

---

## Socialisation in a space of law: student performativity at ‘Coffee House’ in a university law faculty

---

Sarah Turner

Department of Geography, McGill University, 805 Rue Sherbrooke West, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2K6, Canada; e-mail: turner@geog.mcgill.ca

Desmond Manderson

Faculty of Law, McGill University, 3644 Peel Street, Montreal, Quebec H3A 1W9, Canada; e-mail: desmond.manderson@mcgill.ca

Received 27 October 2005; in revised form 1 June 2006

---

**Abstract.** Working with ideas of performance and performativity, the geographies of law, and the sociology of the legal profession, this paper reports on a study of the microgeography of a social space in a major Canadian law school, and, more specifically, questions what it means to be a law student there. ‘Coffee House’ at McGill University Faculty of Law is a weekly social event sponsored for half the academic year by prominent Canadian law firms who supply free alcohol and food to the students attending in an effort to ‘brand’ their firm. These events contribute in different ways to the socialisation and identity of the law students present. We argue that a performativity of what it is to be a McGill law student heading towards corporate success begins to be structured through the repetition of a range of performances undertaken in this space.

### Introducing ‘Coffee House’

*At 4pm nearly every Thursday afternoon during the teaching year at Montréal’s McGill University, between 100 and 300 law students (well over one third of the total student body) start to crowd into a recently built space designed of steel and glass called the ‘Atrium’ in the Law Faculty. Half the time this event is sponsored by Montréal and Toronto law firms who send their youngest and best dressed lawyers to mingle with the crowd and convince those to whom they speak that their firm is the most successful, the most prestigious and the highest paid. Positioned in the mezzanine of this space, a small jazz group provides the kind of music one would expect at a cocktail party. Elegantly presented hot and cold food, satay and sushi, circulates on trays in the care of waiters in formal attire. Throughout the evening, beer is served on one side of the Atrium while, on the other, wine is served on starched white linen tablecloths. 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 bit drunk—a few very much so. Fuelled by the free alcohol, noise levels climb and people strain to be heard above the din of the crowd and the accompanying music. Welcome to McGill Faculty of Law’s ‘Coffee House’. There is no coffee and there is no house.*

The social institution of the ‘coffee house’ dates from 16th-century Istanbul, where it played a pivotal role in the life of the city, as described by Ibrahim Peçevi:

“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.”<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> This quotation of the Turkish historian Peçevi, who wrote around 1635, is found in Douglas (1727), in turn cited in Ellis (2004, pages 12–13).

Not long after, the phenomenon of the coffee house took off in London, England, with 3000 established by the early 18th century (Habermas, 1992 [1962]). Here, too, coffee houses emerged as cultural spaces that provided important opportunities for political and social conversation in an environment of studied egalitarianism (Habermas, 1992 [1962]; see also Ellis, 2004; Klein, 1997). Habermas (1992 [1962]) argued that these coffee houses were typical of the transformation of the public sphere and of the emergence of bourgeois civil society at that time. By providing a space for open and critical political debate, as well as maintaining a conscious disregard for issues of status and power, the coffee house embodied rational, ethical, and free discourse—his very ideals (Habermas, 1992 [1962]; see also Calhoun, 1992).

‘Coffee houses’ at McGill’s Faculty of Law—which offers an internationally recognised education at a university whose T-shirts, at least, proclaim it ‘Canada’s Harvard of the North’—started rather more recently, sometime in the mid-1980s. Initially conceived of by a group of students called ‘Lawyers for Social Responsibility’, they were developed as a get-together and fund-raiser for activists (KI 3, 11 February 2005).<sup>(2)</sup> One could argue that, by using the term ‘coffee house’, these students were gesturing more or less explicitly towards the Habermasian ideal. Certainly, the dean of law at the time saw an opportunity for informal intellectual growth and for the development of better lines of communication between students and faculty (KI 3, 11 February 2005).

But is the McGill Coffee House really a coffee house? This semantic paradox—a coffee house that has no coffee and no house—attracted us to undertake this research. One of us is a human geographer with an interest in the construction and interpretation of social spaces, and the other is a legal theorist with an interest in concepts of legal pluralism and interdisciplinary scholarship. As such, the aim of our research is to explore the nature of student experiences in this social space. We move on from Habermas’s idealised portrait of the coffee house—although it is important to note that Habermas himself acknowledged that the equality of status in the coffee house was never actually realised, but was, rather, an influential ideal (Habermas, 1992 [1962]). Indeed, we argue that power is never absent from any social environment, although it might not be explicit. Moreover, building upon ongoing work in social geography we want to explore the ways in which bodily experiences are part of the process of meaning creation (Longhurst, 2000; see also Nairn, 1996). Some of the students we interviewed for this study insisted, somewhat defensively, that during Coffee House “there’s nothing more complicated going on” than eating and drinking (Scott, 24 March 2005). We beg to differ. Although social relations and the ideologies they express are not the conscious or explicit content of the experiences of students at Coffee House, we argue that nevertheless these students are learning a great deal through and by the medium of their bodies in this particular space.

This project was even more fascinating because of the corporate sponsorship involved. Most notably, during the January–February recruitment period that consumes many second-year and third-year law students, the major law firms in Montréal and Toronto ‘battle it out’ to host and fund Coffee House (KI 2, 21 January 2005). It costs anywhere between Can\$5000 and \$10000 *per event*, for which the law firms provide live music and serving staff along with free food and—rather more to the point—free drink, in exchange for their prominent presence on site. In comparison, during other weeks of the academic year, the Coffee Houses are instead organised by a variety of law student organisations, and the students attending pay for the drink and

<sup>(2)</sup> We have identified students with whom we held unstructured interviews or informal conversations by gender-specific pseudonyms, whereas key informants are numbered (KI 1, etc) with the interview date.

---

food on offer. These contrasting events therefore gave us the opportunity to observe differences between corporate-sponsored and student-run Coffee Houses.

By undertaking a series of in-depth interviews, informal interviewing, and participant observation at the Coffee Houses, we wanted to better understand the complexities and power structures involved in socialisation in this specific space. We wanted to answer the following questions. How do students behave at Coffee House? What do they hope to gain from attending? What do they learn through their interactions with the range of actors present? Who are they in the process of becoming, and how is their understanding of the world and of the law influenced by their experiences here?

Our discussion is presented in six sections. Firstly, we detail the conceptual framework within which our study is situated, drawing on work from performance, performativity, and subjectivity; geographies of law; and the sociology of the legal profession. In the second section we detail the methods that were used, whilst the third section describes the space we examined and the actors present in it during Coffee House. In the fourth section we propose through our analysis that two principal student performances were being carried out during Coffee House, especially during those events which were sponsored. In the fifth part, the discussion, we reflect upon these performances and argue that they were connected to a specific form of performativity, one being remade through constant repetition during these events. We conclude with some thoughts on what Habermas might have made of our observations.

### **Situating the study**

Conceptually, our framework for this study draws upon three bodies of literature, namely: performance, performativity, and subjectivity; geographies of law; and the sociology of the legal profession. First, our interests in performance and performativity, and the formation of subjectivity in particular spaces, have been influenced by the work of Lefebvre and Butler. Lefebvre (1991) provides us with a general point of departure, insisting that space is not an abstraction but a socially constructed lived form, in which particular forms of human subjectivity emerge (see also Dixon, 1999; Elden, 2001; Merrifield, 1993; Soja, 1989; 1996; 1999; Unwin, 2000). In terms of Lefebvre's celebrated if somewhat obscure triad, we wish to explore the physical environment of Coffee House as a 'space of representation', a place in and by which particular representations of identity and power come to have vital force and meaning (Lefebvre, 1991; see also Soja, 1996).

We also wish to engage with Butler's work on the power of performativity (Butler, 1990; 1993a; 1993b), which has become an important topic for debate in the literature on social theory and social geography, the latter pointing to how Butler has tended to ignore spatial elements in her work (see, amongst others, Bell et al, 1994; Lloyd, 1999; McDowell and Court, 1994; Nelson, 1999; Parker and Sedgwick, 1993; Pratt, 2004; Rose, 1999). The idea of repetition or iteration that Butler highlights provides us with a way to understand the transformative forces we will suggest are at work in the socialisation of law students. It is important at this point, however, to distinguish a public performance at a particular site from wider notions of performativity; performativity, for Butler, captures the ways in which sexuality and gender are "constantly remade through repetition, or the compelled performance of dominant discourses" (Nelson, 1999, page 331; see also Campbell, 2000). As such, a performance is a bounded act, whereas performativity consists of "a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'" (Butler, 1993b, page 24). Likewise, as Gregson and Rose (2000, page 441; see also McDowell, 2005) note, "performance—what individual subjects do, say, 'act out'—is subsumed within, and must always be connected to,

performativity, to the citational practices which reproduce and subvert discourse, and which at the same time enable and discipline subjects and their performances.”

Second, turning to the geographies of law, we argue that the meaning of law is not limited to the formal legal documents one finds in statutes, codes, or judgments, or limited to the work of designated government officials (Blomley, 1994; Blomley et al, 2001). On the contrary, law constitutes all of us daily, being read through and modified by the physical and social environments in which we live (Cover, 1984). The design of a courtroom, a library, or a lecture hall is a statement of intent about hierarchy, democracy, and power (Haldar, 1999). A street map is a coded lesson in advanced civics (Mohr, 2003), and a children’s book is a primer in obedience and responsibility (Manderson, 2003). Thus, our ideas of law are constantly being tested, mediated, and constructed. A wide range of informal normative ordering mechanisms saturate every corner of our world: the laws of clubs, unions, schools, communities, small towns, even riots or religions (see de Sousa Santos, 1995; Griffiths, 1986; Merry, 1993; Thompson, 1991). The Atrium in McGill’s Faculty of Law is another such corner.

Third, this project lends itself to the sociology of the legal profession. Although there is abundant literature on the education of law students, the focus of much of it has been on classroom method, substantive law, and ‘legal reasoning’: all the trappings of the formal education offered in a legal curriculum (Kennedy, 1982; see also Cownie, 2004; Elkins, 1983; Eron and Redmont, 1957; Hedegard, 1979; Macdonald, 1990). Even those studies that have focused on the transformation in identity that law school accomplishes have tended to focus on its effects on students’ *thinking*, on the “war between heart and head” that it initiates (Elkins, 1983, pae 459). However, we argue that the power of socialisation lies elsewhere, outside the classroom. “In the classroom”, reports Elkins, “we learn to think like a lawyer” (1983, page 464). But, we wish to ask, where, and how do we learn to *act and live* like a lawyer?

Overlapping as it does with the sociology of the legal profession, scholarship on educational socialisation is also useful here. Key texts of Granfield and Koenig (1992a; 1992b; see also Granfield, 1991; Philo and Parr, 2000) focus on the power of certain institutions to transform the goals and identities of law students. Yet, there is still too little published on the exact day-to-day moments by which these transformations take hold.<sup>(3)</sup> Socialisation is a daily business, and our lives are transformed and developed through forces and pressures of which we are often unaware. This microstudy thus enables us to undertake qualitative research on the actual processes of socialisation in an educational institution—to explore the complex dynamic between a specific space and students, set in motion by the McGill Faculty of Law Coffee House.

## Methods

To undertake this study we attended ten Coffee Houses, six of which were sponsored, during 2005 in McGill’s Faculty of Law. The authors and our research assistant conducted over ninety unstructured interviews with students, professors, lawyers, and waiting staff at these events, as well as recording numerous informal remarks offered by those with whom we spoke in the course of the evenings. We asked students willing to engage in discussions with us, when we interrupted their conversations, details regarding why they attended the Coffee Houses, their relationships with other students present, their perceptions of the Coffee House environment, how they interacted with the lawyers at the sponsored Coffee Houses, and how they would compare sponsored

<sup>(3)</sup> We would also argue that there is little written regarding corporate sponsorship of university events, the main focus of this limited literature being sporting events (see, for example, Madrigal, 2001).

and nonsponsored events; professors and lawyers were asked similar questions, whilst waiting staff were asked about their perceptions of the event and of the students.<sup>(4)</sup> We should note, however, that we did not target nonattendee law students for interviews, although we talked to some informally.

In addition, longer semistructured interviews following a predetermined interview guide but allowing for interviewees to focus on specific themes of interest to them were conducted away from these events with key informants including members of the Law Students' Association (LSA) and law professors.<sup>(5)</sup> These gave us further information regarding the history of the Coffee Houses, the debates that had risen both for and against their continuation, reasons why professors did or did not attend, and how the corporate sponsorship was organised. A range of other data, much of it gained by participant observation, was collected in order to gauge how many people came to Coffee House, to whom they spoke, for how long, and on what subjects over the course of an evening, with additional information coming from a series of eight time-and-motion studies.

In addition to utilising multiple sources of information to form a triangulated research design, we also undertook investigator triangulation (Baxter and Eyles, 1997); one of us is a male law professor in his forties whom all the students recognised, one is a female professor in her thirties whom only two of the students knew from taking a geography class, and the third is a male undergraduate student in his twenties. By constantly comparing our notes, interview data, and experiences, we were able to evaluate not only our findings but how we were influencing the interview procedure. While the language used and the ideas raised by students did differ depending on who they were talking to, at the same time, as will be discussed later, dominant themes clearly emerged.

### *Homo Academicus anxieties*

In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu's study of the micropowers that constitute academic life (1988), he took great care to insist on the researcher's responsibility to examine the mechanisms that made up his or her own world and not merely to objectify those of others. He argued that the researcher of the self "is in danger of appearing to surrender to the well known strategies of polemic, insinuation, allusion, hint and veiled innuendo—all those procedures which are especially dear to academic rhetoric" (1988, page 2). What is worse, such research is almost certain to be understood as an act of betrayal by those whose world the researcher sets out to study.

With this in mind—although our work was in no way covert, with no deception practised, and with everyone interviewed fully informed of the nature of our project before they talked to us—the rumours that circulated around our research were mostly

<sup>(4)</sup> These unstructured interviews, undertaken during the Coffee Houses, were not taped because of the background noise and the informal nature of the interview process. As such, the quotes repeated here were remembered by the researchers and written down every ten minutes or so in a discrete location. As well as these interviews, a number of nonlaw students who also attended the Coffee Houses were also interviewed. There was a roughly equal split between men and women students interviewed. Five lawyers were interviewed, three men and two women, and one female marketing manager of a law firm. Ethics approval for this research project was granted by the McGill University Research Ethics Board-I.

<sup>(5)</sup> Five law professors were interviewed: one male professor who had been present when the Coffee Houses began and knew a great deal of the history of the event; one senior male professor who attended many of the Coffee Houses; one male, middle-ranked professor who attended only occasionally; one senior woman professor who had gone to Coffee House in the past but no longer did so; and one junior woman professor who did not attend. Three representatives from the LSA involved with the organisation of the Coffee Houses were interviewed. The key informant interviews were taped and transcribed.

amusing, if occasionally a little alarming. “There’s *nothing* more complicated going on. A.K.A. Manderson don’t fuck with our sponsored Coffee Houses or we’ll cut your head off and stick it on a stake” replied one slightly intoxicated respondent (Scott, 24 March 2005). Whilst this was hopefully in jest, we constantly emphasised to interviewees that the purpose of our research was categorically not to campaign for any reform or policy change, but to inquire carefully into the meaning and effects of a particular event. As will be seen, our conclusions are by no means reducible to a good/bad dichotomy, yet stating this does not really probe the students’ concerns. We suggest that the threat such students felt—albeit a small group—was not practical; it was the *act* of observation itself and not the conclusions that might eventually be drawn that bothered them. “Your project, I feel like I’m being watched, it’s like being under a microscope” (Adam, 27 January 2005). Should we have been more concerned about reactivity and such statements (Cresswell, 1998)?<sup>(6)</sup> Perhaps, but we suggest that maybe it is not researchers in this case but law itself, as practised by lawyers and taught in the classroom, that is most culpable. Students at law school learn what they will practice all their lives: to objectify, to interrogate, and to judge. Indeed, they become very good at it. Yet, any attempt to treat the ideas that students learn as requiring them to question *their own* motives, or in any way to second guess their own dispositions, can be met with a frosty reception. Application and doctrine are both safely ‘out there’, to be done to others; who *we* are often remains safely tucked away.

### Setting the stage: the Atrium and the actors

Coffee House takes place in an enclosed foyer called the Atrium that links a 19th-century mansion, in which teaching and administration takes place, with a large four-storey library constructed along with the Atrium in 1998 (see figure 1). The Atrium serves as a transitional space (rather unlike the original meaning of a meeting place or courtyard). It is modern, metallic, unornamented, and painted black and white. It appears as a space to be moved through between destinations, and certainly would not normally be considered a location that encourages lingering.

As Lefebvre (1991) insists, the objective neutrality of the concept of space—the modernist claim that this it is not a representation but prior to representation—is itself a historical construction that conceals and facilitates certain politics. Social relations are always built *somewhere* and if we are not mindful of the power of space and of our ideas about space to impose certain patterns on those relations then we have lost some of our critical capacity (Lefebvre, 1991). If instead one describes the Atrium as ‘sterile’, ‘constructed’, and ‘artificial’—as students indeed did during interviews—then immediately it becomes apparent that the space itself is conducive to certain activities, including in particular the activity of being somewhere else, of not wanting to dawdle (Tom, 27 January 2005; Virginia, 27 January 2005). The Atrium is not a space that is acoustically or environmentally warm and as such it does not invite the sharing of confidences; there are too many people passing through it, and not enough corners.

Turning now to look at who is entering this space during Coffee House, we have a number of different actors—namely, professors, law students, nonlaw students, LSA representatives, lawyers and the firms they represent, and those serving. The number of

<sup>(6)</sup> Whilst we found such comments interesting in themselves because of the unease that they represented amongst the student population, we should note that only four individuals from over ninety interviewed made such comments, and as soon as signs of nervousness were noted we carefully reiterated the aims and methods being used, as well as stressing the confidential nature of our results. In general, the students attending Coffee House were far more intrigued by our project than worried.



**Figure 1.** The empty Atrium.

professors who socialise with their students in this space has been waning in recent years. From a time in the late 1980s when seven or eight professors attended Coffee House regularly, in 2005 there was typically only one or two. In part, this reflects changing demographics. Late afternoon and early evening on a Thursday are not convenient for faculty members with families and child-care responsibilities. For women professors, often juggling different demands most acutely, the time commitment is simply unrealistic (KI, 3, 11 February 2003). It is also, however, clearly an issue of environment. Sponsored Coffee Houses are noisy and crowded affairs not conducive to serious discussion. Professors are for these reasons more likely to come to unsponsored events. As for children, they were seen twice at the unsponsored smaller events, but none ever came to those sponsored. This spatial environment, therefore, actively worked to discourage certain types of participants. In subtle ways, the childless and masculine character of success in law has already been reinforced.<sup>(7)</sup>

At the time of our study, six Coffee Houses were being sponsored by Montréal and Toronto law firms each academic year. These coincide with the professional recruitment period for upper-year students that dominates the first half of the second term, namely January and February. So many people crowd into the Atrium for these events that one can hardly move (see figure 2). An LSA representative noted, “you start to smell people. It gets hot. I can’t even get to the other side” (KI 5, 13 January 2005). A wide cross-section of the law student population attends, but first-year students appear to be particularly reliable attendees. The standard of dress is noticeably higher at sponsored than at nonsponsored Coffee Houses. Although the dress code is rarely more than ‘smart casual’, make-up and jewellery are frequently seen on women,

<sup>(7)</sup> Compare this with McDowell’s discussions regarding merchant banking (for example, 1997; 2005; McDowell and Court, 1994).



**Figure 2.** The crowd at a sponsored Coffee House. (This photograph has been altered to preserve the anonymity of those present.)

and—occasionally—men wear suits. The students explained that there was a ‘different feel’ at a sponsored Coffee Houses, “perhaps it’s the lighting, or maybe it’s the corporate thing ... there’s just a different feel ... the sponsored Coffee Houses are more like a cocktail party and less like a bunch of students getting together after class and drinking ... it’s more high-brow” (Samuel, 31 March 2005).

However, there are, of course, students who choose not to attend Coffee House, and student attendees were quick to describe them: the “serious studying people aren’t here, they don’t come” (Kate, 20 January 2005). “I know a guy who’s really socially awkward and I never see him come here” (Nathan, 17 February 2005). Others classified those in attendance quite clearly: “Coffee House is a certain kind of scene. You have to be a certain type of personality to be into it, an ‘A-type’ personality” (Susan, 27 January 2005).<sup>(8)</sup>

Therefore it is true that many students do not attend Coffee House, or do so only irregularly, for a variety of reasons ranging from pure temperament to what we might characterise as conscientious objection. Nevertheless, Coffee House operates hegemonically to affect the climate of legal education even amongst those who do not attend. Fundamentally, the power of Coffee House lies in the way in which it presents a certain model as central and marginalises alternatives. This is so in two ways. First, Coffee House presents a powerful corporate image of ‘real law’, a description which we heard time and again amongst the students we interviewed and which comes to have normative currency amongst the student population as a whole. Whether one attends or does not attend, the ‘reality’ of this performance of law is not strongly contested. Second, Coffee House acts as a meeting place for students who understand themselves and are broadly understood as being very much central to the student community—it constitutes the ‘in crowd’ amongst law students at McGill. Again, those who do not

<sup>(8)</sup> As noted earlier, we did not attempt to target nonattendee students for interview, but did talk informally to some such students. Nonattendees ( $n = 8$ ) tended to agree strongly with the conclusions that we draw in this paper regarding those attending Coffee House.

attend Coffee House do not, by and large, contest this social formation but cede its authority to define normality.

The sense of exclusivity and of the collective aim of belonging is strongly policed (Fortier, 1999). Gate-crashers are termed 'SNAILS' (Students Not Actually In Law School) and informal and formal mechanisms are used to keep them out. Informal measures include LSA members serving beer and keeping 'an eye' on those in attendance; formal measures include security guards hired by the LSA asking anyone looking hesitant his or her reason for being there. Among other concerns, it is generally thought that SNAILS—coming as they do from 'down the hill' or 'lower campus', a commonly used language of spatial distinction and hierarchy to situate nearly all other McGill students—would not 'hold their drink'. A student, Simon (17 February 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 KI 2, 21 January 2005). Along with this rather vivid distinction comes a clear sense of entitlement.

It is the role of representatives from the LSA to decide which firms will sponsor events and when. As well as paying for the food, drink, and catering staff, these firms also pay a \$600 donation that helps fund the LSA and some law student clubs and societies. Members of the LSA executive were generally in agreement that "the firms need us, but we don't need the firms". Competition gets so fierce amongst the firms that "they fight to get space; *they fight* ... I mean I had some firm reps practically, like, promising me their first born" (KI 2, 21 January 2005). Another LSA representative commented "of course when it's a big law firm, they're going to try to ... seduce us" (KI 1, 16 December 2004). At all the events, sponsored and nonsponsored, it is LSA members who serve the beer, rather than—for the sponsored events—the waiting staff hired by the firms who serve wine in glasses. This practice has remained in place since the initial sponsoring of Coffee House, and since 2004 beer has been served in red plastic mugs which students buy for \$2 each, a notion introduced by the LSA as a way of branding the whole event, as well as on environmental grounds.

Then there are the lawyers and their companies. Sponsorship buys visibility for the firms that pay for this lavish display: posters and brochures announce 'Welcome to our Coffee House', 'Taste Extreme Success', 'Fall in Love ... With [XYZ]', and 'Hit the Bull's Eye, join the inner circle of [ABC]'. But, more importantly, it pays, or is believed to pay, for access. The firms, most of them "big national firms with Montréal offices" that usually return each year, send along a cadre of lawyers—normally around half a dozen—to mingle with the students (KI 5, 13 January 2005; also KI 1, 16 December 2004). These representatives are often recent McGill graduates and other young lawyers, all well dressed, 'personable', and, for the most part, men. Nevertheless, when women lawyers are present, youth, beauty, and the law firm image become integrated in the minds of some, with comments such as this from David (17 February 2005), a male law student, "I mean if the lawyer's a hot woman we're more likely to talk to her", whilst Colin (10 February 2005), another male student added,

"No, it's totally irrational, it's like I could see an attractive, beautiful woman and associate that with the firm. Like last week there was a lawyer serving wine who was really [good-looking], and a lot of people commented on it. A lot of people ... So people are thinking 'This firm has hot women' ... I was looking at the lawyers last week and thinking about why they send who they send ... the guys seemed to be wearing really smart suits."

Finally, there are the waiters and waitresses, the servers or servants. They are employees of catering companies hired by the individual law firms, who dress in



**Figure 3.** The formal and discreet waiting staff, with a jazz band in the background. (This photograph has been altered to preserve the anonymity of those present.)

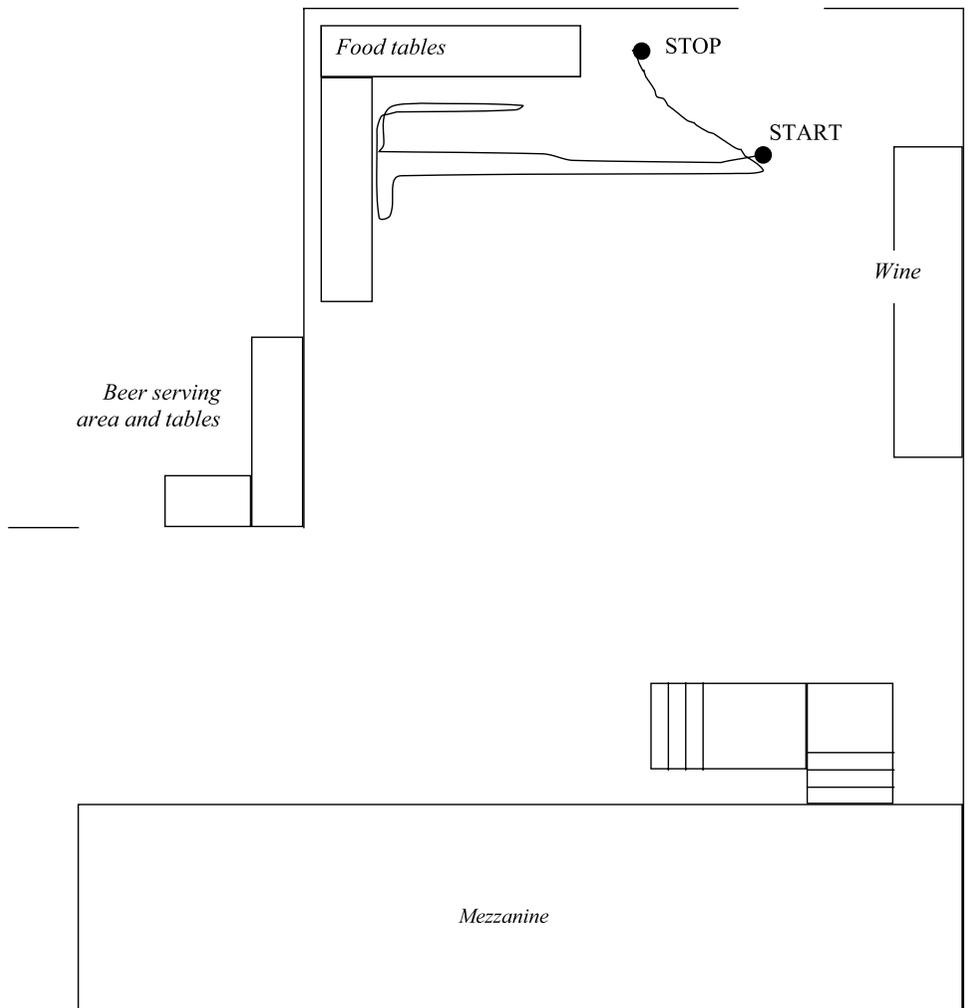
teduxes, and behave formally and discreetly (see figure 3). An element of hierarchy and exclusivity is thus added to the evening. Without a doubt, from the atmosphere and the service, to the actors present, the law students receive a certain aspirational message: we are the ones who will drink this fine wine, eat this elegant food, appreciate such cultured music. We are professional lawyers, proud and powerful.

### **All hyped up at Coffee House<sup>(9)</sup>**

#### **Having a good time**

The vast majority of law students interviewed maintained that the presence of lawyers at sponsored Coffee House events had no effect on their lives or experiences whatsoever. Coffee House was argued to be purely a social lubricant. Students suggested that assembling together such a large proportion of the student body allowed them to meet and interact with each other and that the free food and drink was important only because it encouraged this attendance and mixing. In turn, students argued that the lawyers were useful only because they paid for it (Lucy, 17 March 2005). Many students were at pains to explain this line of reasoning to us. “To demonstrate why I came here”, said Shannon, “I’m going to go get another drink” (10 February 2005). “I come for this”, said Colin, pointing to his glass, “*that’s it*” (10 February 2005). Indeed, some of those we interviewed were quite insistent that they were “not conscious of the lawyers on any level” (Tim, 27 January 2005, emphasis in speech).

<sup>(9)</sup> With acknowledgements to Bell et al (1994).



**Figure 4.** The limited choreography of a second-year law student at Coffee House 'to be with his mates', recorded for a two-hour period.

**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" (24 March 2005).

As we observed the performances of the students it was definitely the case that the patterns of most people's interactions were limited to obtaining drinks at the bar, hovering around the serving staff or lingering at the buffet table, and mingling with their own small circle of friends. This fairly typical form of behaviour is shown in figure 4, a 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, 6 January 2005).

It was clear that the food and drink did attract many of those present. It was also true that, like any student party, a good deal of alcohol was drunk over the course of

two or three hours.<sup>(10)</sup> As one student enlightened us: “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, 17 February 2005). Another added:

“People are drunk by 7 on a Thursday, then what do you do? You’re already drunk, so you can’t do work, you have to drink more, stay drunk ... You should check out conversations outside; there’s lots of ‘can you believe it’s 4:30 and we’re drunk already’” (Stephen, 13 January 2005).

However, after observing ten Coffee Houses, we believe that contending that these events are just a means to find new friends or relax with established ones is too simplistic. The environment at a sponsored Coffee House is unusual. It is a good place to drink (freely), but not an ideal place to socialise or talk. Noisier and more overcrowded than the nonsponsored events, these events are also more self-conscious, having been described to us variously as loud, rowdy, awkward, intimidating, frustrating, tense, and stressful. While some of these comments could be applied to any student party, others were more unique. One female student stated, “personally I find it kind of awkward, it’s a kind of awkward space, nowhere to sit” (Anna, 13 January 2005), another student adding “c’est complètement superficiel” (Michelle, 13 January 2005), and a third reporting “there’s tension in the space because there are the lawyers walking around” (John, 27 January 2005). Another 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” (Sophie, 27 January 2005), whilst one more commented “we know we’re being kind of watched [by the lawyers]” (Kate, 3 February 2005). Another student was even more critical regarding the presence of the lawyers, explaining “this is a frustrating social space” (Robert, 10 February 2005). The spatial nature of control, power, and domination that Lefebvre insists upon was clearly apparent. This was very much an appropriated space, one “modified to meet the needs and possibilities of a group”, and while students dominated in numbers they did not in power (Lefebvre, 1991, page 166). At the sponsored events, both the lack of personal space and the ever-present lawyers gave a subtle (or not so subtle) sense to the students that they were continually on display.

Further increasing our scepticism of the argument that ‘it is only about having a good time’ was the fact that sponsoring law firms battled it out with each other and with the LSA representative who timetabled the events to gain a prime week, and then paid thousands of dollars in refreshments for the privilege (KI 2, 21 January 2005). What was the rationale of the law firms? Perhaps it may be said that the lawyers themselves simply gained a marketing opportunity.

“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 ... It’s bold. It’s out there. I know it is, because I’ve had my friends who have no idea about this stuff—like once they start recruitment ... they just remember [the name]. It works!” (KI 2, 21 January 2005)

Indeed, ‘branding’ was a term constantly used by students, the LSA representatives, and the lawyers themselves (Frank, 27 January 2005; Robert, 10 February 2005; Don, 17 February 2005). As one lawyer explained to us, “we see the value in promoting the image of the firm, in participating in this kind of promotion activity. It’s a nice thing to do for the students ... to throw them a party” (Don, 17 February 2005).

<sup>(10)</sup> Clearly, alcohol consumption played a major part at these events; however, our aim here is not to explore the specific psychological and physiological roles of this substance. For studies regarding the complex relationships between university students and alcohol see amongst many others, Nairn (1996), Roche and Watt (1999), Webb et al (1996).

Again, however, there are reasons to doubt the validity of such a rationale; as one student explained to us, "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, 10 February 2005). Furthermore, the students' consciousness of the names and profiles of the sponsoring firms actually appeared very low, demonstrated here in a discussion between two students, Nathan and Tim, to whom we talked.

**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" (17 February 2005).

In addition, at every sponsored Coffee House a lawyer from the firm being represented would give a short 4–5-minute speech emphasising the merits of his or her firm. Students had almost no patience with any such speech making, to the point of rudeness. In sum, we found that there was a striking inconsistency amongst the comments from students regarding the branding of Coffee Houses. The same person would tell us that it was a powerful marketing exercise by the law firms *and* that it had no effect on him or her personally. Yet, as one student pointed out, "80 percent of students are desperate to get into these firms. We should be buying *them* things" (Ben, 24 March 2005), which brings us to our second dominant performance: networking.

### Networking with lawyers

The 'official' purpose of the sponsored events was for students and lawyers from major law firms to 'network' and, by doing so, for students to gain greater social capital when it came to recruitment, whilst firms got their names 'out there'. Thus, by attending Coffee House, students could gain easy access to the lawyers present, find out more about the work they did, and perhaps even gain an advantage in the recruitment process.

At each sponsored Coffee House, we observed a small group of students undertaking this type of performance. A few students, usually around eight to ten, typically in their final year and therefore very much with an eye to their future, were purposely 'dressing up' and making a point of talking to the legal representatives. Wearing a suit (in the case of the men) was for these students the 'rule of recognition' (Samuel, 31 March 2005) indicating that they wished to talk to the lawyers. As one student explained, "last year our friend John would come in a three piece suit to talk to the lawyers. We would hardly see him" (Michel, 31 March 2005).

Following this line of argument, one student, Warwick, was adamant in his understanding of why students came to the Coffee Houses:

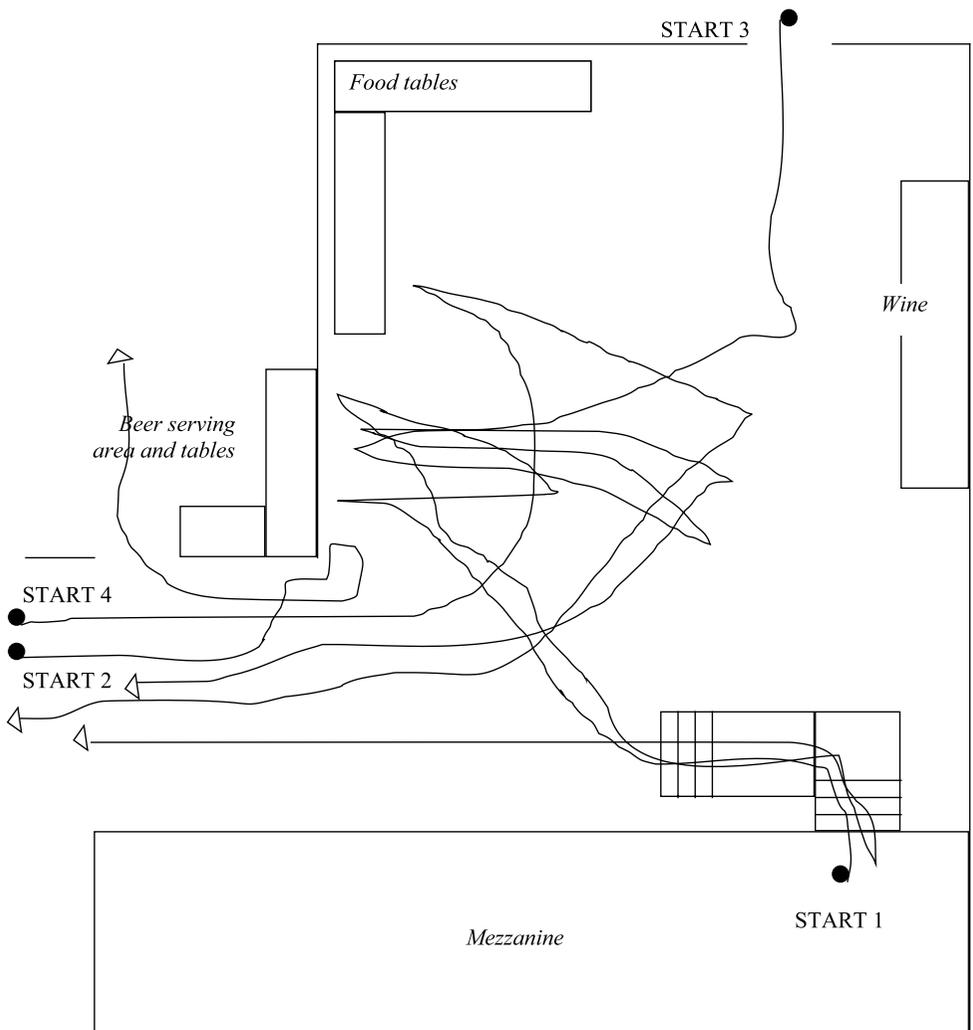
"The sponsored Coffee Houses help people to network with the lawyers ... 50% of McGill law grads stay in Québec, it's those students who are helped by the connections they make here ... The connections that people make aren't necessarily going to help them tomorrow, or in a few months ... Maybe three or four years later that connection will be helpful" (17 March 2005).

Another student referred to a long conversation he had had the week before with a lawyer who worked in the same area he was interested in, and which he felt had improved his chances of recruitment (Chad, 10 February 2005). In charting the movements of people during Coffee House, we also found a distinct pattern amongst some that corresponded with a conscious attempt to 'work the room'. The choreography

of one such striver over the course of an evening is depicted in the tangled web of figure 5. “This is a war field”, said another such student, adding “I’m just looking for whoever can get me a job ... I come here to compete, to get ahead” (Peter, 3 February 2005). His friend Oliver concurred, “it’s about connecting. Because they get like 140 resumes, and so you have to connect with someone so that they remember you” (3 February 2005).

Although it was a minority of the students we spoke to who actually admitted to this kind of conscious networking, many more referred to third parties who they thought did so. Thus, networking operated as a kind of rumour that people acknowledged while once again denying their own involvement. “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, food, friends” (Anita, 17 February 2005).

Indeed, the vast majority of students publicly disdained the practice of networking and treated it as shameful. Time and again, students insisted “oh no, I never talk to



**Figure 5.** The choreography of a law student ‘working the room’, recorded for a two-hour period. The breaks indicate a move outside to smoke.

---

a lawyer", and others exclaimed that they "avoid lawyers like the plague" (Chad, 10 February 2005; Shannon, 10 February 2005). Some had even established their own defensive formations in order to avoid talking to the lawyers present, standing in a circle and orienting themselves so that their backs formed a solid wall against the intrusion of an approaching representative when a member of the group signalled 'incoming' (Erik, 20 January 2005; also explained independently by Lucy, 17 February 2005). Another student explained that, "when the lawyers head in my direction, I turn and walk away" (Colin, 10 February 2005).

Accordingly, the more we listened, the more it seemed to us that a posture of refusal marked out the majority of students' understanding of the environment, and their own performances. This symbolic resistance, this insistence on one's immunity, was a mark of 'coolness' in the general sense, with the more specific implication of keeping a haughty distance from any kind of personal involvement. Of course, there was every reason for the students to attempt this double argument. If they want free parties in an educational institution then they have to argue that it is useful to the firms; but, at the same time, no one wants to be caught 'in the act'. Such an argument can be made only by separating others (who might be susceptible to influence) from oneself (remaining above the fray).

### **Performativity: Coffee House and the successful lawyer**

What we have detailed here are two different yet connected types of public performances being played out in a specific time and space. We argue that the majority of students present were undertaking a performance of eating and drinking like lawyers, yet maintaining a distance from the lawyers actually present, and acting as if their presence was neither of use to them nor a bother. Those students we talked to and observed at Coffee House who were there 'for a good time' were fairly similar in social organisation. They tended to arrive about an hour after the event had begun and stay to the end, they did not really mingle with more than their immediate group of friends, and friends of their friends, and they tended to drink a fair amount of alcohol. However, given the feeling of being watched by the lawyers and the fact that these students could afford to buy drinks in a more relaxed and hospitable atmosphere if they wished to—as was explained to us, "people don't come here for the alcohol. They are rich students, they can afford the alcohol, so that's not the reason" (Brad, 31 January 2005)—in addition to the general branding of the event, why then did they come? These students were drinking fine wine in small circles, mixing occasionally, and enjoying catered food being served to them by formally dressed waiting staff. This was not your usual student party; this was a show of eating, drinking, and acting like lawyers, a chance to dress up and play the part of lawyers making small talk, even if just amongst friends. As one student reported "I hope being a lawyer will involve some of this" (encompassing the room in a sweep of his hand) (Jason, 27 January 2005). Additionally, a far smaller group of students took this performance to another level, engaging in small talk directly with the lawyers. These students not only walked, ate, and drank like lawyers, they were there to talk like lawyers too. The performance was becoming more and more polished.

Our argument, then, is that these repeated performances represent an embodied notion of what it is to be a McGill law student on his or her way to a career as a successful corporate lawyer. This identity is constantly being reinforced through repetition, week after week. One might find it strange that no one we talked to at these events ever directly mentioned this interpretation. But we suggest that this is exactly because these events allowed for the enactment of this shared performance as powerful

and legitimate.<sup>(11)</sup> One became proud and powerful, not to mention wealthy; one gained the disposition to not only think like a lawyer, but act like one too. This did not need to be discussed, because it was already the hegemonic ideal of what going to law school was all about, and through constant iterations this discourse had become virtually unchallengeable.<sup>(12)</sup> Even more than that, such performativity would be undermined by making it conscious. The behaviours at Coffee House, like those which Fortier (1999, page 48) found in the rituals of an Italian Catholic church in the UK,

“constitute performative sites of communal and individual subjects at once. That is to say that the shared performance of patterns of behaviour not only produces a communal appreciation of belonging, but it simultaneously produces particular kinds of subjects which cannot be dissociated from the collective project.”

“Identity is the effect of performance, and not vice versa” (Bell, 1999, page 3). Coffee House, as a site of repetition, operates to create a recognisable identity—a powerful corporate lawyer—whose legitimacy and prominence call forth its many aspirants (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Collins, 1998; Fortier, 1999). Our contention is reflected in the comments of one of the LSA representatives, who explained to us that the firms “know the McGill clientele, like, we like our nice hors-d’oeuvres ... We get comfortable with getting treated nicely. We also have the firms that do firm visits, and firms try to impress us ... but we get used to it” (KI 2, 21 January 2005). She added: “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.”

Of interest here is Bourdieu’s idea of *habitus*. One becomes entitled to occupy the role of powerful lawyer not merely through the attainment of formal qualifications, but through those dispositions that have been inherited and/or acquired, allowing one to ‘pass’ in a certain space where influence is brought to bear (Bourdieu, 1977; 1988). Thus, the bodily habitus forms identity by “a system of structured, structuring dispositions” (1977, page 52) and an “embodied history” (page 198) which we learn by living in it and never by thinking about it. We argue that, by attending a sponsored Coffee House, students who did not possess this particular habitus before their arrival at law school—those who did not by their own dispositions feel particularly comfortable sipping their wine from a fine glass, or being offered food on a silver platter by a gloved waiter—instead learnt it through performing it. On the one hand, Coffee House reinforced the habitus of those who already knew the rules. Yet, on the other hand, it allowed those without these inherited preferences to gain them. One student, Stacey, demonstrated this difference to us clearly when she pointed to a male student and explained “his mother’s a judge and I think his father might be too actually. So it’s different I guess if you grow up in that environment ... he’s already worked out how to behave ... and he looks like a 45 year old lawyer already” (10 February 2005).<sup>(13)</sup>

For those who had not already ‘worked out how to behave’, Isabel explained “the law firms are reorganising our work and reminding us of the rewards ahead—the *feeling of belonging to this kind of class*” (3 February 2005, emphasis added). This student went on to explain, “it’s a shared ritual because it creates class markers that we can, in fact,

<sup>(11)</sup> It is interesting here to note a similar situation that occurred to Campbell (2000) when researching the spaces of drinking in rural pubs in New Zealand.

<sup>(12)</sup> Evans (2005) makes a similar statement with regards to discourses and the performativity of masculinity (see also amongst others, McDowell, 1997; 2005; McDowell and Court, 1994).

<sup>(13)</sup> We were amused at a later Coffee House that, when our research assistant approached this student, his immediate response was “you can ask me *one* question only”. He certainly seemed well on track to a career in law. We were less amused to hear that when two female students joined the conversation he commented “hey baby-face” (Derek, 31 March 2005). Is this the *habitus* of a 45-year-old male lawyer?

feel we can identify with: the waiters, the wine, the jazz band. So it's a social reward, social confirmation and social unity." At the same time, subtle differences will always remain, highlighted by one waiting staff in his comment, "most of the students are OK, are polite, but then there are the rich ones, I can tell them [apart], and those ones, they can be condescending" (Walter, 13 January 2005).

The successful branding at Coffee House, then, was not that of the law firms but of the *student body*. Elite professional schools are very effective in internalising in their students "the occupation status hierarchy within their chosen field" (Granfield and Koenig, 1992b, pages 316–317). The building of a collective sense of place for students in the professional hierarchy is central to that process (Granfield and Koenig, 1992a). Coffee House is a statement of group identity and exclusiveness for 'McGill law students', an identity of class and polish. As one student simply stated, "it becomes kind of a ritual" (Catherine, 24 March 2005), a performative site that cultivates a sense of belonging through "affirmations, reaffirmations and transformations" (Rosen, 1985, page 33). The law firms' catering, from the jazz trios to the waiters to the food, all help to train students' developing sense of themselves and their aspirations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Another student, Brad, added, "being catered to is part of the appeal ... it's an ego boost, that's part of it" (13 January 2005). "It does kind of make you feel special", noted another (Robert, 10 February 2005). Wealth and aspirations commonly came into the conversations that students engaged in with the lawyers present. One lawyer, explained a student, raised the topic directly, asking him "so do you know how much money I make?" (Jonathan, 21 January 2005). As the student told us, "of course I know how much money he makes, well I don't know exactly, but I can guess in the ballpark."

Drinking and networking were two key components of 'lawyering' recognised by students.<sup>(14)</sup> One stated that at the Coffee House "to be frank, you learn to hold your liquor. You learn to drink, but to still not do anything too ridiculous" (Paula, 3 February 2005). Likewise, another student added, "I've learned to not drink at all, or to take one drink and coast on it all night long" (Nathan, 17 February 2005). The students were keenly aware of the need to 'hone their social skills', 'learn to fit a mould', and 'make small talk'. As one student made clear, "people learn to act and socialise as lawyers here. People learn to talk to the firms confidently. It's part of learning to be a lawyer" (Elizabeth, 20 January 2005). Other students were acutely conscious of the role Coffee House was playing in their own socialisation. "Oh yeah, when I first came here I wasn't very good at these social skills, I was kind of more reserved. This [Coffee House] is how I learned those skills" (Oliver, 3 February 2005). "It's a place where we learn to do small talk ... that's important for anyone wanting to be a lawyer, so we have to get good at it. I've learnt more about doing small talk here" (Stacey, 10 February 2005). Another explained, "you come and you drink a lot, but you also have to talk to the lawyers sometimes and not make an ass of yourself. You learn to multi-task" (Paul, 24 March 2005). This was not lost on the law professors we interviewed either; one explained to us, with regards to recruitment, "I mean, you're not going to get a job if the interviewer doesn't see you as one of them ... I mean, what it's about is the *re-invention of the self*, of the 'this is how we are and we will take you on if you can be how we are'" (KI 4, 11 March 2005, emphasis added).

The students at the sponsored Coffee Houses clearly had agency in that they had made a conscious decision to attend these events (see Gregson and Rose, 2000; and Nelson, 1999). Yet, after they had chosen to attend and had entered this specific space, we suggest that they unconsciously acted out the dominant behaviour patterns

<sup>(14)</sup> Drinking is also recognised in a growing literature on lawyers and alcoholism more generally (see, amongst others, Allen, 1997; Benjamin et al, 1990; Drogen, 1991).

expected of a McGill law student and aspiring lawyer. This process was one of the many pressures transforming their aspirations, their choices, and indeed their desires. Students had agency, but that agency was in turn constructed by their experiences at law school. The law firms helped to encourage such performativity by creating an environment in which these students felt such behaviour was the norm and to be expected. Worthy of note here is an LSA representative's comments regarding the lawyers which firms send to Coffee House. She explained that they are "always like, their affable, social lawyers. Like, they know who to send. They don't send the hard workers. They send like, the good-looking sort of social types." When asked if the firms send more good-looking women or men, she continued, "I think they're all good looking. It works to have good looking guys, trust me. Because even for guy students it's like '*this is what I want to look like*'" (KI 2, 21 January 2005, emphasis in speech).

The law firms were in attendance to reinforce the dominant stereotype of lawyering through messages encoded in and enacted through their sponsorship (also see Rosen, 1985). The law firms demonstrated that this is what law really is—how it is carried out, in what context, and by whom. Whether or not individual students talked to individual lawyers, or even remembered the name of the sponsoring firm, was entirely beside the point. The large corporate law firms, week after week, year after year, visibly paraded the meaning of law and the exercise of power (Lefebvre, 1992). It was they who appropriated this space for their own means. The recognition of such power and the dominant discourse it represented was clearly reflected in the comments of Edy, a student attendee who noted "even the idea of *alternative* careers is a strange idea ... The sponsored Coffee Houses are powerful because students only see one kind of lawyer—the big corporate firms' lawyer—that's the kind of lawyer that they see" (17 March 2005). A specific discourse was emerging as a situated practice in a particular place (Pratt, 2004). A particular message was being communicated and a particular social structure was being reinforced with all its "ramifications for the maintenance of a particular power order" (Rosen, 1985, page 33).

As performative acts, these episodes were part and parcel of regulatory practices that were producing dominant "social categories and the norms of membership within them" (Fortier, 1999, page 43). As a student pointed out regarding those students not attending Coffee House, "there are some people who just don't want to be part of *the law world*, or law school culture" (Warwick, 17 March 2005, emphasis added). Indeed, solidarity and professional identity are not just given or absorbed. The law students present at Coffee House were engaged in confirming their capacity to successfully fit into the corporate legal world. To each other they reconfirmed their identity as 'McGill law students', whilst in relation to their future as lawyers they were provided with an opportunity to 'try on' and act out the successful corporate player. For them it was thus perhaps both rehearsal and performance.

It is important to note here that subversion and parody, those key Butlerian devices for resistance, require actors to be self-conscious of their own social and performative role. Ironic self-consciousness is the power that Butler (1990) attributes to 'drag', for example. Yet, it has been our point throughout this study that students at Coffee House are not self-conscious of the implications of their performances. Indeed, as we have amply demonstrated, they insisted to us, repeatedly, that 'nothing was going on'. While they thus remain ignorant of the nature and implications of their performances at Coffee House, they will continue to be unlikely to subvert or parody it. The subconscious remains immune to irony.

### Concluding thoughts

What would Habermas have made of Coffee House then? The Atrium is a space in which open and critical political debate could indeed occur. Likewise, it would be possible, theoretically speaking, for those present at McGill's Law Faculty Coffee Houses to maintain a conscious disregard for issues of status and power. However that is not what we witnessed at all.

Perhaps if he had visited the very first Coffee Houses at McGill, Habermas might have been content. Yet, whilst maintaining its name, the institution of McGill Coffee House has changed. The institution has radically shifted over the course of twenty years, from a consciousness-raising exercise to a brand-naming exercise; from student fund-raising to legal branding. As one LSA representative noted, "it's gotten fancier, it's definitely gotten fancier" (KI 2, 21 January 2005). Perhaps though, in a vain attempt to maintain some continuity, this is why beer is always served by LSA representatives, and why students now bring back their red plastic mugs each week. We must not forget, too, that many of the students themselves frequently insist on this continuity. 'There's nothing more complicated going on here ... There's nothing more complicated going on'. 'It's just like [anywhere else] ... It's just like [any other situation]'. Such disavowals are in fact central to the power of performativity (Nelson, 1999). Over time, Coffee House confirms the notion of identity as continuous *as* it transforms it.

Strictly speaking, however, there is no such thing as mere repetition (Derrida, 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, page 943). Precedent is a system of iterability. Judges only repeat what has been decided before, but each repetition in an always-new context subtly changes and develops the law (Manderson, forthcoming). As such, what is being learned here is only learnable over time. This repetition, rather than the specifics of the individual evenings, implicates the Coffee House in the maintenance of a specific legal hegemony. The performativity of the McGill law student en route to being a successful corporate lawyer merges into social practice.

Coffee Houses teach students not about how to do law, but about how to *be* law. Student identities are slowly transformed, metamorphosed, little by little, as Coffee House socialises those who attend. The shows put on by the lawyers at Coffee House, whose performances we have barely started to unravel here, speak to a wealthy lifestyle, to a successful position in society. One gets "hooked into law firms and ... attached on the wealth" (Pauline, 13 January 2005).<sup>(15)</sup> An LSA representative put it even more bluntly: "the students get addicted to Coffee House" (KI 5, 13 January 2005).

<sup>(15)</sup> Statistics appeared to confirm this, with numbers obtained for the 2003 and 2004 graduating years ( $n = 278$ ) reporting that only four students from a total of 268 on whom there was information had gained positions with NGOs, with another twelve accepting other nonlaw positions. More specifically, in 2003, from a group of 126 graduating students, of the 120 on whom there were data, 73% went into private practice, 9% worked for government, 9% remained in academia for graduate work or other degrees, 8% had yet to find employment, and 1% went into nonlaw positions. In 2004, from a group of 152 graduating students, of the 148 on whom there were data, 64% went into private practice, 13% were yet to find a job, 10% worked for government, 7% were in other nonlaw positions, and 3% each remained in academia for graduate work or other degrees, or had gone to work for an NGO (statistics gained from Faculty of Law, McGill University). This appears to reflect the findings of Granfield and Koenig (1992a, page 516), who conclude with regards to Harvard law students, while also drawing on statistics, that "even among students who seek to resist developing this elite identity, the overwhelming majority come to accept the rightness of large, urban, prestigious law-firm membership" (see also Gulati et al, 2001; Sheldon and Krieger, 2004). An instructive exercise would be to record McGill student employment wishes before and after their law education and socialisation. Nevertheless, informal conversations with students in the social sciences prior to law school already suggest a higher percentage wishing to undertake NGO and/or human-rights activities.

We are not trying, however, to suggest here that Coffee House is the only means by which law students are socialised, nor even that it is the dominant means (see Elkins, 1983), but Coffee House is one type of experience, one ritual amongst others, that occurs during students' time at law school which has until now been overlooked. It is powerful in its own right because of the unique mix of actors present in this space, a complex space of power and empowerment. Moreover, identity transformation works best when it operates unconsciously, subtly constraining our dispositions, our temperament, our social conditioning, our habitus (King, 2000). Coffee House, at the same time, is not a monolithic environment. On the contrary, it is defined by contradiction, tension, and paradox as we have shown. It is in the multiplicity of identities and subject positions at play that the potential for realignment lies, little by little, slowly but surely.

**Acknowledgements.** We would like to thank Steve Baird, our research assistant, for his diligent work on this project. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Lynda Johnston and Brad Coombes for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper, and to Karen Nairn and Janine Wiles for their suggestions. Thanks also to our anonymous reviewers.

### References

- Allen R B, 1997, "Alcoholism, drug abuse and lawyers: are we ready to address the denial?" *Creighton Law Review* **31** 265–277
- Baxter J, Eyles J, 1997, "Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: establishing 'rigour' in interview analysis" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* **22** 505–525
- Bell D, Binnie J, Cream J, Valentine G, 1994, "All hyped up and no place to go" *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* **1** 31–47
- Bell V, 1999, "Performativity and belonging: an introduction" *Theory, Culture and Society* **16**(2) 1–10
- Benjamin G A H, Darling E J, Sales B, 1990, "The prevalence of depression, alcohol abuse, and cocaine abuse among United States lawyers" *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* **13** 233–246
- Blomley N, 1994 *Law, Space, and the Geographies of Power* (Guilford Press, New York)
- Blomley N, Delaney D, Ford R T (Eds), 2001 *The Legal Geographies Reader: Law, Power, and Space* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Bourdieu P, 1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)
- Bourdieu P, 1988 *Homo Academicus* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA)
- Bourdieu P, Passeron J-C, 1990 *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Sage, London)
- Butler J, 1990 *Gender Trouble* (Routledge, New York)
- Butler J, 1993a *Bodies That Matter* (Routledge, New York)
- Butler J, 1993b, "Critically queer" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* **1** 17–32
- Calhoun C, 1992 *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA),
- Campbell H, 2000, "The glass phallus: pub(lic) masculinity and drinking in rural New Zealand" *Rural Sociology* **65** 562–581
- Collins J, 1998, "Language, subjectivity, and social dynamics in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu" *American Literary History* **10** 725–732
- Cover R, 1984, "The Supreme Court 1982 Term—Foreword: *Nomos* and narrative" *Harvard Law Review* **97**(4) 14
- Cownie F, 2004 *Legal Academics: Culture and Identities* (Hart, Oxford)
- Cresswell J W, 1998 *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA)
- Derrida J, 1976 *Of Grammatology* translated by G C Spivak (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD)
- Derrida J, 1990, "Force de loi: le fondement mystique de l'autorité" *Cardozo Law Review* **11** 920–1045
- de Sousa Santos B, 1995 *Towards a New Common Sense* (Routledge, London)
- Dixon D, 1999, "Between difference and alterity: engagements with Edward Soja's thirdspace" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **89** 338–339
- Drogen E, 1991, "Alcoholism in the legal profession: psychological and legal perspectives and interventions" *Law and Psychology Review* **15** 117–162
- Elden S, 2001, "Politics, philosophy, geography: Henri Lefebvre in recent Anglo-American scholarship" *Antipode* **33** 809–825

- Elkins J R, 1983, "Becoming a lawyer: the transformation of self during legal education" *Soundings* **66** 450–468
- Ellis M, 2004 *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London)
- Eron L, Redmont R, 1957, "The effect of legal education on attitudes" *Journal of Legal Education* **9** 431–443
- Evans R, 2005, "'You questioning my manhood, boy?': using work to play with gender roles in a regime of male skilled-labour", in *Spaces of Masculinities* Eds B van Hoven, K Hörschelmann (Routledge, London) pp 193–204
- Fortier A-M, 1999, "Re-membering places and the performance of belonging(s)" *Theory, Culture and Society* **16**(2) 41–64
- Granfield R, 1991, "Making it by faking it: working-class students in an elite academic environment" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* **20** 331–351
- Granfield R, Koenig T, 1992a, "Learning collective eminence: Harvard Law School and the social production of elite lawyers" *Sociological Quarterly* **33** 503–520
- Granfield R, Koenig T, 1992b, "The fate of elite idealism: accommodation and ideological work at Harvard Law School" *Social Problems* **39** 315–331
- Gregson N, Rose G, 2000, "Taking Butler elsewhere: performativities, spatialities and subjectivities" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **18** 433–452
- Griffiths J, 1986, "What is legal pluralism?" *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* **24** 1–55
- Gulati M, Sander R, Sockloskie R, 2001, "The happy charade: an empirical examination of the third year of law school" *Journal of Legal Education* **51** 235–266
- Habermas J, 1992 *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* translated by T Burger (Polity Press, Cambridge); first published in 1962
- Haldar P, 1999, "The function of ornament in Quintilian, Alberti and Court architecture", in *Law and the Image: The Authority of Art and the Aesthetics of Law* Eds C Douzinas, L Neal (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL) pp 117–136
- Hedegard J, 1979, "The impact of legal education: an in-depth evaluation of career-relevant interests, attitudes, and personality traits among first-year law students" *ABA Research Journal* **4** 791–868
- Kennedy D, 1982, "Legal education as training in hierarchy", in *The Politics of Law* Ed. D Kairys (Pantheon Books, New York) pp 40–61
- King A, 2000, "Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: a 'practical' critique of the habitus" *Sociological Theory* **18** 417–433
- Klein L, 1997, "Coffeehouse civility, 1660–1714: an aspect of post-courtly culture in England" *Huntington Library Quarterly* **59**(1) 30–52
- Lefebvre H, 1991 *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Lefebvre H, 1992 *Critique of Everyday Life* volume 1 (Verso, London)
- Lloyd M, 1999, "Performativity, parody, politics" *Theory, Culture and Society* **16**(2) 195–213
- Longhurst R, 2000 *Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries (Critical Geographies)* (Routledge, London)
- Macdonald R, 1990, "Office politics" *University of Toronto Law Journal* **40** 419–476
- McDowell L, 1997 *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- McDowell L, 2005, "The men and the boys: bankers, burger makers and barmen", in *Spaces of Masculinities* Eds B van Hoven, K Hörschelmann (Routledge, London) pp 19–30
- McDowell L, Court G, 1994, "Performing work: bodily representations in merchant banks" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **12** 727–750
- Madrigal R, 2001, "Social identity effects in a belief–attitude–intentions hierarchy: implications for corporate sponsorship" *Psychology and Marketing* **18**(2) 145–165
- Manderson D, 2003, "From hunger to love: myths of the source, interpretation, and constitution of law in children's literature" *Law and Literature* **15**(1) 87–141
- Manderson, D, 2006 *Proximity, Levinas and the Soul of Law* (McGill–Queen's University Press, Montreal)
- Merrifield A, 1993, "Places and spaces: a Lefebvrian reconciliation" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* **18** 516–531
- Merry S, 1993 *The Possibility of Popular Justice: A Case Study of American Community Mediation* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI)
- Mohr R, 2003, "Law and identity in spatial contexts" *National Identities* **5**(1) 53–67
- Nairn K, 1996, "Parties on geography fieldtrips" *New Zealand Women's Studies Journal* **12**(2) 87–97
- Nelson L, 1999, "Bodies (and spaces) do matter: the limits of performativity" *Gender, Place and Culture* **6** 331–353
- Parker A, Sedgwick E, 1993 *Performativity and Performance* (Routledge, New York)
- Philo C, Parr H, 2000, "Institutional geographies: introductory remarks" *Geoforum* **31** 513–521

- 
- Pratt G, 2004 *Working Feminism* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA)
- Roche A M, Watt K, 1999, "Drinking and university students: from celebration to inebriation" *Drug and Alcohol Review* **18** 389–399
- Rose G, 1999, "Performing space", in *Human Geography Today* Ed. D Massey, J Allen, P Sarre (Polity Press, Cambridge) pp 247–258
- Rosen M, 1985, "Breakfast at Spiro's: dramaturgy and dominance" *Journal of Management* **11**(2) 31–48
- Sheldon K M, Krieger L S, 2004, "Does legal education have undermining effects on law students? Evaluating changes in motivation, values, and well-being" *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* **22** 261–286
- Soja E, 1989 *Postmodern Geographies, New Series* (Verso, London)
- Soja E, 1996 *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- Soja E, 1999, "Thirdspace: expanding the scope of the geographical imagination", in *Human Geography Today* Ed Doreen Massey, J Allen, P Sarre (Polity Press, Cambridge) pp 260–278
- Thompson E P, 1991 *Customs in Common* (Merlin Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk)
- Unwin T, 2000, "A waste of space? Towards a critique of the social production of space" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* **25** 11–29
- Webb E, Ashton C H, Kelly P, Kamali F, 1996, "Alcohol and drug use in UK university students" *The Lancet* **348** 922–925