Enabling Regulars in Complex, High Traffic Environments: Customer Determined Informality and the Exercise of Insider Knowledge at Oddfellows Café + Bar**

Broadly, this chapter examines how physical design can be understood as a manipulation of the “stage” of a social space, in turn manipulating what performances may be conducted on that stage and what styles those performances may take. So far, this examination has focused on the ways that this manipulation functions as an ideological domination of customer interests by the café as an institution. I want to close this chapter by showing that manipulating the physical stage of performance can have profound benefits for customers, enabling them to engage in performances and performance styles that they would not otherwise be able to as successfully. This can clearly be seen in the way that the seating design of Oddfellows Café + Bar (hereafter referred to as Oddfellows) in Seattle, WA provides for many different possible usages of the social space that customers are free to use as befits whatever specific desires strike them in a given visit to the café. As with so much of this thesis, my analysis focuses specifically on regular customers, looking at how their accumulated knowledge of performance possibilities in this space allows them make maximum usage of the

café's physical form.

I spent the past summer working at Oddfellows as part of a two to three person morning bar team, rotating through register, espresso machine and barbacking/non-coffee drink prep duties. As an employee I was playing a significant role in the production of the café's social life, but I was separated from the customers by both the physical bar and counter area, and of course by the social distance enforced by the customer / barista relationship. In this work, I was heavily interacting with customers and able to observe the entire interior of the space, giving me an excellent viewpoint on the social life of the café. What particularly struck me in my observations was the way that different groups of regular customer made use of the seating options in the café.

Oddfellows is a very interesting take on the café, especially for the United States. The main space is one very large room two-story open room, with a small enclosed back patio and four tables with patio/bench seating in a small roped off area on the front sidewalk. Oddfellows offers the full gamut of food and beverage options: espresso and drip coffee service; a standard alcohol bar with gourmet wine and beer selections; pastries baked in house; counter-service style breakfast, brunch and lunch; and a more traditional sit-down restaurant experience for dinner and late night food and drink. The right and back walls of the space are completely taken up by the production and service facilities for these offerings. The bar end of the service area

starts with a glass-front pastry case, with the espresso machine station set immediately next to the case in a niche in the back wall. The register is set on the curve of the bar, next to the pastry case, and then there is a marble-topped bar with eight bar stools to the right of the register. The bar is setup as a standard alcohol bar, with a well and ice-holder under the bar and the liquor bottles and glasses on shelves along the back wall. At the far end of the service area in the back corner of the space is the open kitchen, separated from the customer area by a bar counter that is similar in appearance to the beverage service area, but set higher and supporting shelves for plates and other kitchen needs. This design creates a service area that is completely open to the customers, clearly differentiated from the customer area, cohesive in its appearance, but clearly segmented into different functional areas.

Over the course of my employment I interviewed Linda Derschang, the owner of Oddfellows, multiple times, trying to understand her design goals with the space and how she tried to achieve them. The primary goal that stuck out in all of our conversations was Linda's desire to create a space that people wanted to be in all day. Linda has opened a number of restaurants and bars in Seattle, and she explained that with all of the places she opens, her goal is to create people's "favorite" place, not necessarily the "best" place.<sup>32</sup> This is particularly challenging for Oddfellows since the café is open from eight a.m. until two a.m., and so Linda needed to create a space that could be someone's favorite place to go for breakfast, or a morning coffee and pastry, or a coffee break, or an informal lunch, or a coffee to go with a morning or

afternoon of studying on a laptop, or happy-hour drinks, or a nice sit-down dinner, or a few well-made late-night cocktails after seeing a show at any of the nearby music venues, or any of the uses in between. Linda was very conscious of the different requirements entailed in all of these usage patterns, and used a number of interesting design choices to meet these requirements.

In talking about making someone's "favorite" place, Linda is implicitly talking about cultivating regular customers, and so her design decisions had to be able to capture all of the different types of regular customers entailed in the vast array of usages the space could be put to throughout the day. What is particularly interesting to me is the way that Linda's focus on attracting many different kinds of regulars creates a specific kind of social informality and accessibility that is integral to Oddfellows' ability to encourage regulars despite its overwhelming volume of customers. Because of Oddfellows's prime location in one of the trendiest neighborhoods in the city, its high quality food and drink offerings, the range of those food and drink offerings, and its attractive space, Oddfellows is always busy. Pretty much from the moment the doors opened at eight until the moment I got off shift at two p.m., there would be at least one person in line waiting to be served, and at the peak rushes around morning coffee break and lunch times, the line of people waiting to order would often be a constant eight or more parties deep and stretch all the way to the door. The main café area has seating for approximately eighty customers across a range of seating options, and during lunch all of the seating would

often be full, but during the morning and afternoon the seating would generally be between one and two thirds full.

This staggering volume of customer traffic presents many challenges to cultivating regulars. First, the high volume of customers, combined with Oddfellows' increasing prominence in tourist guides and the like, means that a high proportion of customers will be either new or infrequent customers, which can dramatically undermine the creation of a coherent and stable social space through repetition of the same styles of social performances. In short, there are a whole lot of people coming the door who don't know "how things are done" at Oddfellows. Second, the hustle and bustle of so much volume can make it hard for customers to find sufficient solitude and privacy in the space amidst the constant noise and comings and goings. Third, the sheer number of customers can mean that there isn't enough free seating space in the café, or at least in the different sub-spaces of the café, for regular customers to be able to know that they can reliably come in and make use of the space how they want. Fourth, the vast range of uses the space can be put to can potentially make customers feel somewhat uncomfortable if their particular usage seems greatly at odds with what other customers are doing, for example if a student is studying on a laptop in the late afternoon while the tables all around them are filled with people having after work drinks. Lastly, because there are so many customers coming through the space, it can be hard for regular customers to feel a special sense of ownership or involvement in the community of the space.

The design of Oddfellows addresses all of the issues I have laid out by operating on a sort of hybrid counter-service service style during the day, and by offering a vast array of seating options that offer a range of visibility and engagement with the rest of the space. From opening until the switch over to dinner service at five p.m., all orders are taken at the register and customers form a line stretching from the register towards the door in the open space at the front of the café. If customers order food, they are given a wooden block with a number on it, and then they are free to take that number and sit down at any open table. Once their food is ready, it is brought out to the customer by the floor servers, who remove the blocks at that time and are also responsible for clearing dishes, refilling coffee, waters and other drinks, and taking any additional food or drink orders that customers may have once seated. The floor staff is instructed to service the customers' needs but never pressure the customer into feeling like they need to leave after a certain amount of time. If the customers have just ordered coffee or pastries, they are asked to wait next to the register by the pastry case, and the barista will hand them their pastries and drinks once the drinks have been made. This modified counter-service style enables a relatively small staff to handle massive customer volume with heavy table turnover. Most importantly, it preserves the essential informality and accessibility of the café environment by 1. allowing customers to choose where they wish to sit and how long

they wish to stay,<sup>6</sup> and 2. accommodating customers who want to take their orders to go or just order coffee, without making those customers feel any different or less important than the customers ordering food.

There are a number of interesting nuances to the service style that further contribute to informality and accessibility. Demonstrating the depth of her thinking on the subject, and her strong service-industry bent, Linda points out that with this service style, because all tips are pooled and given at the counter, customers will not feel as guilty about staying for a long time in the café because they are not taking up a table in server's section that the server needs to turn over as many times as possible to get sufficient tips.<sup>33</sup> Another nuance that I have observed is that spending time in line waiting to order gives customers ample time to evaluate how long the wait for food is likely to be based on the speed the line is moving and the number of blocks sitting out on tables, as well as giving them time to observe whether or not there is free seating in the area they want to sit in. This opportunity for observation allows the customer to gauge how accommodating to their desired usage the café is likely to be at that time, giving them the opportunity to decide to change what they order, order

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6 It is important to note that these issues of informality and the compulsions that come from table service are at least somewhat particular to the American style of food and especially café service. In most European cafés, table service is the standard and is not necessarily seen as restricting informality, due to both cultural tradition and the fact that the price structure of the café offerings combined with the wage and benefit structure for workers negates many of the tipping related issues. This is one of the reasons that I say Oddfellows is an interesting adaptation of the Continental Café style to the U.S. context.

their items to go, or leave all together without any of the feelings of obligation that come from going through the rigmarole of the standard process of being seated and having their order taken by servers. Regular customers are particularly able to take advantage of this opportunity for observation because they have a better sense of the general patterns of the café and so are more attuned to the indicators I've listed. One last important point to be made about the customer line is that it functions as an obligatory but informal social stage where customers must wait in close proximity, which encourages socializing between customer parties—a fact that is particularly evident in the way that the morning regulars who work in the building above Oddfellows and in the surrounding buildings will often talk with each other when they find themselves together in line, chatting in a way that is clearly a continuation of their existing informal relationships.

As interesting as the service design of Oddfellows is, what really defines the café is its seating design. The front wall of the café is dominated by massive windows that extend the entire length and almost the entire height of the space, with a continuous bench underneath the window sill. There are eight two-person tables set in front of this bench, each with one chair opposite the bench. Due to the building's construction, the floor of the café is actually raised about two feet from street level, which combines with the height of the benches to mean that passersby on the street are somewhat below the eye level of the seated customers, and the passersby are only able to see the customers from about shoulder up. Going back to chapter one's

discussion of transparency's relationship to informality, the level of the windows and bench means that passersby are able to get a general sense of the atmosphere in the café but cannot see exactly how full it is or what is going on, while the customers are able to look out on the entirety of the street scene unobtrusively. Linda said that this height was a conscious decision designed to make it so that passersby would see and hear the lively environment of the café and be enticed to come in, while still preserving a separation between café and street.<sup>34</sup> I think that this decision is an excellent compromise that allows customers to find a sense of solitude and privacy while still being engaged with the outside world, despite the monumental openness created by having the facade of the café being completely transparent. This idea of just enough formality and inaccessibility is a theme that runs through the entire seating design.

Looking with your back to the wall of windows, the left wall opposite the service area also has one continuous bench running down its length, with ten two-person tables arranged in front of it. The seating area in the center of the café is made up of three rows of three four-person trestle tables set slightly apart from one another. Behind these trestle tables is another long bench with four two-person tables in front of it, and the floor staff's service island set into its back. There is a large communal table set in the space between the service island and the back wall of refrigerators for beer and wine, next to the service window area of the open kitchen. In the left corner of the space opposite the kitchen area is a door into the small, enclosed open-air patio

that has two two-person tables and one three-to-four person table. Rounding out the seating options are the eight stools in the bar area, which is open all day, but due to Washington liquor laws is semi-partitioned off by two railings and marked with a no minors allowed sign.

In designing Oddfellows' seating, Linda paid particular attention to issues of visibility and public presence. She said that she wanted to make sure people could work comfortably during the day, so it was important to have enough seats arranged in a way that could accommodate people without too much unnecessary bustling around. At the same time, she said that people were “there to be seen, otherwise they'd work at home”.<sup>35</sup> As such, she wanted the seating to be arranged such that everyone was facing everyone else as much as possible, with few possible “places to hide”. Following the idea that people come to hang out at a café for a specific atmosphere, Linda also wanted the space to have a feel of vibrancy and informality, which was part of the decision to have one large open space with seating that is generally set close together and offers multiple styles of communal seating. I think that Linda generally succeeded with all of these goals, but as with the service design, what really interests me are the little nuances that make the space especially effective for regulars.

Though everyone is generally facing everyone else in the degree, there are different degrees to which the customer could be seen as being “public” in the café's seating, based on how much the customer's seating choice faces and is faced by

others. Here I take public to mean how visible the style of a customer's social performance is to those around customer, or how much any transgression the customer makes is likely to be noticed by other customers. These issues are defined by how many different areas the customer can be observed from, and how easy it is to do so.

If the customer is seated in the center trestle-tables, the customer is in the most public spot in the café: the customer is observing and being observed by customers seated in the bench seating along the three sides of the café, as well as the other customers seated in the center section, and there is a short distance from the customer's seat to all other points, with no major line-of-sight obstructions. It is somewhat of a toss-up between the bar stools and the tables under the windows as to which area is the next most public seating choice. Seated at the bar stools, the customer is facing away from all of the other customers and so may be less likely to feel themselves as being observed by them, but at the same time the customers seated along both the windows and the opposite wall are directly facing the customer, and especially during the counter-service hours the customer is seated near the focal point of customer and staff attention in the café. When seated at the benches under the windows, the customer is directly facing all of the seating areas except for those customers along the side wall, and the customer is also somewhat in view of the street. However if the customer is seated in a chair at one of these tables, the customer's back is to the rest of the café and the customer is able to look directly out

the windows, which can definitely provide a sense of solitude and isolation from the rest of the café, especially when a long line of customers is blocking the window seating area from the rest of the café's sight.

The two-person tables along the left side of the space are definitely the most private general seating area in the café. When seated on the bench, a customer is able to observe entire café, but there are no customers who are directly facing them. The closest to direct observation comes from the customers seated under the window, but those customers are still looking at an angle and through the crowd of other seated and standing customers. The effect becomes more pronounced the further towards the back of the space the table is.

The large communal table and the back patio both present special cases. The communal table is isolated from the rest of the café by the service island, but at the same time the bustle of food service from the kitchen is going on right next to it, which depending on the customer's disposition can either make customers feel even more isolated since they are caught up in the inner workings of the café, or less isolated and more on display because of the flurry of activity surrounding them. Also because it is set in the back of the space and is often used for informal business meetings by managers, customers may feel unclear as to whether or not they are allowed to sit there. The back patio is certainly the most secluded and private seating available, but it is closed when the weather is foul and many customers do not even know that it exists. This increases the privacy of the space and presents an

opportunity for regulars to make use of their insider knowledge to find quiet and secluded seating even when the café is quite busy.

Analyzing all of the possible use cases presented by these various seating options would require in depth ethnographic work and likely be a chapter unto itself, so I will settle for presenting three particular usages of seating that I think are illustrative of the issues at play. These examples all focus on different forms of usage by regulars: 1. morning regulars who work on their laptops tend to sit along the far left wall, 2. mid-afternoon regulars drinking alcohol usually sit in the seating under the windows, or at the first row of trestle tables if they have a larger party, 3. lunch time regulars often skip the line and sit down directly at the bar stools. All of these usage patterns are examples of ways that the seating design enables regulars to engage in performances that are at odds with the dominant usage style of the café at that given time.

I believe morning regulars who work on their laptops tend to sit along the far wall because it offers them the most peace and privacy. As I explained above, the seating along the far wall is the most private because its relative unavailability to the gaze of the rest of the customers in the café. The far wall seating is also the area least disturbed by the coming and goings of customers, since unlike the area in front of the bar or the windows, customers have no reason to go down the far side aisle unless they are going to or leaving a table. The privacy that is created in terms of space and visibility is helpful to the both the customers on their laptops and the other customers

in the café: for the laptop users, they feel less disturbed by those around them, better able to find solitude due to the heightened informality, and less self-conscious about working while the people around them are eating breakfast or whatever else; while for the customers who are not using laptops are less disturbed by the silence and a-socialness of laptop users. Another benefit to regular customers is the fact that the floor staff usually make their rounds via the aisle next to the far wall, so regular customers are better able to stop staff members they know and engage them in conversation, ask for refills, etc. All in all, sitting along the far wall while using laptops allows customers, and especially regular customers who are more attuned to the space's dynamics, to use their laptops in unobtrusive ways that do not detract from the ambiance, while also allowing them be less disturbed by the rest of the customer traffic in the café.

The seating choice of alcohol drinking regulars in the mid-to-late afternoon is another example of customers isolating themselves spatially from activities of the rest of the café. Though it is certainly not as strong a trend as laptop users along the far wall, I have noticed that generally if a group of customers, especially regular customers, come into to have drinks between two and four p.m., if the weather is not nice enough for patio or sidewalk seating and they do not want to sit at the bar, they will prefer to sit at the tables along the front windows, or less commonly, in the first row of central trestle-tables. My theory on this behavior is that it is based 1. on Linda's observation that people are at Oddfellows to be seen, and 2. that people

engaged in types of informal socializing like drinking are more sensitive to the moods and actions of those around them, and hence more likely to isolate themselves from other people who are not drinking. As Linda pointed out, generally if people are doing something in a public venue that they could be doing in a private venue, they are either actively desiring, or at least not opposed to being seen. I think this is doubly true for drinking at Oddfellows since it is such a clearly open and visible space—there are plenty of bars with booths, nooks, dimly lit rooms, fenced in patios and countless other options for drinking out of the public gaze. Since Oddfellows has a reputation as a trendy place where people go to see and be seen, part of the appeal of drinking there is to be seen drinking there, and so it is logical that people drinking will sit in the most visible seating areas of the café. Even if a customer is not specifically desiring to “be seen”, casual social drinking is not an activity in our society that is in seen as aberrant for public life, whereas things such as working or eating alone in public are, so drinking customers will feel less incentive to seek out the more out of the way seating options.

Though casual social drinking is not necessarily something that customers will feel they need to do out of sight from others, it is an activity that is rather sensitive to how other people in the social space are acting. A group of people having after work drinks are going to feel less comfortable engaging in a loud, jovial social performance if the people seated on either side of them are furiously typing away on laptops or picking at a scone and reading a novel. At one a.m., it is a pretty safe bet that most of

the customers in the café are behaving loosely and having a good time, but this is certainly less the case in the late afternoon. As such, it makes sense for drinking customers to sit under the windows or in the first row of trestle-tables because these are the seating areas that are a. most disconnected from the quieter atmosphere in the rest of the main space, and b. most associated with informal and short-term patronage because they are nearest the door, in the most highly trafficked area, and generally the places where customers just stopping in for a moment sit down. Though I have noticed all sort of alcohol drinking customers tend towards sitting in these areas, it is once again a trend that is strongest with regulars, which I believe is due to their accumulated experience with the social atmosphere of the café at different times of day and the intuitive sense they develop of what seating areas are best for different types of usages in relation to the social atmosphere at the given time.

For me, far and away the most interesting spatial usage pattern is how regular customers make use of the bar-stool seating during lunch and brunch rushes. Lunch, and especially brunch, at Oddfellows tends to get pretty insane. Between eleven a.m. and one or two p.m., there is all but guaranteed to be a constant line of customers at the register, usually at least three parties deep, and not uncommonly a constant five or more parties deep. The main seating areas will be between eighty and one-hundred percent full. This is with the entire bar, floor and kitchen staff going full-tilt, constantly in motion with every movement having a purpose. Though this can be a lot of fun to work as a barista, the long wait in line and the lack of seating can present

a serious issue for regular customers out on a lunch break who just want to grab a quick bite. However if they are sufficiently familiar with the workings of the café (which is usually a function of if the staff likes them/their tipping behavior enough to explain to them), a regular customer can avoid these issues by walking up and sitting down at the bar. Though there are no signs explaining it, customers do not have to wait in line if they want to sit at the bar, no matter if they want to have food or only drinks. All of the bar staff have been instructed to take orders from and serve customers seated at the bar as soon as possible after they sit down, which is easy enough for the staff to do because they can greet the customers, provide water glasses, and take orders while also engaged in drink prep and other tasks behind the bar. Customers who are aware of this are thus able to totally bypass the non-regular customers waiting in line, assuming that there are enough open seats at the bar.

What this means is that during brunch, and especially during weekday lunch, the bar seating will usually be mainly occupied by regulars either by themselves or in groups of two or three. Because learning that one can bypass the line requires either rather frequent patronage or a good relationship with the staff, the regulars who sit at the bar tend to be people who work in the immediate vicinity, and especially service workers from the multitude of bars, clubs and restaurants in the neighborhood. In general the regulars at Oddfellows I liked most and knew the best were the ones who would sit at the bar, because I was able to converse with them while working the register or doing barbacking/drink prep. By the same token, the people who I was

most likely to tell about being able to skip the line were the regulars who I most enjoyed talking with. The atmosphere of the bar during lunch was highly informal since customers were placed in close proximity to other customers and the staff, it was perfectly normal to be alone at the bar, and customers could come and go quickly or linger over food or drink. Customers were thus more exposed to socializing with other customers and staff, but in a less artificial way than if they were seated at a table, since sitting at the bar was a choice.

By choosing to sit at the bar, regular customers were performing their identity as an insider, someone who knew how things were done at the café, and performing their identity as someone who was interested in approaching the staff and other customers as real people to socialize with. Because the bar was set immediately next to the register, the impact of the regular customers' performance was magnified by being right in the line of sight of every new customer in the space. By performing their insider knowledge directly in front of everyone else, the regular customer is more apt to feel special and invested in the space. However, what is most interesting is that by being marked as an insider and then being able to perform as such within the narrowly delimited social space of the bar, the regular customer is able to create a transgressive social space that asserts their particular vision of what customer / staff relations should be like at Oddfellows.

This possibility of creating transgressive social space at the bar is an excellent place to close this chapter. As we have seen, the physical design of the bar seating's

placement next to the register, combined with the service design of allowing the customer to bypass the line by sitting at the bar, creates an opportunity for regular customers to perform their knowledge of the possible performances in the social space of Oddfellows. Though I'm not sure that Linda had any particular intention to do so, the physical placement of the bar also creates a social stage that encompasses the customers waiting in line, the customers seated at the bar, and the service staff working behind the bar. The customers in line are able to see and hear the performances of the customers at the bar and vis-a-versa, which combines with the bar staff's constant addressing of both groups of customers to create a single conceptual sub-stage on which all of the main service interaction in the café is played out.

In the in-line ordering style of Espresso Vivace, the customers ordering in line are just as much “on stage” as the baristas, from the view of the other customers waiting in line.<sup>7</sup> The point holds doubly true for the bar seating / service-area / customer line space at Oddfellows. As Jen observed, what this means is that if a customer in line engages in a performance that is non-normative for the social environment of the space, such as treating the barista rudely, the other customers in line are able to challenge this performance by either directly saying something to the transgressing customer, or by telling the barista after the fact that they thought the

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<sup>7</sup> I want to thank my friend Jen Prince for first making this point to me while we were discussing different ordering styles.

customer's performance was unacceptable. In this way, regular customers waiting in line are able to discipline what they view to be transgressive performances by engaging in a performance style on the same stage that is authorized as dominant over the transgressive customer because the regular customer is a. a customer with just as much claim to the space as any other customer on the same stage and b. a customer with more claim to the space since they are a regular who knows how things should be in the space.

The integration of the bar seating area into this dynamic at Oddfellows greatly magnifies the effect. Customers seated at the bar are able to interact socially with the staff members while they are engaged in service, and since these customers are generally regulars who have good relationships with the staff and the café as a whole, these social interactions will generally be respectful, informal, and matching the environment that the staff and other regulars wish to create. This style of performance will be visible to every customer who orders at the register, and the regular customers at the bar are able to see and challenge the performance of any customer who comes through the line, instead of just the customers is immediately in front of them as in the Espresso Vivace example. Though it is very unlikely that this challenge would take the form of a direct statement to a customer in line, the customers at the bar could make remarks to either other customers or staff that were intentionally audible to the transgressing customer, or they could easily make comments after the fact to the staff that support the staff not acquiescing to

attempted domination by customers. The act of skipping the line and sitting at the bar clearly marks these customers as people with a claim to knowledge of the proper functioning of the space, and the way that staff members interact with the regulars at the bar in a familiar and sociable manner further marks these customers as people who “belong” in the space. All of this gives the regular customers seated at the bar a powerful ability to define and ensure the re-performance of the appropriate performance style for the café space. In so doing, the regular customers help to further the ideological positions of the café. I

In this example the combination of physical design and service design creates a social space that enables a specific performance style by customers: the performance of a knowledgeable regular customer identity that allows the regular to bypass the restrictions created by massive customer volume. At the same time, this social space helps to advance an ideological position by dominating other customers: the combined line / service-area / bar social stage clearly emphasizes performances that are respectful of the staff and regular customers' desires, while enabling the staff and regular customers to engage in performances that negate the effects of performances that are not respectful of their desires.

## **Conclusion: Constructing Queer Social Space at Espresso Vivace, and Why All of My Cafés Will Have Bus-Tubs**

I hope that this thesis has provided a fuller understanding of both the café as a social space, and the power that performativity based analysis has to explain the production and implications of social spaces generally and the café specifically. I of course believe that the extension of Judith Butler's gender performance metaphor I have presented provides a reasonably complete and convincing account of the social space of the café, but I understand that there may still be some objections that need to be addressed. The first possible objection I see is a fundamental rejection of the idea that cafés have identities that can be analyzed in terms of performative re-production, or more specifically analyzed as comparable to gender identity. The second possible objection I see is really a pair of objections in terms of applicability: café owners and designers may question how all of this theoretical wrangling can productively inform their design choices, while feminist and queer theorists may question how all of this not particularly rigorous theorizing can productively inform understandings of gender and sexuality related issues—especially since gender and particularly sexuality are hardly mentioned at all in this text. I'm going to attempt to address all of these objections by presenting a quick analysis of two particular intersections of physical and service design that I believe have clear potential implications for the identity of a

café: 1. how the social space created by the bar layout and service approach at Espresso Vivace gives baristas and regular customers increased agency to present gender-variant identity performances and 2. how having a visible bus tub in a café and expecting customers to bus their own dishes can increase the strength of regular customers' identification with a café and contribute to a sense of community.

I have already described the bar layout and service approach of Espresso Vivace at length in chapters two and three, but as a brief refresher: Espresso Vivace has a large gently curved bar arranged such that the customer first orders their drink from the barista pulling shots on the espresso machine, then waits in line in front of the espresso machine while the drinks of the customers in front of them are made and paid for, before finally advancing to the head of the line and paying the barista that is steaming milk, completing drinks and working the register. The bar is oriented such that the line of customers snakes from the door to the espresso machine and then around the curve of the bar, ending at the register. This inversion of the standard pay at the register and then receive the drink from the espresso machine order physically creates a social space where the customers in line are placed in front of the baristas within conversation distance for the maximum possible time. David Schomer, the owner of Vivace, has instructed his baristas to approach their service in a style that emphasizes their craft competency and focuses the service interaction on the drink order instead of superficial, high-personality socializing with customers, which

actually creates better tips and stronger social relationships with regular customers by enabling more authentic social interactions.

As I briefly discussed at the end of chapter three, because the baristas as well as all of the customers in line are placed together in close physical proximity, a single social space is formed where identity performances by customers that transgress the established social norms of the café are able to either be challenged by the baristas, with the challenge being backed up by regular customers elsewhere in line, or directly challenged by the regular customers in line. In my observations, the combination of this singular social stage with the emphasis on craft competency is able to create an overall “safe space” in the café that is profoundly supportive of gender-variant identities in both customers and staff.

There are currently three different Espresso Vivace shops in Seattle, and they all exhibit this phenomenon to various degrees, but I am going to refer specifically to the old Espresso Vivace Roasteria café that was torn down in 2009 to make way for a light-rail station (that is still at least three years from completion). This café was located on Broadway in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle. The Roasteria was an institution on Capitol Hill for over fifteen years, and in those days Capitol Hill and especially Broadway was strongly identified as the “gay neighborhood” in Seattle, with the annual Gay Pride parade route running down Broadway, and many gay-owned and gay-themed businesses and organizations throughout the neighborhood. As a young gay man, Capitol Hill helped open my eyes to the fact that there were

other people like me in the world. I still distinctly remembering biking or busing up to Capitol Hill as a middle and high school student. I would wander Broadway before stopping into the Vivace Roasteria to have a latte and read *The Stranger*, Seattle's alternative weekly newspaper. The customers and baristas at the Roasteria presented a dizzying array of identities, with most every take on alternative sexuality, gender identity, fashion style and body modification either working behind bar or walking through the door on any given Sunday. Vivace was a microcosm of the neighborhood in all its variety, and I found it to be an unfailingly safe and affirming place. Though many other cafés and experiences helped truly ignite my passion for coffee, there is no doubt that the seed of my love for the café as a social space was planted by Espresso Vivace's combination of truly world-class coffee with a resolutely welcoming, queer-positive environment. To say that I was elated to get a job working at the Vivace the summer after high school would be an understatement. Over the course of that summer and the next, I developed a new-found confidence in my identity in the industry and in the world while working behind that bar.

I believe the Roasteria was able to cultivate this queer space because of the way that its physical and service design forcibly presented the ideological position that the café was a space for community, that this community involved customers and baristas equally, that the baristas were worthy of respect, and that any affront to the baristas or the regular customers who “belonged” in the café was an affront to the community of the café as a whole. Out of all of the bosses I've had, David Schomer is the only one

who has explicitly stated that baristas at his café are empowered to kick out customers they don't feel should be there. Though I have never witnessed a situation where baristas actually had to resort to this power, the idea is fundamental to the ideological position of the café: Espresso Vivace makes fantastic coffee, there are thousands of regular customers who love the coffee and the social space, and if an individual customer doesn't like how things are done at Espresso Vivace, they should go elsewhere because the community of regulars and staff is much more important than the whims of some random customer.

This philosophy is made clear to every new customer who walks in the door. The layout of the line forces the new customer into extended close proximity with the barista, where they are able to watch the intensely skilled dance of drink performance and see the baristas finishing each drink with a beautiful piece of latte-art on top. The new customer sees how easily and genuinely the staff and regular customers interact with each other. The new customer is compelled to watch a performance that shows the barista as a real, skilled human being, even if the new customer is apt to see the barista as anything but due to their heavy tattoos, alternative gender presentation, swishy mannerisms, or whatever else.

As I explored in chapter one, the economic exchange of the barista / customer service interaction forces the barista and customer into a social exchange as well. Because the customer is compelled to interact with the barista (and other customers) in an at least somewhat social manner, a space for what Jose Muñoz calls a

disidentificatory performance is created. If a new customer comes into Vivace and believes that the position of power afforded to them as a customer allows them to engage in a performance that is homophobic or otherwise disrespectful to the staff or other customers, the café, as composed of the baristas and regulars customers, are able to challenge that performance as not acceptable in the space. They are able to do this by affirming that the new customer is engaged in an economic and social interaction with the café, thereby partially accepting the new customer's interpellation, but then taking that interpellation and refiguring it through a performance that denies the new customer's right to dominate others in the café based on that new customer's position in the economic transaction.

This challenge can be performed in a number of ways, as befits the level of transgression exhibited by the new customer. If the new customer is merely being surly or generally rude, the barista can refuse to engage socially beyond the barest minimum required of the economic exchange, while performing their production duties with a level of skill that counters the implied personal denigration of the new customer's actions; while regular customers behind the new customer in line may remark to the barista, possibly intentionally audible to the new customer, that the new customer seemed quite rude and the barista handled them appropriately. If the new customer makes a remark that is openly homophobic or otherwise personally insulting, the baristas and regular customers in line can say something directly to the new customer, regardless of whether or not the remark was specifically directed at any

of them, because they are all sharing in the same performance on the social stage of the line area. If the new customer persists in being offensive, the barista can tell the new customer that they need to leave, which will quite likely elicit supportive statements from regular customers in line.

This ability to challenge homophobic or otherwise transgressive customer performances takes the form of a disidentificatory identity performance that contributes to the overarching identity of the café by ensuring that the continual re-performance of the social space occurs in a style that affirms the café community's ideological stance against homophobia and other forms of social domination. This disidentificatory performance is built upon the sense of community that comes from the strong social ties between baristas and regular customers that are developed thanks to the alternative service style at Espresso Vivace that focuses on creating natural social interactions via service performance styles that are properly attuned to the realities of the café service interaction. Though the possibility of a disidentificatory challenge to homophobia is predicated on this service design, it relies on the physical design of the café for its particular ideological efficacy. Beyond reinforcing the community enabling effects of the service design, the physical design of the customer flow at the Roasteria also places the baristas, the ordering customers, and the customers waiting in line all on one social stage. This design creates the possibility of social interaction between all of these parties, and legitimates and promotes that social interaction because in engaging in the style of social interaction

that their experience with performances in the café has taught them to expect, the baristas and regular customers are constantly reproducing a social space that values that style of interaction. This constantly re-produced social space clearly marks as transgressive customer performances that do not fit into the expectations of respectful community oriented socializing. If a customer transgresses these expectations, they are likely to be challenged in a number of ways, and are forced to either acquiesce to the expectations of the social space, or leave the premises.

The customer's attempted transgression thus does not affect the values and expectations of the social space in the long term because it is figured as an isolated act that will be erased by the immediately following re-performance of the social space's values by the baristas and/or regular customers. In this way, the service and physical design of the Espresso Vivace Roasteria was able to advance and maintain an ideological position in support of the baristas and regular customers that made up the community of its social space. The fact that new customers rarely transgressed the space's expectations, and extremely rarely transgressed them to point of receiving any sort of challenge, speaks to the naturalizing power that active physical constraints and constant re-production of social space have to forcibly, and largely invisibly, propagate ideological positions.

There are still two Espresso Vivaces located on Broadway, but Capitol Hill has greatly gentrified since then and is now the trendy “alternative” neighborhood in Seattle. When the Roasteria was torn down, a part of me died, and the Seattle of my

childhood faded into memory. If you visit Broadway, or even Capitol Hill generally nowadays, there is not much left that speaks to the neighborhood's gay identity, except for a few gay bars along the periphery and a precious few stalwart but rapidly disappearing institutions along the main drag. When I go into the new Espresso Vivace in the bottom of a condo development at the north end of Broadway, I see many of the same old baristas and regulars, but I can't help but notice that the overall feel of the place is more normative, more homogenous, and quite simply, less queer. Of course this is a reflection of an overall societal trend towards the mainstreaming and homogenizing of homosexuality, and to a lesser extent gender-variance, but I feel that this trend is greatly accelerated by the loss of community institutions, such as the Espresso Vivace Roasteria, that were associated with a vibrant queer life.

To truly understand the affects that changing and disappearing safe spaces have on homophobia and misogyny, it is crucial to understand how exactly different sorts of social institutions can function as safe spaces, or more broadly as spaces for the articulation and propagation of non-normative social ideologies. I have noticed a tendency towards romanticizing “public space”, and especially non-commercial public space, in academic work on social change and marginalized groups. This is of course a hugely important area of study, but we must avoid the tendency to assume that there is some inherent mechanism in a space being open to the public that gives it any specific type of social, cultural or political utility. The possible utility of any social

space, public or private, is determined by the specific physical form of that space, and the way that physical form is given symbolic meaning through the accumulation of specific performance styles that occur within that form. As public life in our society becomes ever more contained within commercial spaces such as cafés, malls, movie theaters, sports arenas and the like, it is particularly important that we pay attention to the ways that the physical and temporal forms of these social spaces can differ radically from previous conceptions of social space that were not predicated on economic transactions.

By analyzing the production of social space in the café, we have come to see that private determination of physical form by café owners, combined with the compulsory social interaction created by the economic exchange, can create opportunities for the advancement of specific ideological positions through both the restrictions that come out of physical form, and the way that physical form combined with compulsory social interaction can enable and legitimate disidentificatory social performances. In this way, an entire social institution, such as a café, can present a resistant social identity. Resisting homophobia, misogyny, or any other form of domination is inescapably a social act, which must inescapably occur in social space, and hence, feminist, queer, and other critical theorists must pay attention to how social space conditions and enables forms of resistance.

Hopefully this example clarifies how social spaces can present non-normative identities, and how performativity based phenomenological accounts can help uncover

the mechanisms of domination and the possibilities for resistance within those identity expressions. Having clarified some of the utility of this thesis for academics, I'll now turn to a clarification for the coffee industry. Creating environments, like Espresso Vivace, that encourage and support the community of staff and regular customers in a café is of course a serious concern for café owners, and I very much hope that people are better able to understand how to do so after reading this thesis. However, such concerns can certainly feel like a rather specific and limited part of the overall design issues in a café, especially from an economic perspective. By examining the issue of using self-service and bus-tubs in a café, I want to show that 1. analyzing the performative construction of social space can help understand the challenges and rewards entailed in things like using bus-tubs, and 2. even seemingly mundane issues like using bus-tubs can help to encourage stronger identification with the café by regular customers, and as every café owner knows, cultivating regular customers is integral to a café's economic success.

For anyone not already aware, a bus-tub is a large plastic tub that is set out in the café, usually underneath the condiment bar or nearby. Customers are expected to place their dirty cups and dishes in the tub once they are done, and then a staff member will come out into the service area periodically, take the tub back to the service area, and clean all the dishes. Sometimes there are signs put out on the condiment bar and perhaps the tables asking customers to bus their own dishes to the bus-tub, though often there are no signs and customers are just expected to know that

they should bus their own dishes once they are done. I've noticed that bus-tubs are particularly common, and it is particularly common to have them out without any signage, in cities such as Portland, OR and Seattle, WA where there is a strong independent café culture and so customers are likely to be aware of the convention.

I've gotten into arguments with multiple people in the industry about the issue of bus-tubs, and the argument usually centers around the other person contending that expecting customers to serve themselves and bus their own dirty dishes is demeaning and potentially disrespectful to the customer. While I think these objections certainly have validity if the goal is to create a luxury retail experience more along the pattern of a wine bar, I think they are rather tangential when it comes to the informal social space of a café.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis I have been exploring how informality in social interactions and expectations is key to the café's social utility because that informality makes customers more comfortable with coming to a café

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1 For about the twentieth time, this discussion is specific to the American context and its particularly confused and tortuous relationship with service industry workers, tipping, and respecting its (semi)public spaces. Obviously putting out a bus-tub in a European café would have no coherency because of the default of table service. Bus-tubs can only productively create informality and community in the much more transient environment of espresso bar style spaces, or in the more alienated and atomized social world of the American café. Introducing table service into the American café context, such as at Oddfellows, may help bring some of the positive aspects of European public culture to America, but I believe that 1. the entirety of a café's physical and service design must be oriented very carefully towards that goal, and 2. it is probably necessary to have the café serve food for customers to be able to accept table service as coherent. Even then, unpacking all of the issues necessary to evaluate the efficacy of that decision would be a chapter unto itself. So, in this discussion, I am limiting myself to American cafés that are standard in their service and their focus on coffee.

alone or in groups, and engaging in any of the wide variety of possible social performances in that café. In this context, at the base level bus-tubs are beneficial in that they create more informality by allowing the customer to determine the length and nature of their stay in the café. With a bus-tub, there are no staff roaming the café, asking customers if they are done or if they want a refill, which means that customers are not forced into an awareness of how long they have been there and the fact that other customers may want to use the space the customer is occupying. Bussing their own table also enables the customer to leave the space without their departure being noticed by the staff, and to an extent the other customers, furthering the accessibility and the feeling of informal transience in the café.

Beyond these benefits to the informal atmosphere, having a bus-tub is beneficial because it creates another opportunity for customers to perform their insider knowledge of how things are done in the space, and another opportunity to perform their respect for the café space and the staff working in it. When a customer buses their table, especially without having to ask the staff where the bus tub is, they demonstrate that they are familiar with how the specific café does things—or at least that they are familiar with how things are done in the general class of cafés that the specific café is an example of. As I pointed out, I have most often noticed bus-tubs without signage in Portland, OR and Seattle, WA cafés, which means that when a customer comes into one of those cafés and uses the bus-tub, they could be seen to be

identifying themselves as a Pacific Northwester familiar with that specific café scene, even if they are not a regular at the specific café they are in.

The bus-tub's ability to mark a customer as a regular of the scene generally or a café specifically is heightened by the “in place / out of place” ideological dynamic of space that Cresswell points to. Using a bus-tub may subtly mark a customer as a regular, but not using a bus-tub very clearly marks a customer as a non-regular. The dirty dishes that a non-regular customer leaves on a table function as a clear visible sign of that customer's outsider status which is visible to all of the staff and other customers in the café. This may seem to be largely immaterial because that non-regular customer has already left and so their being marked as transgressive is not likely to change their behavior. While I would argue that if the customer returns, over time they will notice other people bussing their own tables and so decide to follow suit if they wish to be seen as a regular, I do agree that increasing new customer's identification with the café space is not the primary utility of the bus-tub or the un-bussed dishes' marking of transgression.

I think that the primary utility of having un-bussed dishes marking transgression is the way that this can increase regular customer's sense of pride in their insider status. When a regular customer sees a new customer get up and leave, leaving their dirty dishes on the table behind them, that regular customer is likely to feel angry or disappointed in the new customer and defensive of the cleanliness of the café space. Though this may sound trite, that regular customer glaring at the

departing newcomer, or just silently thinking less of them, increases the regular customer's belief in the importance of their insider knowledge that the café expects self-bussing. Watching another customer transgress expectations create an opportunity for the regular customer to re-perform what they see as the correct expectations, thereby furthering the re-production of the overall social space and giving the regular customer a greater role in that reproduction. This re-performance may take the form of the glare or silent disapproval, or if the regular customer feels particularly strongly, they may re-perform the expectations by actually bussing the departed new-comer's dishes for them.

By bussing their own dishes, the regular customer is re-performing the expectations of the café, and by bussing someone else's dishes in addition, they are demonstrating just how much they value those expectations. A café owner may think this is all well and good in the abstract, and may even agree that a regular customer engaging in a re-performance of the café's expectations generally does increase the customer's investment in the café social space, but I wouldn't be surprised if a café owner still thinks that these small things do not outweigh the supposedly demeaning nature of bussing one's own dishes.

I don't disagree that bussing dishes is demeaning. In fact, I think that the demeaning nature of bussing dishes is exactly what makes it so powerful for the customer to do it. As I explored in chapter two, service interactions, and especially short, largely superficial ones like the barista / customer interaction, lend themselves

to dynamics of social domination where the customer believes themselves to be better than the service worker specifically because the work of service is seen as demeaning. This is one explanation of the social utility of the tip: it is an acknowledgment of the service worker's humanity by the customer, an acknowledgment that the service performed is demeaning, that it goes beyond the general expectations of human economic exchange. Having a customer bus their own dishes is another opportunity for the customer to demonstrate that the customer understands the barista's work is demeaning.

By performing the demeaning but ultimately trivial act of bussing their own dishes, the customer is deliberately forgoing their right to completely dominate the barista in the service interaction. Even when there is a bus-tub set out, the customer is not forced to bus their dishes. If they choose to do so, and especially if they also choose to bus other customer's dishes, the customer is acknowledging that it is easy for the customer to bus their own dishes, but comparatively much harder for the barista to interrupt drink service, come out from behind the bar, and clean up all the dishes left on tables. The customer is acknowledging that the barista has better things to do than cater to the customer's every whim, and in so doing, the customer acknowledges the craft competency of the barista's coffee production, further acknowledging them as a worthwhile human being.

Short of giving a wildly over-size tip, bussing someone else's dishes in addition to their own is quickest way for a regular customer to make me like them

when I am working bar, or at least be radically more tolerant of whatever peculiarities they may have. I see that act as the customer acknowledging my humanity and the value of my time, performing their valuing of smooth continued drink production for other customers over having their every whim catered to, and demonstrating their commitment to keeping the communal space clean and pleasant for all customers and staff. It has been a very long time since I had the perspective of a café customer who did not understand the inner workings of café spaces, but I imagine that to at least some degree the regular customer must understand their action in at least some of the same terms. Even if any one regular customer does not understand their action in that way, they are still helping to construct an overall social space that reflects those values since the style of their performance can be read by others as reflecting those values.

Every café I ever open will have a bus-tub in it because I want to attract customers who feel invested in the community of the space and treat the baristas and other customers as human beings, not anonymous people subject to their every whim. Having a bus-tub may seem to be something with a very small effect, especially compared to the loftiness of those goals. But we must not forget just how often regular customers come in to the café. Even the smallest of acts, if performed hundreds or thousands of times in the same style, can play a large role in constituting an identity, both for an individual and for a café. Every single service and physical design decision that is made has some sort of ideological implication, no matter how small, on the ways that the social space of a café will re-perform itself and shape its

customer's and staff's personal re-performances. Since that is the case, I choose to approach every single design decision as an opportunity to help create a social space that reflects and furthers the values I want to society to have.

The effects may not be particularly grandiose, but they are real, and I hope that more people can come to see that. Each and every space the contains social life is an opportunity to reshape that social life for the better. The designs of cafés have been reshaping the conduct of social life for centuries, helping to create and further some of the most profound social changes in human history, from the democratization of politics, art and intellectual activity, to the rise of capitalist exchange and the dissolution of restrictive, sexist divisions between the public and domestic spheres. The social changes being created by the rise of portable computing and telecommunications technology, the breakdown of public life, the decay and revitalization of the American city, and the total commercialization of public space are just as serious as the social changes negotiated by the London Coffee House, the Continental Café and the Espresso Bar. I believe that we have a duty to understand these issues and the ideological affects we have on them when we design and operate the cafés where the conflicts these issues create are played out.

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## Chapter One

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## Chapter Two

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