

Coffee House: *Habitus* and Performance Among Law Students

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Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler, we develop a detailed ethnography of a social space in a major law school and explore its socialization of the students there. "Coffee House" is a weekly social event sponsored by Canadian law firms and offering free drink and food to the students present. We argue that this event and the actors involved profoundly change student identities and alter educational aspirations. Although the students themselves insist that "nothing is going on," our ethnography suggests that in "Coffee House" identity is developed through performances, and in the accumulation of symbolic capital, until ultimately students come to feel their future career path is not a matter of choice, but destiny. We explore the important work of Bourdieu through this setting, but ultimately we resist his determinism, and suggest instead that, following the work of Butler, identity is a more complicated and fluid dynamic between space, repetition, and performance. It appears that a personal unconscious transformation among law students attending Coffee House is underway; yet opportunities to change the meaning of this space and these performances remain.

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I. THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF A SPACE

A. Introduction

The “coffee-house” dates from sixteenth-century Istanbul, where it quickly came to occupy a central place in the life of the city. Ibrahim Peçevi, provides us with one of the earliest account of its emergence:

They look'd upon them as very proper to make acquaintances in, as well as to refresh and entertain themselves . . . Young people near the end of their publick Studies: such as were ready to enter upon publick Posts: *Cadhis* [magistrates] out of place . . . the *Muderis*, or Professors of Law, and other Sciences; and, in fine, Persons of all Ranks flocked to them. (Ellis n.d., 3)

Within a century or so, coffee-houses had spread to London; 3,000 of them by the early eighteenth century. Here too they emerged as a space that provided important opportunities for political and social conversation in an environment of self-conscious egalitarianism (Habermas 1992, 32). Habermas argues that such coffee-houses were paradigmatic of the transformation of the public sphere and central to the emergence of bourgeois civil society (Habermas 1992, 36; Calhoun 1992). He sees them as embodying a discourse that is rational, ethical, and free.

Conceived by a student group called Lawyers for Social Responsibility as get-togethers and fund-raisers for activist students,¹ it seems likely that the “coffee-house” initiated at McGill University’s Faculty of Law in Montréal during the mid-1980s gestured toward the Habermasian ideal. Certainly the Dean at that time saw an opportunity for informal intellectual growth and for the development of better lines of communication between students and teachers.

But when is a Coffee House not a coffee-house? Studying law at McGill offers an internationally recognized education at a university whose T-shirts, at least, proclaim it “Canada’s Harvard.” Coffee House runs almost every Thursday afternoon during the teaching year, and some weeks well over 200 people attend—more than a quarter of the total law student body. Between 4:30 and 7:30 p.m., beer and wine are served in the midst of a thoroughfare connecting the teaching spaces to the library. There is no coffee, and it is not a house. Furthermore, during the recruitment period that consumes many final-year law students throughout January and February, major law firms from Montréal, and even Toronto, aggressively compete to “sponsor” Coffee House. In exchange for a prominent presence, the law firms supply waiters and live

1. We discuss our sources and interviews for this empirical research below. Ethics approval for this research project was granted by the McGill University Research Ethics Board.

music, free food and—rather more to the point—free drink, at a cost of \$5,000 to \$10,000 per week.

We reject Habermas' portrait of discursive freedom, noting that Habermas himself concedes that equality of status in the coffee-house was an ideal never fully realized (Habermas 1992, 36). On the contrary, power is never absent from a social environment. Moreover, in opposition to the liberal tradition, which insists on the radical disjunction of body and mind, we wanted to explore the ways in which bodily experience and affect are central to the process of meaning-creation (Bordo 1989, 13; Nairn 1996, 89). Some of the students we interviewed at Coffee House told us, somewhat defensively, that "there's nothing going on" but eating and drinking. We agree, but only to the extent that eating and drinking are exceptionally important human rituals (Goodrich 1990; Lévi-Strauss 1969). Students—in fact, all of us—do not just learn by thinking and reading. We learn by being and doing. Although social relations and the ideologies they inflect are not the explicit content of students' experience of Coffee House, these students are learning a great deal through and by the medium of their bodies. This study sought to answer the question: what, and how, and in what ways did the presence of major law firms change the events and the students who went to them?

B. Methodology

To undertake this ethnography of a very specific social event we attended ten Coffee Houses held in McGill's Faculty of Law during 2005, six of which were sponsored. We conducted over eighty informal, unstructured interviews with attendees,² including students, professors, lawyers, and waiting staff.

During these interviews, which took place during Coffee House itself, we asked students why they attended, their views of the actual space, their interactions with the other students present, how they related to the lawyers at the sponsored Coffee Houses, and how they would compare sponsored and nonsponsored events. The interviews were not recorded because of the environment and in order to maintain their informality, but we made detailed notes immediately following each conversation, in a separate location. Naturally all our subjects were informed about the nature and aims of our research prior to our talking to them. Semistructured interviews were also conducted at other times with key informants including three members of the Law Students' Association (LSA) and five law professors, in order to gain additional information concerning the history of the Coffee Houses, the

2. As well as interviews with law students, a number of nonlaw students who also attended the Coffee Houses, from time to time, were also interviewed. There was a roughly equal split between men and women interviewed.

discussions that had arisen both for and against their continuance, and how the corporate sponsorship was organized.

The separate use of multiple researchers (we each talked to subjects individually, and often at different times) was an important design decision for this research. Our interview team consisted of the two authors, a male professor who teaches in the law school and a female geography professor who does not, and in addition, an undergraduate male research assistant. As such, we were able to overcome concerns of potential bias not only in the findings, but also as a way of constantly interrogating and cross-checking our data in order to ensure that what we were hearing was not merely a function of students' prior knowledge of who was asking the questions. We found that while the language employed and the ideas mentioned by students did sometimes differ depending on who they were talking to, dominant themes emerged with exemplary clarity. We would stress here that given that one of us was a law professor in the institution in question, we were very careful to corroborate the observations students made to their own teacher.

C. Structure and Argument

This article is in six parts. The present section introduces our methodology and summarizes our analysis of Coffee House and the implications of that analysis for the socialization of law students. In Part II we describe the environment of Coffee House and the experience and atmosphere of these events in more detail. In Part III we discuss the two standard narratives offered by the students to whom we spoke. According to these analyses, the purpose of Coffee House is either to allow students to network with visiting law firms, or simply to provide an excuse for a party in which the presence of the law firms is largely irrelevant. We found neither of these explanations adequate and for similar reasons: both explanations, although apparently contradictory, treat students' own motives as determining their experiences. Our research was aimed at getting instead at the *effects* that Coffee House was having on the attitudes of students to law and to each other, regardless of whether they were conscious of them. Several students told us that there was "nothing [special] going on" at Coffee House. This article is intended to demonstrate otherwise, and in the process to contribute to the sociology of legal education.

Much previous research in this field has focused on classroom method, substantive law and "legal reasoning"—all the trappings of formal education (Kennedy 1982; Hedegard 1979; Eron and Redmont 1957; Cownie 2004). Studies of the transformation of identity in law school have been much rarer, and have focused on the effects that legal training has on students' thinking, on "the war between heart and head" that it sets off (e.g., Elkins 1983, 459). But the power of socialization lies elsewhere, in its reconstitution of the heart

itself, which takes place not inside but *outside* the classroom. Even Granfield and Koenig's important work (1992a, 1992b) on the power of institutions to transform the goals and identities of law students offers too little on the exact day-to-day moments by which these transformations take hold. This article is intended to demonstrate just how powerful such ordinary and unexamined moments can be. Our lives are transformed and developed, knit together and cut apart, through those forces of which we are *least* aware. "What is 'learned by the body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something one is" (Bourdieu 1990, 73).

In Part IV, then, we propose an alternative analysis of Coffee House that draws on the two most significant sociologists of the "everyday" (Macdonald 2002) from the past half-century, Henri Lefebvre and Pierre Bourdieu. Our aim is to introduce these theorists to a wider audience and to demonstrate their relevance by the very down-to-earth and apparently unproblematic example of socialization we have chosen to unpack. Lefebvre, of considerable importance to recent scholarship in human geography, insists that space is not an abstraction but a socially constructed lived form (Lefebvre 1991). To think about space is to think about spaces, their design, their designers, and the people who use them. We analyze Coffee House as a "space of representation" (Lefebvre 1991, 33), in and by which particular representations of identity and power come to be influential. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital, meanwhile, tries to tell us exactly how our daily practices and dispositions within those spaces provide us with a way of being in the world (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1988; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

One could endlessly enumerate the values given the body, *made* body, by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy which can instill a whole cosmology, through injunctions as insignificant as "sit up straight" or "don't hold your knife in your left hand", and inscribe the most fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of a culture in seemingly innocuous details of bearing and physical manner, so putting them beyond the reach of consciousness and explicit statement. (quoted in Pile and Thrift 1995, 28)

Bourdieu's concept of what he termed the *habitus* illustrates just what has been left out of Habermas' rational, discursive public sphere: the subconscious, the physical, and the routine.

Drawing on these theories, in Part IV we develop an alternative analysis of Coffee House. It is not law firms that are being "branded" here, despite what students think, but the law students themselves, creating an image of class and sophistication that legitimates their status while at the same time it persuades them that this is what "real law"—big city law, big money law—just is. Coffee House provides an opportunity for students to practice, develop, and get used to exercising all those skills of social capital that Bourdieu tells us will be essential components of their future career. On the one hand,

then, Coffee House is a rehearsal in the deployment of the tools of social capital. On the other, it is a performance that demonstrates the students' collective competence to the lawyers who observe it. In each case, the effects on students' attitudes to law, and to their own futures, is not limited by whether or not they talk to the lawyers who are present, or if instead they "just come to have a drink." The identity of students, individually and as a body, is being transformed and entrenched physically, subconsciously, and imperceptibly.

Part V places this argument about the power of social conditioning in the wider context of the law school, in which students at McGill, as elsewhere we hasten to add, feel an intense conflict between the pedagogical values of the university and its commitment to professional training. The unease that many of their teachers feel with the profession of law creates enormous anxiety within the student community. We argue that Coffee House is one distinct, if informal, institution that strongly encourages students to feel the difference between their being and their becoming, their present and their future, as a kind of fate into which they are being inexorably drawn. Coffee House helps to construct new identities for law students while it encourages them to think of their legal education as merely a transition, a temporary impediment to the "real world" that Coffee House portrays and foreshadows.

In the final section of this article, the underlying determinism of Bourdieu's argument compels us to address the broader debate over the relationship of agency to structure in the formation of social identity, central issues in contemporary social theory, and human geography. Bourdieu presents a dark vision (King 2000)—everything from how we talk to our taste in beverages foreshadows the social destiny assigned to us. Coffee House offers an important case study through which we can not only illustrate but, just as significantly, *test* this largely passive and inescapable model of identity-formation. Judith Butler, for example, argues in a similar vein that identity is developed, actively and constantly, by our performance of certain roles (of which gender is the best known example) (Butler 1993, 1990; Nelson 1999; Parker and Sedgwick 1993). Her analysis contributes concretely to Bourdieu's reading of the processes by which the *habitus* is reproduced. Just as one becomes "a woman" performatively, to use Butler's term, dressing up, wearing make-up, behaving in certain ways in public, and so on—so also one becomes "a lawyer" performatively—dressing up, drinking, inhabiting a social role, and a class position. Performativity does not just project an identity we already "have" or "choose": it actively creates that identity as we go along. But Butler highlights the "iterative" nature of this identity-work: each performance *repeats* prior performances by ourselves or others, and each repetition does not simply entrench but also subtly alters their meaning. Repetition is central to the power the everyday exerts over us, but is also a resource that allows change to take place.

In Part VI, we conclude that the tensions and ambiguities within Coffee House—particularly those between legal education and legal training that we elaborate in Part V—mean that students’ performances are not monologic. Although Coffee House represents a certain kind of sublimation of the anxieties about identity and change being experienced by a great many law students, it is also a very public stage that *dramatizes* them. Moreover, the transitional nature of law students’ identity and aspirations means that they are not as fully embedded in their social destiny as Bourdieu, for one, seems to assume. This article, by bringing the subconscious power of the performance of social capital to the surface, suggests that students may yet exercise some agency over it. In this lies the possibility to reimagine Coffee House as a performance with a critical, or a dialogic component. Ironically, it is precisely students’ insistence that “nothing is going on” that prevents them from being actively involved or reflective in the construction of their identity.

II. INTRODUCING “COFFEE HOUSE”

Let us start with the space itself (Bachelard 1994). Coffee House takes place in an enclosed foyer called the Atrium constructed in the mid-1990s to link a nineteenth-century teaching and administration building to a new library. An atrium suggests a space between destinations. This one is modern, metallic, and unornamented. One might describe it as neutral and abstract. But the modernist idea that “space” is empty and, prior to representation, only conceals and facilitates certain politics (Lefebvre 1992, 401–12). If instead one were to describe the Atrium, as the students we spoke to indeed did, as “sterile,” “constructed,” and “artificial,” then it immediately becomes apparent that this space encourages certain activities, including, in particular, the activity of hastening elsewhere. Spaces *are* political: they encourage certain relations and discourage others. The Atrium is not “warm”; it does not encourage lingering. There is too much traffic and not enough corners (although a small upstairs area with sofas and chairs is used throughout the day). The space was also described to us as “classy”: polished, sophisticated. Sterility is classy. Class is sterile—unmarked by the signifiers of untidy difference. Class is neutral in the same way that men are neutral, and whiteness is neutral. This space is already full of representations of what it means to belong.

A space draws those who fill it best. From 1986 to 1998 Coffee House was held in the common room, a smaller, fustier room in the old mansion. In design, furniture, and carpeting, it felt like a men’s club. In contrast, both the physical openness and accessibility of the Atrium, and its aesthetic “neutrality,” convey the liberal dream of formal equality while nevertheless implying the invisible constraints that make some people feel more at

home than others. No doubt the space of the Atrium is just that bit more conducive to social events than the old common room. Interestingly, however, law firms only started to sponsor Coffee House on a regular basis *after* this change in venue. The new space, with its underlying class and its overlay of neutrality, was close enough to the modern law firm's self-image for them to imagine appropriating the space. The image of neutrality is not neutral; it conveys *homogeneity* or sameness, which echoes the way elite law firms have always reproduced themselves (Granfield 1991). Of course, there was nothing conscious about this in the design of the Atrium or the history of Coffee House. But the practices and symbolisms that emerge in a space are not unrelated either to the built environment or to the social forces that find here a resistance, there an opportunity (Lefebvre 1992, 229–91).

Meanwhile, the number of professors who come to Coffee House to talk with their students is steadily in decline. Once seven or eight might have gone, but by 2005 typically only one or two attended. In part this change has been demographic. Thursday dinnertime is not convenient for academics with young families. Women professors, in particular, feel the juggling of different demands acutely and find the time commitment unrealistic. But the space itself is an issue. Sponsored Coffee Houses are too noisy and crowded to have a serious discussion, so professors are more likely to come to unsponsored events. So too we saw children only occasionally, at the smaller, less formal affairs. In these ways apparently "neutral" conditions, of time and space, actively work to encourage the childless and masculine character of success in law.

In the course of the academic year 2004–05, eight Coffee Houses were sponsored by Montréal law firms and one from Toronto, largely coinciding with the professional recruitment period during January and February. At these events, so many people crowd into the Atrium that one cannot even get to the other side. First-year students are particularly loyal attendees. The standard of dress is noticeably higher at sponsored coffee-houses. Although rarely more than "smart casual," the women sometimes wear make-up and jewelry and occasionally men wear suits. In one corner, a jazz trio sometimes provides live music. Elegantly presented sushi and satay are offered by waiters in formal attire. Beer is served on one side of the Atrium, wine on starched white tablecloths on the other. By the end of the evening, a large amount of alcohol has been consumed at the law firm's expense, and many of the students are a little drunk; a few of them very much so.

Sponsorship buys visibility: posters from the sponsoring firms announce "Welcome to our Coffee House," "Taste Extreme Success," and "Fall in Love . . . with XYZ." More importantly, it buys access. The firms send along half a dozen lawyers to mingle with the students. The firms are mostly represented by recent McGill graduates and by other young lawyers, mainly men, all well dressed and personable. Youth and beauty is not unrelated to the

image the law firms are presenting. As David,³ a young law student, shouted in the midst of a particularly noisy coffee house, “No, I mean if the lawyer’s a hot woman we’re more likely to talk to her.” (Feb. 17, 2005⁴). Colin, another such student, remarked, “I was looking at the lawyers last week and thinking about why they send who they send. [Attractive women] and the guys seemed to be wearing really smart suits” (Feb. 10, 2005). The space has been transformed from a thoroughfare into a downtown wine bar. Alcohol, music, food, dress, all convey a definite aspirational message. We are lawyers, healthy and wealthy. Why not join us?

III. TWO EXPLANATIONS CONCERNED WITH MOTIVES

A. Networking

From students present at Coffee House, we heard two rival hypotheses concerning these sponsored events. According to the first, the purpose of the event is to “network” with an eye to recruitment. And certainly it is true that a few final-year students dress up for Coffee House and make a point of talking to the legal representatives. Wearing a suit (in the case of the men) is for these students the “rule of recognition,” which indicates that they wish to talk to lawyers. Warwick, a later-year student who fell into this category, insisted to us that “the connections that people make aren’t necessarily going to help them tomorrow, or in a few months. . . . Maybe three or four years later that connection will be helpful” (Mar. 17, 2005). Another student referred to a long conversation he had had with a lawyer who worked in the field in which he was interested (Chad, Feb. 10, 2005).

The Atrium is designed such that there is a less-used mezzanine that affords a good overview of the whole event. It was from this vantage point that we were able to observe, over the course of several events, the general structure of people’s interactions, and thus to support and facilitate our interviewing. In addition, we did eight time-and-motion studies, selecting a range of participants and tracing their movements over the course of an evening. We noticed that some students—perhaps a dozen out of the 200 or so usually present—do indeed “work the room”; their movements are well represented by those of the carefully groomed final-year male student we have chosen for the purposes of illustration at Figure 1. “This is a war field,” said Peter, as his friend concurred. “I come here to compete, to get ahead” (Feb. 3, 2005).

3. All names have been changed to protect anonymity.

4. All verbatim quotations from our interviews are cited by interview date (month, date, year) and draw on comprehensive notes of all interviews and observations on file with the authors. See also the Methodology section, above.

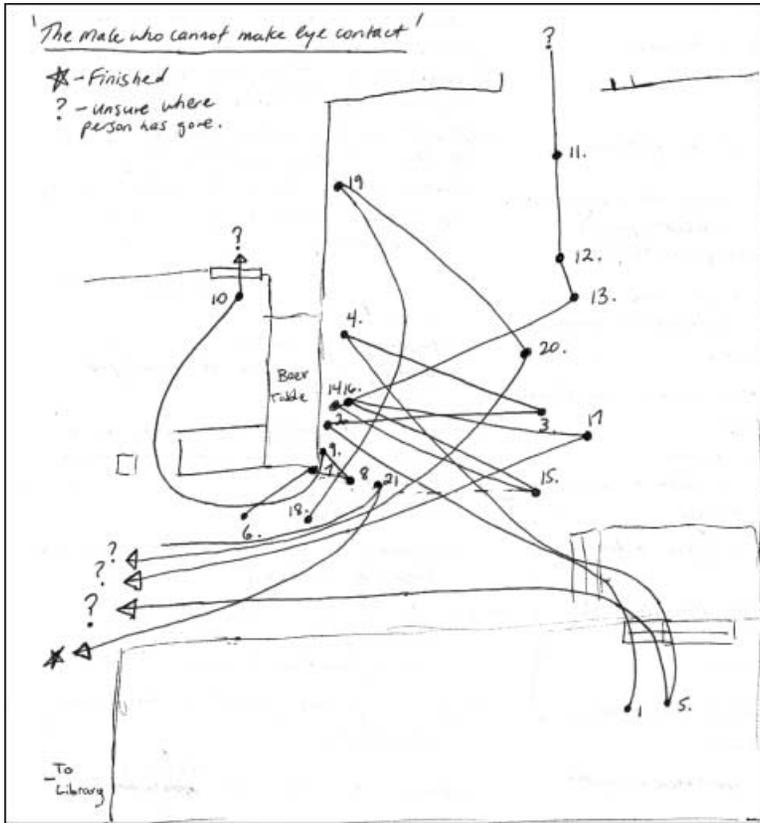


Figure 1. “Working the room” at Coffee House.

But there were rather more *rumors* of networking than actual admissions to it, as a conversation with these two women suggested:

Rachel: What’s going on here is that there are about three people trying to meet lawyers, and about three people trying to pick up. Everyone else is here for the food . . .

Anita: No, it’s definitely more than that. People know that this is a way to get hired, that people get hired through the connections that they make at Coffee House. [But] I come for the free drinks . . . (Feb. 17, 2005)

In fact, although students disagree as to its prevalence and its effectiveness, the vast majority publicly disdain networking. Time and again the students to whom we spoke insisted they “never talked to a lawyer;” “avoided lawyers like the plague,” and so on (Chad, Feb. 10, 2005; Shannon, Feb. 10, 2005).

One might think that this kind of response merely indicates a defensiveness in admitting to engaging in such instrumental behavior and, as we

will see, it is certainly the case that students feel a tension between their role as a university student and as a potential employee. But the evidence goes further than to point up a disjunction between what law students do and what they admit to doing. We were told on several occasions that students had developed their own defensive routines precisely in order to *avoid* lawyers; they would stand in a tight huddle and turn their backs toward any approaching representative in order to discourage them from intruding (Erik, Jan. 20, 2005; also made clear at a different time by Lucy, Feb. 17, 2005). Again we were able to observe the effectiveness of this maneuver from our eyrie in the mezzanine. In fact, we noted on many occasions that the lawyers spent a considerable amount of time either standing by the bar or just talking among themselves. While it is clearly the case that several students do, despite their disavowals, nevertheless find themselves talking to a law firm representative, our study of their interactions and of the ebb and flow of these events makes it quite clear that such interactions are, in fact, the exception rather than the rule. "I feel kind of guilty, like I should talk to the lawyers," said Carla, a woman in first-year law (and a former student of social anthropology). "They are paying all this money . . . A lot of students aren't respectful enough to the lawyers, they put down the lawyers and avoid talking to them" (Feb. 10, 2005). Pangs of conscience aside, with only a few exceptions, the majority of students' evenings are indeed limited to the bar, the buffet, and their circulation among a small circle of friends. Figure 2 shows the representative choreography of time and space of a second-year law student who stated that he came to the Coffee Houses to "be with my mates. It's the evening I get with them, rather than with my partner" (Erik, Jan. 6, 2005).

The theory that the students are engaged in networking goes hand in hand with the assumption that the firms are engaged in marketing. One of our key informants, Jenny, who is responsible for liaising with law firms around Coffee House, made the case: "I think people start with 'X' amount of firms that they'll even invest their time in [applying to]. So that's why the branding works. . . . Coffee House is the best thing to do to get their name out there" (Jenny, Jan. 21, 2005). Indeed, "branding" was a term constantly used to describe the law firms' motivations. Yet there are reasons to doubt its effectiveness. Said a later-year woman student, "when I wanted to know about the firms I went to their websites. That tells you more than you'll get from talking to one of the lawyers here. What are they going to tell you? It's a very superficial, contrived interaction" (Laura, Feb. 10, 2005). Moreover, on every occasion we observed that students had almost no patience, even to the point of rudeness, with any speechmaking by the lawyers. Furthermore, brand consciousness was very low, as the following dialogue, which took place as part of a conversation between two later-year and business-dressed students, demonstrates:

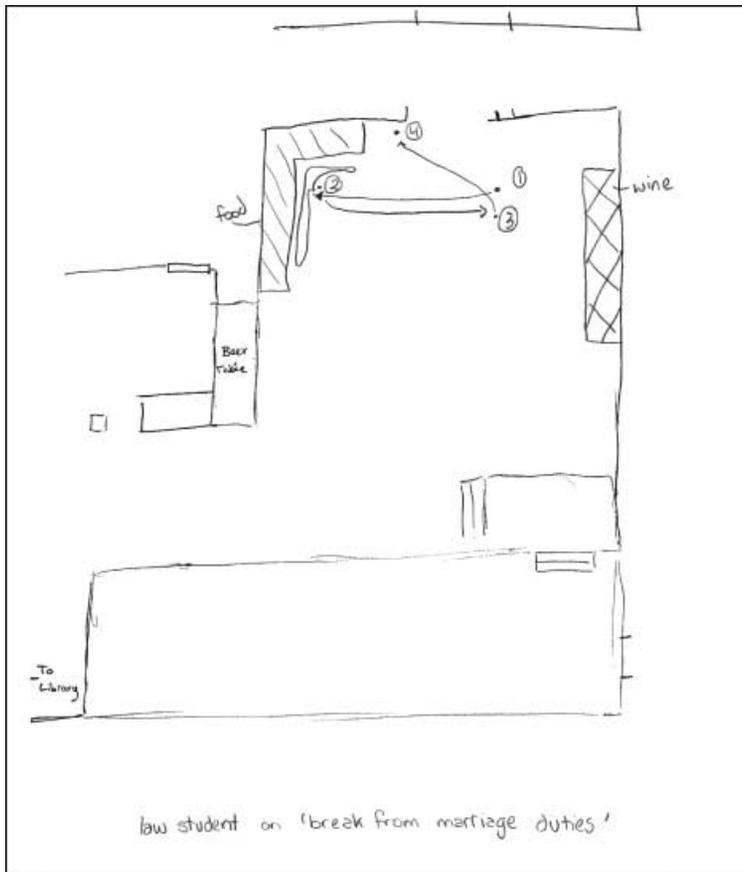


Figure 2. "Drinking with mates" at Coffee House.

Nathan: I don't understand this from [the firms'] perspective. . . . [It's] the worst marketing ever. I have to keep reminding myself who this firm is because it's so easy to forget.

Tim: I think it has an effect on students, they remember the firms. . . .

Nathan: Do you remember the firm who sponsored the first Coffee House [you went to] this semester?

Tim: [pause] OK, good point. (Feb. 17, 2005)

There was a striking inconsistency among the comments. The same person would tell us that it was a powerful marketing exercise, *and* that it had absolutely no effect on them personally. This posture of refusal characterized the vast majority of students. "Turning one's back," so to speak, is a mark of coolness, in the general sense of being in fashion and with the more specific implication of keeping a haughty distance from any kind of personal contamination. As we have argued, this turn reflects not merely a reporting discrepancy but a reality.

B. Socializing

The second and rival hypothesis that we encountered among students maintained that the law firms' presence had no effect on students. Coffee House is purely a social lubricant; the lawyers' only function is to pay for it. Some students, like Tim, were quite insistent that they were "not conscious of the lawyers *on any level*" (Jan. 27, 2005). Here are two other young men telling us the same thing in no uncertain terms:

Ben: The *only* difference is that there are less people [if the Coffee House is not sponsored] and we have to pay for our beer. . . . That's it, there's nothing more complicated going on here.

Scott: People come more if there's free stuff, there's *nothing* more complicated going on. (Mar. 24, 2005)

This defensiveness—which we observed on several occasions—was particularly prominent among those who had been "caught out" talking to lawyers. "To demonstrate why I came here," said Shannon, a female student who had just admitted as much to our research assistant, "I'm going to go get another drink" (Feb. 10, 2005). "I come for this," said Colin, pointing abruptly to his glass. "*That's it*" (Feb. 10, 2005).

The free food and drink clearly does motivate many to attend, although our purpose is not simply to find out *why* people come to Coffee House but to study its effects. It is also true that, like any student party, a good deal of alcohol is drunk over the course of two or three hours. A Quebecois student in his last year reflected somewhat wistfully, early one evening, "I have a love-hate relationship with Coffee House. It's like I don't want to drink tonight, but I have to drink tonight" (François, Feb. 17, 2005).

It is otherwise puzzling why first-year students appear to predominate. As regards recruitment and networking, "we're not even in the game." New to the institution, however, they are in the game of building stable networks of friends; Coffee House is a good occasion for it. A later-year student, reflecting on his experience when he first arrived, said, "you can go through first year without meeting anyone who's not in your 'section' if you don't go to the coffee houses" (Trevor, Jan. 6, 2005). Speaking for many of those we asked, François told us "it's a place that helps you to socialize, meet people, and in your first year you come to meet friends and after some time you've made your group of friends and you don't need it anymore."

Yet this is no less simplistic than the alternative (networking/marketing) explanation. Noisier and more overcrowded than the noncommercial events, certainly, sponsored events are also self-conscious, often described to us in harsh terms. One female student stated, "personally I find it kind of awkward, it's kind of an awkward space, nowhere to sit" (Anna, Jan. 13, 2005), another student adding "c'est completement superficielle" (Michelle, Jan. 13, 2005),

and a third reporting “there’s tension in the space because there are the lawyers walking around” (John, Jan. 27, 2005). Sophie agreed, “you have to talk to people really closely, you can’t maintain personal space. You almost have to whisper to people, which is like flirting, but that’s what is contradictory about this space because you don’t want to be flirting with lawyers” (Jan. 27, 2005), while Kate commented “we know we’re being kind of watched [by the lawyers]” (Feb. 3, 2005). Robert was even more critical regarding the presence of the lawyers, explaining “this is a frustrating social space” (Robert, Feb. 10, 2005). Both the lack of personal space and the ever-lurking lawyers gave a subtle sense that students were being watched—and not just by us. A number of students do not go to sponsored Coffee Houses for ideological or social reasons. Several others remarked that they preferred the atmosphere of nonsponsored events to an environment that was said to be “formal” or “highbrow.” The difference was brought home to us at the first nonsponsored Coffee House, which took place after the lengthy recruitment season was over. The music and the people—less than half as many as at the big sponsored occasions—were visibly more relaxed, and an exuberant impromptu limbo competition was in progress. A palpable sense of disorder and relief from tension was in the air: it was as if school was at last out.

IV. TWO EXPLANATIONS CONCERNED WITH EFFECTS

A. Forming Professional Identity

The two hypotheses that we reject see the space, not surprisingly, through the lens of individual motivation. Either students go there *so as* to network with the lawyers, or they go there *so as* to talk to their friends or to drink. Neither hypothesis begins to address unconscious meanings. The space is communicating something to those in it regardless of whether they come with the motive of talking to the lawyers or avoiding them. Moving from motives to effects, we think that Coffee House is the expression of the law school’s subconscious. Its power is performative: its weekly performance of identity actively constitutes subjects, regardless of *why* they come (Butler 1993, 1990; Nelson 1999).

In fact, the successful branding that takes place at Coffee House is not that of the law firms but of the student body. Elite professional schools are very effective in getting their students to internalize “the occupational status hierarchy within their chosen field” (Granfield and Koenig 1992b, 316–77). The building of a collective sense of students’ place in that professional hierarchy is central to that process (Granfield and Koenig 1992a). Coffee House is a statement of student identity: class and polish. If first-year students find it compelling, it is not because they are searching for friends but because they want to belong. The law firm’s catering, from the jazz trios to the waiters

to the food, therefore largely caters to, and trains, students' developing sense of themselves and their aspirations (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). One of our key informants, Jenny, whose work with the Law Students' Association (LSA), as we have previously noted, involved timetabling these sponsored events, waxed lyrical:

They know the McGill clientele, like, we *like* our nice hors-d'oeuvres. . . . We get *comfortable* with getting treated nicely. What we have also that the firms do is firm visits, and firms try to impress us . . . but *we get used to it*. (Jan. 21, 2005, emphasis added)

The experience of a particular space actively constructs not only our ideas but our *desires* (Butler 1990, 30), and thus leads us to become the kind of subject who *wants* to fulfill a particular social role. As a later-year student, Pauline, conceded, one gets "hooked into law firms and . . . attached to the wealth" (Jan. 13, 2005). Elizabeth, another Law Students' Association representative, put it even more bluntly: "the students get addicted to Coffee House" (Jan. 13, 2005).

The sense of exclusivity attached to Coffee House is strongly policed. Gatecrashers are termed SNAILS (Students Not Actually In Law School) and informal and formal mechanisms, including hired security guards, are used to keep them out. Among other concerns, it is generally thought that SNAILS, coming as they do from "down the hill" or "lower campus," will not be able to hold their drink. A student, Simon (Feb. 17, 2005), explained to us, "no one ever gets out of hand here [friend David nods agreement]. If some of our non-Law friends came here they'd be piss drunk. They'd be puking on the floor and kicking each other in the groin. No one here ever does anything really obnoxious" (also suggested by Jenny (Jan. 21, 2005)). Along with this rather vivid distinction comes a clear sense of entitlement. Few questioned the power or the hierarchy enacted through Coffee House. Instead, students believe that this was a fair reward for all their efforts. Coffee House gives them a taste of "real social recognition," said Isabel (Feb. 3, 2005), adding that it confirms that they belong here and reminds them what "lies at the other end." It is a collective and "ceremonial affirmation of their new status" (Granfield and Koenig 1992a, 513). The fear that the *justice* of this privileged treatment and this promised status might be under threat lay behind the hostility that some respondents showed to our questions.

Sponsored coffee-houses create solidarity, while they nurture expectations. That identity and those expectations are tied to the belief that Coffee House gives them a taste of "real law." Two first-year law students, both of whom had recently moved to Canada from other parts of the world, explained:

Juan: It is a way of practicing the skills which we all need to be a lawyer: to talk, to meet people, to network.

[Friend: To drink!]

Juan: Yes, yes, to drink too. That's part of it. We all want to be lawyers and this makes us feel like lawyers. (Jan. 27, 2005)

Although drinking is seen by students as a vital component of lawyering (see also Nairn 1996, 92–93), so too, in the words of several of the students we spoke to at different events, is “honing their social skills,” “learning to fit a mold,” and “making small-talk.” Coffee House allows students to practice fitting into that “professional world”—to practice on each other, and not with the lawyers. Jenny noted:

When we do have the DJs it's at the clubs' parties . . . When it's the firms, no no no . . . It's funny when people sort of resent the whole process, and I'm like “man, you're going to have to do this, I hate to tell you.” (Jan. 21, 2005)

Coffee House operates *collectively* to create a recognizable subject position—a powerful corporate lawyer—whose legitimacy and prominence call forth its many occupants, aspirants, and supplicants (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Collins 1998).

B. Building Social Capital

What entitles one to occupy that role are not formal qualifications but informal ones—inherited and acquired resources that allow one to “pass” in a certain space where influence is trafficked (Bourdieu 1977, 1988). This is the bodily *habitus*, “a system of structured, structuring dispositions” and an “embodied history” (Bourdieu 1977, 52, 198) that we learn by living in it and never by thinking about it. “It's like this is how you celebrate. Like you can't go bowling or something. You have a good dinner, good steak, good wine” (Jan. 21, 2005).

The concept of class distinction is most dramatically performed at Coffee House in the separation of wine and beer. Wine is served on one side of the hall, in proper glasses, beer on the other, in red plastic mugs. Wine is served by the hired waiters and beer by law students themselves *even though* both are paid for by the sponsoring firm. On the one hand, the fiction of Coffee House as a student-run event is thus maintained (at McGill as elsewhere throughout North America, Australia, and New Zealand, beer is a metonymic signifier for the whole student experience) while its character is being fundamentally transformed—a tension between the notions of student and professional identity about which we will have more to say in the last section. On the other hand, the *relative* distinction of wine as a marker of class and culture is only enhanced by its juxtaposition to something that is consciously downplayed in these ways (Bourdieu 1984). Beer drinkers

were in the minority. Furthermore, although it is difficult to generalize among such a large group of people, it seemed to us that they were, by and large, distinct: generally men rather than women, sometimes quite noticeably underdressed, and aggressively sensitive to feeling out of place. In choosing to drink beer, they too were enacting an identity.

It is not what is talked about, or to whom, that forms identity in this environment, but the performance itself (Butler 1993; Rose 2000; Goffman 1956, 1963). Such performances are not the conscious actions of autonomous agents, but the constitutive expression of the *habitus*, its spaces, and its structures (Gregson and Rose 2000, 437). So, professional identity and solidarity are not just given or absorbed; they must be built by public performances in collective spaces (Pile and Thrift 1995, 436; Butler 1993, 12).

First, the law firm demonstrates that this is what law really is—how it is carried out, in what context, and by whom. Whether or not individual students talk to individual lawyers, or even remember the name of the sponsoring firm, is entirely beside the point. The performance advantages all the large corporate law firms that, week after week, visibly manifest the meaning of law and the exercise of power (Lefebvre 1992, 27). As Chris, a quiet and thoughtful final-year woman observed, after a slight pause for reflection, “even the idea of *alternative* careers is a strange idea. There’s one ‘alternative career day’ per year” (Mar. 17, 2005).

Second, law students themselves are engaged in a dual performance to confirm their capacity to fit into such a world. To each other they establish their own identity as “McGill law students”; in relation to their future as lawyers they are provided with an opportunity to “try on” and display this identity. Janus-faced, theirs is both performance and rehearsal. Any specific interactions between students and lawyers are equally beside the point. The performance benefits the student body as a whole. Of course most of them avoid talking to the lawyers. It would be like mingling with the audience.

This *asymptotic* (adjacent but not touching) relationship between lawyers and students is precisely what we would expect from the accumulation of cultural capital that must, on no account, be made overt or intentional. Cultural and social capital implies the ability to feel at *ease*. Those who have it behave as if they do not, just as those who do not make the mistake of pretending they do (Granfield 1991; Bourdieu 1988). Informal power is a game that must not be seen to be played (Castiglione 1967). This is true in law school, too; earnestness and hard work are a little suspect (Granfield 1992a). Those who do not, go to Coffee House are, in the main, treated with disbelief or incomprehension, but occasionally they too were spoken of suspiciously: men and women, French-speakers and English-speakers alike, described them as “socially awkward,” “really serious,” or “people who work too hard and don’t have any time.”

Students show a great pride in literally turning their backs on the lawyers—and great shame when they transgress that invisible line. Yet the

law firms' presence is crucial precisely in being unacknowledged. The lawyers are, of course, the patrons for all this display; they are the nemeses against whom this roguish indifference can be performed; and the critics to be convinced by the ease and confidence of students' social skills. Patron, nemesis, critic: three more asymptotic relationships that produce dispositions and effects on subjects *without* any direct contact between them (see Wacquant 1990, 685). In Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*, the needles of a great "harrowing machine" or loom carve the legal sentence onto the flesh of criminals' strapped and naked backs (Kafka 1990, 141–46; Derrida 1992, 181). This is the great power of the informal, corporeal *habitus*. In turning their backs on the law, our students simultaneously have it etched into them.

V. IDENTITY IN TRANSITION AT LAW SCHOOL

Many teachers of law, including but by no means limited to McGill, find their role in professional training extremely problematic. They too are frequently engaged in gestures of refusal, in which students' foreshadowed careers as lawyers are placed at a careful remove from teachers' educational aims. Both students and teachers find themselves torn between the conflicting demands of intellectual understanding and practical knowledge. As a generalization, the legal profession views the role of a law school as one of providing lawyers comprehensively trained in the details of the formal legal system, and as providing this service *for them*. On the contrary, a sizable proportion of the professors in the Faculty of Law conceive their role more broadly, introducing students to a range of social, political, and theoretical perspectives, as well as a much broader vision of what law is, where and how it functions, and why it matters.

Indeed, the term "faculty" being used here to describe the institution through which law is taught at McGill itself draws attention to the cultural and institutional dimensions of this divide. In the United States, one speaks of "law school," a term that foregrounds the aspect of practical training. A law school is a school for lawyers. Although students at McGill do frequently say the same thing, throughout Canada and elsewhere in the British Commonwealth, law is typically taught in a "law faculty," a term that—particularly to many of those who teach within it—orients it, institutionally and intellectually, toward the rest of the university, and *not* to the profession. There are, in fact, only three "law schools" in Canada, sixteen faculties, two departments, and a college.

Before they arrive, first-year students do not necessarily understand the conflicting agendas of legal education and legal practice. Yet, it is one of the first things they learn. They learn it from upper-year students for whom the recruitment process is a continually intruding reality legitimated by privileging *it* as "real" and everything else as "academic" or "alternative." And

they learn it from law teachers who themselves very often widen the gulf between the two, whether they are theoretically inflected academics, whose position is self-consciously critical of the legal establishment, or whether they see themselves as practically oriented ambassadors from the “real world.”

The tension between academic and professional milieux is unusually powerful in North America, where law is taught as a postgraduate degree undertaken for practical reasons.⁵ The professional nature of this education creates a clear trajectory toward a very specific set of careers. Those studying for undergraduate degrees (including, in many other countries, law) have at least as much anxiety about their futures as do law students, but it is dissipated among a much broader range of options.

This cognitive dissonance accounts for law students’ unusually high levels of anxiety (Dammayer and Nunez 1999). It generates a paradox between the community they are a part of while they are at McGill, and the future they imagine for themselves. “Law school” seems, at times, to be imbued with the heavy scent of two fragrances. First, the anxiety of identity besets many of those who have just arrived (and they have all just arrived): who am I, or rather, who am I *now*? Second, the anxiety of destiny looms over many of those who are about to leave (and they are all about to leave): is that who I am, or rather, is that who I *will be*? (Elkins 1983, 465).

Coffee House dramatically heightens this anxiety and these tensions. Spatially, the arrival of law firms into the Atrium stages a crossroads and a transition. Temporally, sponsored Coffee Houses take place immediately after the announcement of first-year students’ very first exam results. That these results are only “half-time scores” in full-year subjects does not soften the blow. Continuous assessment sharply demonstrates what Foucault means by discipline: “an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit to a meticulous and ever more analytical observation” (Foucault 1995, 227).

The first examination period produces new subjectivities in several ways. First, it establishes and justifies new hierarchies (Kennedy 1982, 50–51). A “crisis of wounded narcissism” has been tellingly observed at other law schools too.

I was humiliated the first year by the professors and some of the other students’ knowledge of the subject. My perception of myself was challenged. I was an A student at Columbia and I was getting Bs for the first time in my life. That was hard. (Granfield and Koenig 1992a, 509)

Several of those we spoke to referred to their “former lives.” “I think the thing about McGill students is we’re like on our fifth of nine lives, so we’re

5. McGill is unusual because a small proportion of the law cohort comes directly from the Province de Québec’s CEGEP program, a U.S. college-like system. The percentage is small enough to make little difference to the dynamics of the institution in the respect discussed here.

like 'B+, A-, whatever'. . . Like, we've had lives, we're here because we really want to be here" (Jenny, Jan. 21, 2005). Although the remark was offered as proof of how "freakin'" collegial McGill law students are, it suggests to us an understanding of identity as fragile, malleable, and demanding reinvention. Your past is a "former life" and now you start again. So too first-year students tend to describe themselves as "kids." Each student must learn afresh to come to terms with their place in the pecking order.

Second, examinations instill in students a sense of being judged and observed, which does not leave them. Anxiety is the modern condition—a sense of being watched, a fear of the unknown and frustration that your welfare is not within your hands (Salecl 2004; Freud 1991). For Foucault, this is the point of the disciplines of modernity: the constant maintenance of anxiety is productive (Foucault 1976, 214). One learns to live with it, but it takes time, and is felt most intensely when the wounds are fresh. For law students, this is in the first weeks of second semester of the first year, just when the recruitment season and sponsored Coffee Houses bring to life, physically and emotionally, the promise of a certain kind of future.

These forces on new students combine to create a sense of tragedy or destiny. Coffee House performs what Bourdieu calls *amor fati*, the love of fate (Bourdieu 1984, 244; King 2000, 423), giving students a very corporeal sense of the future that is rushing to embrace them all. Granfield and Koenig's work on Harvard law graduates (1992b, 318) indicates that at the same time that their education increased their interest in questions of social justice, the number of students who were preparing for careers in corporate law also increased. This contradiction between students' values and their decisions is not only the result of individual rationalization, but derives from a sense of compromised destiny, an unfreedom instilled collectively, publicly, habitually, and unconsciously.

Sponsored Coffee Houses get students to *live* this destiny while suggesting a possible resolution to the problems created by the twin forces of purity and pragmatism that tug painfully at them. The more transitional law school seems, the less difficult the double-think it demands of its students as they respond to the tensions they feel between legal education and legal training. Students, in other words, become alienated (see Lefebvre 1992; Shields 1999), *disengaging* a part of themselves from their present, and another part of themselves from their future. Coffee House glorifies this alienation by representing students' refusal to engage with those around them as cool and righteous. Indeed, the rumors of the "networker," the "schmooze-artist," or "butt-licker," which circulate at Coffee House (all terms we heard employed in our conversations with students, but never, of course, about themselves), only serve as a foil to this normative coolness. They also rehearse a further accommodation in which students' lack of wholehearted commitment to mainstream law will eventually and perversely justify their choice to partake in it (Granfield and Koenig 1992b, 319–20).

Coffee House performs a practice of law that we might even say *haunts* the faculty. It is a suggestive word, implying the existence of two incommensurable worlds that we can sense but never experience simultaneously (Flessas 2005). The cognitive dissonance that legal education sets up admits of a temporal resolution—not a choice between alternatives or even a compromise between the two, but rather a shifting balance of their reality through time. Over time, the balance begins to shift, and the physical world of lawyering first experienced at Coffee House and on recruitment brochures becomes increasingly solid.

Perhaps this is why so few professors come to sponsored events, despite the original goal of Coffee House. Teachers, by and large, like to be the center of attention. At an event wherein one is invited to “fall in love” with one law firm or “taste extreme success” with another, professors are marginal figures. Whether students are talking to the lawyers or avoiding them, the lawyers haunt the event. In the year of this research, one of the authors taught a first-year law course at McGill and knew many of the students at these events. He recalls that on two occasions when his students were talking to a law firm representative, they literally looked right through him. The law firm is such a powerful *presence* at Coffee House that everything else comes to have an element of faded unreality about it. Everything at Coffee House suggests these two asymptotic trajectories, destined never to meet. A student confronted at once by her teacher and her future might be faced with something vertiginous and irreconcilable. Yet, the metaphor of haunting works both ways. From the point of view of the present, it is the law firms that haunt students; but from the point of view of the future into which they are being ceaselessly drawn, it is their teachers that haunt them. We were told that after first year, Coffee House starts to seem gradually irrelevant. One preternaturally world-weary young man about to leave the law school to study abroad for his final year: “In your first year, it’s new and exciting. In your second year it’s boring; and by third year you don’t really care at all anymore” (Nathan, Feb. 17, 2005). Day by day a transition is taking place as the present fades and a predestined future becomes increasingly present.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

A. Iterability and Change

How do we change? Iterability—the repetitive nature of things—is part of the answer. We change by feeling ourselves to be the same; we are comforted by the constancy in our lives and by the myth of a stable identity. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as mere repetition (Derrida 1967, 1976). This is, in fact, “a stroke of luck for politics,” since no words or practices are capable of being defined or established for all time (Derrida 1990,



Figure 3. Iterability and change in a coffee mug.

943). Precedent, for example, is a system of iterability. Judges only repeat what has been decided before, but their repetitions in a new context always subtly change and develop the law (Manderson 2006).

So, too, Coffee House has changed by using the same words to describe itself. The institution itself has radically shifted, over the course of twenty years, from a consciousness-raising exercise to a fund-raising exercise; from a student event to a legal event.⁶ Perhaps this is why beer is still served by law students out of the same cheap plastic red mugs (Figure 3). It is another reassuring sign of continuity. And, of course, the students themselves frequently insist on this continuity, both in their own lives, and in Coffee House. As we were told, in no uncertain terms, by several first-year men, dogmatically and anxiously at the same time: “There’s nothing more complicated going on here . . . There’s nothing more complicated going on” (Ben and Scott, Mar. 24, 2005). “It’s just like [anywhere else] . . . It’s just like [any other situation]” (David, Feb. 17, 2005). Such disavowals are central to the power of performance (Nelson 1999, 337).

Coffee House, week after week, year after year, repeats identity as it transforms it. True metamorphosis normally takes place so imperceptibly that

6. Clearly student clubs and societies complain that the more sponsored events given over to the law firms, the less unsponsored events are available, from which the clubs themselves make money by selling beer. But just as significantly, the Law Students’ Association now views sponsored events as fund-raising too, since the law firms pay a considerable fee for the right to sponsorship. This fee is then passed on to clubs and societies and is thought therefore to compensate them for their “lost revenue.” Neither sponsored nor unsponsored events, therefore, are understood just in terms of the awareness they raise but, more often than not, in terms of the relative funds they provide.

we do not notice it happening. We look at each other, seeing the monstrosity in others (when did *they* get so old?) that we remain blind to in ourselves. If students can see the power that these social and commercial forces exert on others, while insisting that they are somehow immune to it, their disavowals are not at all unusual. We all do it.

As we constantly reminded the students we spoke to, we are not interested in advocating a particular policy response. One might decide that sponsoring Coffee House is antithetical to the intellectual ideals of the university. Nevertheless, a different approach is possible. In this, our study takes issue with some of the implications in Bourdieu in particular. Bourdieu so insists on the “more or less complete” power of the *habitus* to “reproduce itself” that he sometimes appears to present people as wholly determined in their responses to it (King 2000, 420–24; Pile and Thrift 1995, 32). Yes, our dispositions and our practices slot us into a certain place in the world, but Bourdieu does not, we think, pay adequate attention to the *transformative* energy bound up in habit (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, and 1988; see the comprehensive critique in King 2000, 425–30) and inherent in any repetition (Derrida 1967, 1976). As Coffee House shows, the structure of our daily practices is not static but dynamic. The *habitus* does not just entrench but also transforms our identity (Nelson 1999, 333). It accounts for the capacity of class and social relations to change over time, a fact that Bourdieu sometimes appears to rule out (Bourdieu 1984, 1988).

On the other hand, neither students nor faculty can simply choose to “perform” differently, at Coffee House or elsewhere, and thus construct different identities for themselves: this would be a misreading of Butler’s concept of performativity (Nelson 1999, 332 et seq.; Gregson and Rose 2000, 437 et seq.). But identity performances work best, as Butler precisely shows us, when they work unconsciously. An awareness of the actual forces that help to locate and constrain our subject position is fundamental to any kind of reflection and action “in the subjunctive mode, as if we had a full identity, while recognizing that such a fullness is a fiction” (Pile and Thrift 1995, 23). Our normative argument in this article is that by drawing attention to the important transformative work that Coffee House participates in by encouraging certain subconscious performances, we hope to set the stage for different performative experiences.

We continue to be constrained by our dispositions, our temperament, our social conditioning; but these constraints are neither absolute nor—Bourdieu to the contrary—noncontradictory (King 2000, 423–30). Again Butler, rather than Bourdieu, shows us that identical performances can mean different things when done by different people. Coffee House, for example, is not a monolithic environment. On the contrary, it is defined (as we noted in the previous section) by contradiction and tension. Enter Coffee House at 5:00 on a Thursday afternoon and you find yourself in a space electric with anxiety—peopled by students new to an institution and a discipline,

unsure of their place, experiencing change in themselves and their ideas, equally excited about and scared of the future. Although Coffee House appears on one level to sublimate those anxieties by its seduction of an unavoidable destiny, at the same time it collects many students together and gives them free rein to ramify and resonate their anxieties for a couple of hours a week. Furthermore, the very location of Coffee House, sponsored by law firms but staged within the law school, reminds students of the tension between educational and professional goals—as, in its own small way, does the contrast between the students' beer and the law firm's wine. Many of the students themselves often seemed to us torn between their fascination of the lawyers and their horror of turning into them. Perhaps it was more fear than disinterest that kept them from talking. Although Coffee House is a powerful force in channeling these tensions, the very fact of the *transition* it is gradually accomplishing suggests that the mixed identities at play in such a dynamic environment have not yet been entirely settled.

The characteristic gesture of refusal—turning one's back on the lawyers—preserves the appearance of student autonomy, but, at the same time, it strongly reinforces the disjunction between legal education and legal practice that students clearly experience as alienation and come to see as their destiny. Perhaps, then, an alternative approach is to refuse the refusal, and for students and professors to engage consciously with the law firms that enter this space, not with a view to acceding to their vision of the nature, domain, and relevance of law, but to actively contesting it. This might change an asymptotic relationship into a dialogue. In the course of this exchange, some of the young lawyers visiting the faculty might even, on occasion, find themselves challenged and transformed by the event too. One can imagine that many of them, too, do not have a singular and unalterable identity but are, like the rest of us, a mass of insecurities and contradictions. They too are performing; their performances too might change.

When it comes to exerting power, the relationship of space to identity is critical. Coffee House is, as we were told, students "own turf" and therefore open to reinterpretation more readily than, say, a courtroom or a boardroom. The contradictory nature of lived space—its multiple meanings and multiple occupants—becomes a strategic location for collective political action (Soja 1996, 68; Soja 1999, 269). We think the innate ambiguity of having a "legal cocktail hour" in the midst of a Faculty of Law is one example of a contradictory lived space giving rise to such possibilities. The individual cannot bracket the spaces that constitute their identity; but they are also active in their daily construction, which likewise do not exist before or without them (Gregson and Rose 2000, 441). The power to affect the dynamics of a space is the power to change the conditions of one's own identity formation. But, of course, whether students would still be prepared to participate in such events, if they were asked not only to drink but to become fully conscious of their social position and to accept new intellectual responsibilities in respect to it, is quite another matter.

B. Postscript

In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu takes considerable pains to insist on the sociologist's responsibility to "exoticize the domestic" rather than to "domesticate the exotic" (Bourdieu 1988, xi). This is not "indulgent narcissism" he insists, but an exercise in self-awareness, which is likely to be construed as a betrayal by those whose world he or she sets out to study. "No groups love an 'informer' especially perhaps when the transgressor or traitor can claim to share in their own highest values" (Bourdieu 1988, 2–5). Anxiety is a constant trope of *Homo Academicus*—Chapter 1 is entitled "A Book for Burning." And perhaps we have written here an "article for burning." Many rumors circulated around our research, although there was nothing covert about it, with no deception practiced and with everyone interviewed fully advised of the nature of our project before they talked to us. These rumors were mostly amusing if occasionally just a little alarming: "There's *nothing* more complicated going on. So . . . don't fuck with our sponsored Coffee Houses or we'll cut your head off and stick it on a stake," said one slightly drunk young man (Mar. 17, 2005). The purpose of our research was explicitly not to campaign for some reform, but to inquire carefully into the meaning and, above all, the effects of a particular event, as we clearly explained to our informants. But such a response mischaracterizes the concern. The peril our interviewees felt was not political but psychic. It was the *fact* of observation and not our conclusions that upset them. As Adam said to our research assistant, "Your project, I feel like I'm being watched, it's like being under a microscope" (Jan. 27, 2005).

To be studied is often to be misunderstood, and that's no fun. Both doctrinal and critical analyses of law objectify human experience and attempt, finally, to know others better than they know themselves. The objects of law's study, like those of sociology, anthropology, and human geography, rarely read the conclusions that have been drawn about them; perhaps it is just as well. Hence, Bourdieu's nervousness—this time the biter might be bit. And this is not just a problem for scholars. The law itself objectifies mercilessly. It takes peoples' lives as raw material, and packages them into an argument. In the process it generalizes cruelly. Students learn at law school what they will practice all their lives: to objectify, to interrogate, and to judge. Yet, any attempt to ask students to question *their own* motives or dispositions meets with a frosty reception. Application and doctrine are both about others; who and why *we* are often remains safely immured from reflection. Not this time.

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