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'A parcel of muddling muckworms': revisiting Habermas and the English coffee-houses

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In the context of a research project concerned with contemporary cafés, the authors have revisited Habermas's famous 1962/1989 work on the transformation of the 'public sphere', wherein the figure of the early-modern English coffee-house holds considerable significance. The outlines of Habermas's claims are inspected, and three lines of critique— to do with spatiality, sociability and practices—are held up against his depiction of coffee-houses as contained and egalitarian spaces of calm rational-critical debate. Theoretical work is combined with a re-reading of Habermas's fragmentary notes on the coffee-house, together with borrowings from both secondary texts and republished primary sources. The chief aim is to develop critical materials to inform further inquiry into coffee-houses and similar establishments, past and present, as sites for the practical conduct of public life.

Key words: Habermas, coffee-houses, spatiality, sociability, practices.

Introduction

In the place I most usually frequent, Men differ rather in the Time of Day in which they make a Figure, than in any real Greatness above one another. I, who am at the Coffee-house at Six in a Morning, know that my Friend *Beaver* the Haberdasher has a Levy of … undissembled Friends and Admirers … Our Coffee-house is near one of the Inns of Court, and *Beaver* has the Audience and Admiration of his Neighbours from Six 'till within a Quarter of Eight, at which time he is interrupted by the Students of the House; some of whom are ready dressed for *Westminster*, at Eight in

a Morning, with Faces as busie as if they were retained in every Cause there; and others come in their Night-Gowns to saunter away their Time, as if they never designed to go thither. …

When the Day grows too busie for these Gentlemen …, they give Place to Men who have Business or good Sense in their Faces, and come to the Coffee-house either to transact Affairs, or enjoy Conversation … Of these sort of Men consist the worthier Part of Mankind; of these are all good Fathers, generous Brothers, sincere Friends, and faithful Subjects. Their Entertainments are derived rather from Reason than Imagination: Which is the

Cause that there is no Impatience or Instability in their Speech or Action...

The Coffee-house is the Place of Rendezvous to all that live near it, who are thus turned to relish calm and ordinary Life. *Ebulus* presides over the middle Hours of the Day, when this Assembly of Men meet together. He enjoys a great Fortune handsomely, without launching into Expense; and exerts many noble and useful Qualities, without appearing in any publick Employment. His Wisdom and Knowledge are serviceable to all that think fit to make use of them;...

Having here given an Account of the several Reigns that succeed each other from Day-break 'till Dinner-time, I shall mention the Monarchs of the Afternoon on another occasion, and shut up the whole Series of them with the History of *Tom* the Tyrant; who, as first Minister of the Coffee-house, takes the Government upon him between the Hours of Eleven and Twelve at Night... (in Ross 1982: 287–289)

This is ethnography eighteenth-century style, from an article penned by Richard Steele for *The Spectator*, the London-based satirical magazine that he founded in the early 1700s. It captures the rhythms of a typical day spent in a busy coffee-house, punctuated by the differing constituencies of coffee-drinker who arrive at different hours, each inscribing upon the space their own distinctive ways of conversing, interacting and dwelling there. These crowds vary in the extent to which they are ribald or mannered, but at root 'Steele consciously revises the character of the coffee-house in his own reformative image', such that '[i]n his vision the coffee-house becomes the "Place of Rendezvous to all ... thus turned to relish calm and ordinary Life"' (Ellis 2001: 29; also Ellis 2004: 194–196). He acknowledges customers for whom such 'calm' is largely absent, but his preference is for those men, and

he means *men*, whose 'Entertainments are derived rather from Reason than Imagination'. Steele's ethnography thus reveals a tension between the coffee house as 'the Place of Rendezvous to all', whatever their demeanour, and its occupation by those 'good Fathers, generous Brothers, sincere Friends, and faithful Subjects' for whom the calm of reason should forever be the compass. This tension is central to what follows.

The context for the present paper is a research project on the practical conduct of public life in contemporary cafés, our objective being to offer an 'ethno-archaeological' (Laurier and Philo 2004) account of how certain social spaces occasion the routine accomplishment of an inclusive public life attentive to the needs of others.[1] Our investigations study the situated assemblages of shared action that constitute what might be termed 'habitable cities', wondering with Thrift (2005) about the affective dimensions of inhabiting the spaces of such cities. Within our project, coffee-shops, espresso bars and their like loom large, firstly because of their growing presence across the contemporary cityscapes of Britain, North America and elsewhere in the majority world, and secondly for the historical importance of their emergence as a place of urban conviviality. There is a particular theoretical resonance here, moreover, in that the early-modern English coffee-house is a central figure in Jürgen Habermas's text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas 1989; henceforth *ST*). Our purpose is hence to outline Habermas's claims about the public sphere, showing how the coffee-houses engage his theoretical concerns, and we insert extra historical evidence to flesh out connections implied but never expanded. We examine critiques that rework issues of spatiality, sociability and practice nascent in his account

of the public sphere, ones particularly relevant to the coffee-houses, and we identify his seeming *in*attentiveness to what flows from spatializing the public sphere in coffee-houses as sites of thoroughly socialized, embodied and often 'muddled' practices. We then borrow from both secondary texts and republished primary sources to acquaint ourselves with the public sphere as a precarious accomplishment, sometimes but not always occasioned in the life-world of the early-modern coffee-houses, the aim being to elucidate the emergent relations between coffee-house*s* and public*s* (both in the plural). Our contribution here doubles as theoretical contribution and invitation to further empirical research, and it parallels a companion paper (Laurier and Philo, 2006) where Habermas's claims meet our own empirical findings from present-day cafés.

Habermas, the birth of the public sphere and the coffee-houses: an outline

Habermas's book was published in English in 1989, a translation of the German version published in 1962 (for commentary see Calhoun 1992a; Hill and Montag 2000).[2] He discusses the emergence of the 'bourgeois public sphere' from the late-seventeenth century in Western Europe, seeing this as the product of a middle class dependent on its own endeavours for wealth-creation, rather than on inheritance and land-ownership.[3] He defines this entity as 'the sphere of private people come together as a public' (*ST*: 27), locating it in a process whereby 'private individuals'—in the sense of individuals and their concerns for the affairs of family and hearth—acquired a collective character through orienting their attention to matters with a measure of generality ripe for debate

with others. The point is less that these individuals might hold positions of 'power' within society *requiring* them to tackle matters of cultural and political concern, and more that they *elected* to do so, choosing to spend time with others in the mutual consideration of issues that in earlier centuries, arguably, would not have preoccupied them. They now entered into discourse with the expectation that their views, crystallizing as 'public opinion', would circulate and even have some consequence for the workings of state policy, domestic and foreign.

This is the transformation of the public sphere at the heart of Habermas's book. It is a big story energized by grand theory, and a subtext is the extent to which this development dovetailed with an extension of Enlightenment Reason, meaning the growing codification of rational principles in debate, inquiry and policy, throughout the social body (Calhoun 1992b: 17–18). When introducing the 'basic blueprint' of the public sphere, for instance, Habermas insists that '[t]he medium of this political confrontation', meaning private individuals collectively debating the basis for public authority over the likes of commodity exchange and social labour, 'was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (*offentliches Räsonnement*)' (*ST*: 27). Repeated reference is made to 'rational-critical public debate' (eg. *ST*: 28) as the vehicle for the educated bourgeois public, the 'bourgeois reading public' (*ST*: 85), to make its claims in the face of dominating power. 'The bourgeois public sphere institutionalized, according to Habermas, not just a set of interests and an opposition between state and society, but a practice of rational-critical discourse on political matters' (Calhoun 1992b: 9). In this rational arena, so the logic goes, a 'general interest' that 'need not be distorted by

particular interests' is permitted to flourish, guaranteed by an agreed 'rational approach to an objective order, that is to say, of truth' (Calhoun 1992b: 9).

Habermas suggests that an initial version of the public sphere appeared in the later-seventeenth century as a predominantly cultural-literary realm: the 'public sphere in the world of letters' (*literarische Offentlichkeit*). Subsequently, and of most interest to Habermas, this development paved the way for the emergence of 'the public sphere in the political realm' (*politische Offentlichkeit*) from the early-eighteenth into the nineteenth century and beyond. As he writes, '[t]he public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters' (*ST*: 30–31), creating a realm of public opinion that, in a deceptively simple sense, 'put the state in touch with the needs of society' (*ST*: 31). He elucidates 'the historical and social location in which this self-interpretation developed' (*ST*: 85), meaning the times and spaces bearing the growth of this public opinion through which the bourgeoisie came to know (and to represent) itself and its cultural-political concerns. At one spatial scale, for instance, he notes how—following the English 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688—'courtly-noble society' gradually 'became independent from the monarch's personal sphere', separating itself from the court (in the royal residences) and moving more to 'the town', meaning London, the country's capital. Court remained 'the residence of secluded royalty, pointed out from afar, difficult of access save on formal occasions of proverbial dullness' (*ST*: 32), but '[t]he "town" [became] the life-centre of civil society', and it was this urban scene that first witnessed the rise of 'an early public sphere in the world of letters' (*ST*: 30) where '[t]he bourgeois avant-garde of the educated middle class learned the art of

critical-rational public debate … through its contact with the "elegant world"' (*ST*: 29) of a courtly-noble society relocating from its country retreat.

At a smaller spatial scale, Habermas identifies the specific 'institutions'[4] bearing this early urban-based public sphere:

The predominance of the 'town' was strengthened by new institutions that, for all their variety, in Great Britain and France took over the same social functions: the coffee-houses in their golden age between 1680 and 1730 and the *salons* in the period between regency and revolution. In both countries they were centres of criticism—literary at first, then also political—in which began to emerge, between aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals, a certain parity of the educated. (*ST*: 32)

We can quote at length a further extract where Habermas references London coffee-houses:

By the first decade of the eighteenth century London already had 3,000 of them, each with a core group of regulars. Just as Dryden, surrounded by the new generation of writers, joined the battle of the 'ancients and moderns' at Will's, Addison and Steele a little later convened their 'little senate' at Button's; so too in the Rotary Club, presided over by Milton's secretary, Marvell and Pepys met with Harrington who here probably presented the republican ideas of his *Oceana*. As in the *salons* where 'intellectuals' met with the aristocracy, literature had to legitimate itself in these coffee-houses. In this case, however, the nobility joining the upper bourgeois stratum still possessed the social functions lost by the French; it represented landed and moneyed interests. Thus critical debate ignited by works of literature and art was soon extended to include economic and political disputes without any guarantee (such as was given in the *salons*) that such discussions would be

inconsequential, at least in the immediate context. (*ST*: 32–33) [5]

It is perhaps surprising to realize that Habermas actually says little else about the coffee-houses *per se*, but any attempt to appreciate what he means by the rise of the public sphere is assisted by envisaging those educated representatives of the bourgeois discoursing enthusiastically about the issues of the day over steaming pots of coffee in these diverse spaces of public opinion-forming spread across town (see Figure 1). Such, then, is the place of the coffee-houses, what one author once called the 'penny universities' (Ellis 1956: esp. Chap. 9), in the fuller sweep of Habermas's arguments.

Numerous coffee-houses diffused across London's early-modern cityscape, and Lillywhite (1963) provides both a timeline of their development—following from the opening in 1652 of Bowman's coffee-house known as Pasqua Rosee in St Michael's Alley, Cornhill—and a register of the many hundreds of establishments operated from the seventeenth into the nineteenth centuries. He demonstrates their progress from being regarded with suspicion, as in a Proclamation of 1675 calling for their suppression as 'places where the disaffected met' (also Ellis 2004: Chap. 7), to being key vehicles 'in the early postal development of London, which in time led to the organised delivery of letters, and the distribution of newspapers' (Lillywhite 1963: 18–19). Habermas ignores the link with the post as a key element in spatially integrating 'the public' through reasonably assured mechanisms allowing citizens to communicate across physical distance, but the connection with newspapers and the 'journalistic' construction of public opinion is present (also Ellis 2004: 68–74; Sennett 1974: 81). Indeed, that the coffee-houses were nodes

in a wider network is itself empirically verifiable, as Habermas explains in a passage combining several different elements of his account:

When Addison and Steele published the first issue of *The Tatler* in 1709, the coffee-houses were already so numerous and the circles of their frequenters already so wide, that contact among these thousandfold circles could only be maintained through a journal. At the same time the new periodical was so intimately interwoven with the life of the coffee-houses that the individual issues were indeed sufficient basis for its reconstruction. The periodical articles were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee-houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion; this was demonstrated by the flood of letters from which the editor each week published a selection. When the *Spectator* separated from the *Guardian* the letters to the editor were provided with a special institution: on the west side of Button's Coffee House a lion's head was attached through whose jaws the reader threw his letter.[6] (*ST*: 42)

This passage implies a London coffee-house society with some measure of overall cohesion, the patrons of these houses binding together into a 'society' of sorts even if many of them would never meet personally, knowing only those who frequented the same coffee-houses as themselves. The periodicals, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, were born within this society, reflecting its concerns, and expressly giving the impression of being written *from* coffee-house tables after coffee-house discussions. At the same time, they circulated around the coffee houses, being bought there, often read there and then commonly the subject of debate there, thus comprising a satisfying homology between form and content (between personnel, spaces, networks and the contents of

Figure 1   A coffee-house scene, captioned 'coffee-house dispute spills over', from Ellis (2004: Illustration 5, between p. 178 and p. 179; no primary source detailed).

things up for discussion and even decision; also Mackie 1998: 15–17).

The first issue of *The Tatler* established the linkages between the coffee-houses, the 'political' domain of rational-critical debate and the emergence of a public sphere. The magazine was published by one Isaac Bickerstaff, a pseudonym for Richard Steele, who provided this reasoning:

Tho' the other Papers which are published for the Use of the good People of England *have certainly very wholesome Effects, and are laudable in their particular Kinds, they do not seem to come up to the main Design of such Narrations, which, I humbly presume, should be principally intended for the Use of Politick Persons, who are so publick-spirited as to neglect their own Affairs to look into Transactions of State. (in Ross 1982: 65, italics in original)*

Bickerstaff resolved to publish his 'Advices and Reflections every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday', and, significantly, he divided up the sections of the magazine as if they were being written from different coffee-houses:

All Accounts of Gallantry, Pleasure, *and* Entertainment, *shall be under the Article of* White's Chocolate-house; Poetry, *under that of* Will's Coffee-house; Learning *under the title of* Graecian; Foreign *and* Domestick News, *you will have from* St. James's Coffee-house; *and what else I have to offer on any other Subject, shall be dated from my own* Apartment. (in Ross 1982: 65–66, italics in original)

As Mackie (1998: 15–16) elaborates, '[t]he paper's design thus traces London's social geography: its departments stand as newsprint analogues of actual places, public and private'. Habermas arguably could have explored these linkages further in securing his own claims,

particularly given how readily the likes of Mackie (1998: 17) conclude that it was precisely through the intersection of 'institutions like the press and the coffee-house' that 'a new notion of the 'public' arose, one that was composed of private individuals who came together to debate and negotiate matters of public concern, to formulate "public opinion"' (also Ellis 2004: 185–196; Harris 2001: 136–137; Houston and Pincus 2001: 18; Pincus 1995, 1996: 276–280; Sennett 1974: 80–82, 222).

Grounds of the public sphere: materials for a critique

Writing in 1992, Benhabib instigated discussion about the *spatialities* of the public sphere as understood by Habermas, and it is pertinent that she refers to Habermas as thinking in terms of 'discursive public space' (Benhabib 1992: 73) or a 'discourse model of public space' (Benhabib 1992: 84).[7] More specifically, for Habermas:

Public space is not understood … as a space of competition for acclaim and immortality among a political elite; it is viewed democratically as the creation of procedures whereby those affected by general social norms and collective political decisions can have a say in their formulation, stipulation and adoption. (Benhabib 1992: 87)

For Benhabib, this public space is to do with the enacting of 'procedures', the practising of a certain 'democracy' in who can speak to others, free as far as possible from threats of violence, coercion or undue exertion of dominating power. By hinting at the interlinked procedural and practice-based dimensions, she inflects Habermas's position in the direction of foregrounding practices in a

fashion akin to what we favour (see below). Her conception of public space remains somewhat metaphorical, however, and only weakly specified in relation to the organization and differentiation of spaces where people may actually meet to 'have a say' as members of some putative public. The limited engagement with how spaces provide possibilities of habitation for new socio-historical entities such as 'the public' cannot be denied, despite, in the simplest of senses, it being easy to envisage mapping across from what Habermas means by the public sphere, perhaps via Benhabib's first attempt at spatializing the concept, to the spaces of 'mundane reason' (Pollner 1987) present in, say, the coffee-house. In his historical analysis, Habermas makes precisely this step, albeit without pausing to reflect on what he has done nor its possible implications.

What is clear, though, is that Habermas's public sphere cannot—and should not—be mapped straightforwardly on to features of the city that are routinely categorized as, and in effect 'collected' by, the idea of public space. A key intervention is by Montag (2000), who contrasts what Habermas means by the public sphere with how he deploys the figure of 'the street' in *ST*. Montag starts from a single sentence of Habermas's: 'Laws passed under the "pressure of the street" could hardly be understood as embodying the reasonable consensus of publicly debating private persons' (translated in Montag 2000: 133). What he concludes is that, for Habermas, the street is an unruly territory, a place of violent conflict consistently descending into the use of force to back up demands, and as such it departs from the hypothesized peaceful spaces of the public sphere wherein the only force is that of the superior argument most thoroughly reasoned out for all present to hear, understand and (logically) accept. 'To speak from the street',

Montag (2000: 141) glosses, 'is to speak from outside the public sphere'; it is 'in no way an alternative public sphere', for 'it is precisely not a sphere of rational critique or even discussion at all'. The street and the public sphere are therefore fundamentally separate, even opposed, and ideally should be kept apart and devoid of mixing: 'The freedom [that] rational critical debate enjoys within its own realm depends upon its scrupulous observance of this territorial imperative' (Montag 2000: 141). The street, thus conceived, stands as a semi-metaphoric, almost materialized counterpart to Habermas's public sphere, and the image does present itself of the coffee-house, notably in its eighteenth-century guise, as the home of a calm public sphere removed from the churning irrationality of the street outside. What, though, is it about the street that prevents debate and reasonable consensus? In response, and as we illustrate later, it may be that the street is simply too filled with flows, too open to interruption and disruption, too uncontrolled and furnishing no place for rest and conversation beyond the stray shout. While all of society might be there in the street, the people present can in no way do all of the things that a community seemingly requires; and so, in contrast, what the spatial ordering of the coffee-house offered at its moment of emergence, Habermas proposes, is a much more hospitable setting for extended good conversation amongst non-family members.[8]

Noting the exact location of Habermas's emerging public sphere in certain spaces but not others brings us to the claims of Bartolovich (2000). In a dense text informed by postcolonial critiques of the 'localism' within much cultural theory, Bartolovich (also Eley 1992) questions the extent to which Habermas's public sphere tends to be conceptualized as emergent with the space of a

nation-state, largely untouched by interactions with 'others' elsewhere. 'Habermas suggests that historically a "public" forms itself "within" and in relation to a *particular* "bourgeois constitutional state"' (Bartolovich 2000: 15, emphasis in original), and that there is a 'diffusionist' logic—a 'tidy one-way diffusionism'—whereby the public sphere spreads from 'its ur-form [in] the northern and western European nation-state territories' to 'the "belated states" of Italy, Germany and elsewhere' (Bartolovich 2000: 17). Contrariwise, Batolovich (2000: 17) argues that 'the supposedly originary and autonomous European public spheres may have been "stimulated from outside" as well', insisting on the 'transnational' character of the processes at work. The details need not detain us, but of moment is her insight into 'this problem of the production of the *space* of the public sphere(s)', declaring that, 'to understand the operation of its logic of inclusion/exclusion, we need to understand what I will call here its "geo-graphy"—the writing of the world on which it depends' (Bartolovich 2000: 16, emphasis in original). In short, we must be critical of representations depicting the public sphere as dependent upon simple, contained and (en)closed material spaces, when much evidence implies that such spaces were really more complex, porous and fragmentary, crisscrossed by all manner of peoples, ideas, 'forces' and 'impurities' (Bartolovich 2000: 19; also Howell 1993: 310). This being said, while Bartolovich's critique reminds us that the 'geo-graphy' of the public sphere is not neatly contained but a fluid space of multiple encounters, what it does not supply is a solution to the problem of how the public is made possible when a continual through-flow of people would seemingly push it to the point of dissolution. The question then returns for us as to how the coffee-house does provide, as a

practical solution, a pocket of pleasurable order, a patch of convivial stability in the potentially liquifying and anonymizing movement of peoples, ideas and materials.

Rethinking the public sphere as a course of action rather than an over-arching grid is closely bound up with re-examining what might be claimed about the particular form of *sociability* upon which it allegedly depended. Habermas states that the public sphere 'preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether' (*ST*: 37). Social standing, political influence and economic power were dismissed from the historical public sphere as irrelevances, so Habermas supposes, in that the force of the superior argument was all that would 'carry the day', rather than physical force, rank or judicial machinery.[9] In other words, the envisaged form of sociability was egalitarian, the implication being less a total homogeneity in who contributed to the emerging discourse of public opinion, more a sense of enlarging possibilities for all sorts of people, from varying backgrounds, to partake in the critical-rational debate.[10] Unsurprisingly, critics have challenged Habermas on precisely this assumption, rendering him 'vulnerable to charges of ethnocentricism, sexism and abstraction' (Howell 1993: 311). Fraser's critique summarizes what is at stake:

scholars like … Landes [1988], … Ryan [1992] and … Eley [1992] contend that Habermas's account idealises the liberal public sphere. They argue that, despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, the official public sphere rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions. For Landes, the key axis of exclusion is gender; she argues that the ethos of the new republican public sphere in France was constructed in deliberate opposition to that of a

more woman-friendly salon culture that the republicans stigmatised as 'artificial', 'effeminate' and 'aristocratic' … Extending Landes's argument, … Eley contends that exclusionary operations were essential to liberal public spheres not only in France but also in England and Germany, and that in all these countries gender exclusions were linked to other exclusions rooted in processes of class formation … [T]he elaboration of a distinctive culture of civil society and of an associated public sphere was implicated in the process of bourgeois class formation; its practices and ethos were markers of 'distinction' in … Bourdieu's sense, ways of defining an emergent elite, of setting it off from the older aristocratic elites it was intent on displacing on the one hand and from the various popular and plebian strata it aspired to rule on the other. (Fraser 1992: 114)[11]

There is much to note about this passage, including a different take on the relationship between aristocratic and bourgeois factions to that implied by Habermas, as briefly related above, but the chief message is that the 'actually existing'[12] public sphere was fractured by exclusionary lines scratched in the sands of social distinction.[13] Moreover, Fraser (1992: 115) speculates about the existence of 'other, nonliberal, nonbourgeois, competing public spheres', and thereby makes the decisive move to pluralizing Habermas's singular public, writing instead about multiple public*s*. The studies that she cites show that 'the bourgeois public was never *the* public', and that 'virtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public sphere there arose a host of competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics and working-class publics' (Fraser 1992: 116; also Aronowitz 2000; Daniel 2000; Giroux 2000). Once this move has been made, an additional consideration is exactly when and *where* these counterpublics

came into being, prompting questions about how the bourgeois public sphere as a course of conduct immediately, rhythmically or belatedly produces supplements, variations, alliances, splinters, opposition and indifference.

Now that the conjoint spatialities and sociabilities of the public sphere have been shown to be less than guaranteed by a transcendental theory of Reason and rational inquiry, so attention can also turn to the *practices* reckoned to be constitutive of this sphere on a daily basis. Habermas has little to say about practices as such, the effect being a somewhat abstracted account in which the results of writing and speaking are prioritized above what *doing* 'being members' of the public sphere might involve. There is some sense of the former, with the public sphere often appearing as a highly 'literary' endeavour, but the reader is told little about the routines of bourgeois men moving around the townscape, walking or going by carriage, meeting, sitting down together, gesturing, laughing, sighing, lifting food or drink to their mouths, talking to waiting staff, and so on. The reader might imagine these practices, the conduct of which cannot but be central to the accomplishment of anything resembling a public sphere, but they remain stubbornly absent from Habermas's own text. There are two issues here, the first being the empirical one that actual practices in the spaces wherein Habermas's public sphere arises—notably the coffee-houses—might depart considerably from the calmly ordered world of educated heads eloquently discoursing with one another that permeates his text at various points. There may be far more slamming down of mugs, shouting, fisticuffs and more embodied forms of persuasion (see the little exchange pictured to the left in Figure 1), and more generally the disruptions and interruptions of the streets and the taverns surely intruded

upon the socio-spaces of the public sphere. Appreciating the plenitude of action and procedural problems associated with Habermas's public sphere is hence crucial to a recovery of the practices in play, whether whispered conversations, loud arguments, the through-traffic of countless different people and groupings across the threshold of this public sphere.

The second issue, following on, is more theoretical, and ties in with how Habermas might be subjected to a critique—it could be dubbed 'ethno-archaeological'[14]—for leaving hidden the arrays of practices, stumbled or shrieked conversations included, that sometimes constituted, differed from or at least supplemented the supposed polite conduct of rational-critical debate. Polite conduct itself is not enough to constitute reasoned argument, and indeed is often at odds with arguing as it is actually done. It is true that Benhabib (1992) configures Habermasian public space as one shaped by certain procedural 'rules' of discursive practice, in which case the focus on discourse is coupled with a weak notion of practice.[15] It is also true that McCarthy (1992: especially 51–52) gives a lengthy disquisition on Habermas's conception of 'practical discourse', which refers to a sense that reasoning has to be situated—it, literally, has to take place somewhere—even if it always remains in tension with 'the transcendence of situatedness required by his model of rational consensus' (also Howell 1993; see too the conclusions below). Such a reference to practical discourse still does not allow that reason may itself be embedded in ordinary practices of rule-following and reasoning, and, if anything, the tension that McCarthy identifies here between situatedness and transcendence goes to the heart of what we find problematic about much of Habermas's corpus down the years. 'Whereas ethnomethodology and its cognate

disciplines are interested in the situated production of intelligible utterances and actions—ie. in how participants *apprehend* the world', observes Bogen (1989: 53; italics in original), the ideology-critique work of Habermas 'is devoted to the identification and specification of participants' systematic *misapprehensions* (as measured against what they ideally *should* have known)'.[16] While *ST* is arguably less concerned with ideology critique than is much of Habermas's later writing, it would be pushing things to suggest that this text is especially concerned with the local-historical production of 'apprehension' amongst assemblages of materials and human actions, by and for his private individuals, in the course of making an early-modern public sphere. The practices, the conversations included, hence remain somewhat obscure, assumed but largely unquestioned, leaving a lacunae at the heart of *ST* that requires shoring up by his transcendental theory. Pushed to its limits, this critique might even declare Habermas's whole approach to the public sphere misguided, proposing that the only way to advance a plausible inquiry into early-modern public life should commence by returning to the rough ground of embodied practices and vulgar conversation.

Burnt beans at the English coffee-houses

In his impressive scholarship, to which we are indebted below, Ellis (2001, 2002 2004; also Biderman, n.d.; Cowan 2005; Pincus 1995, 1996) painstakingly uncovers the architectures, ambiences and crowds of the eighteenth-century coffee-houses, thereby rebuking Habermas for a lack of empirical-historical detail pertaining to these sites upon which so much theoretical weight comes to bear. Ellis (2004: 44–45) critiques Habermas for basing

much of his interpretation on the *un*critical, often nostalgic histories of the coffee-houses given by earlier writers such as Macaulay and Stephen, and for undertaking no primary research of his own. He detects a failure to engage with the substance of arguments, boasts, exposures, deals, stories, gossip and jokes as they must have been effected, again and again, between all manner of coffee-house customers in order to 'deliver' the polite clientele in enlightened exchange. Although it is hard to recover with any certainty the actual micro-dynamics involved, Ellis shows how a scouring of primary sources may allow some-thing approaching an ethno-archaeological glimpse of public city life as lived in these historically distant social spaces. Drawing upon his work, supplemented with other inputs, we now enter the entangled spaces, societies and practices of London's early-modern coffee-houses.

Considering the *spaces* of these establish-ments, we can hear what Ellis says about the arrangement of these spaces, following his notes about their 'physical architecture'— often dominated by a long table that customers shared, although coffee-houses with more separated-out 'bays' were also common—and about how 'the space of the coffee-house confirmed and established the kinds of sociability found there' (Ellis 2002: 4). Indirectly offering support for Habermas, Ellis writes as follows:

Arriving in the coffee-house, customers were expected to take the next available seat, placing themselves next to whoever else has come before them. No seat could be reserved, no man might refuse your company. This seating policy impresses on all customers that in the coffee-house all are equal … From the arrangement of the chairs, the coffee-house allowed men who did not know each other to sit together amicably and expected them to

converse. In the anonymous context of the city, in which most people are unknown to each other, this sociable habit was astonishing. (2004: 59)

The implication is that the coffee-houses were indeed spaces of equality, although it is evident that this equality was more an ideal than a reality, as Ellis acknowledges at many points and as we will examine shortly. In Habermas's vision, moreover, the coffee-house debaters would have to sit down in a relatively organized fashion, with a clear stability about who is present and contributing, whereas the evidence—as in the opening ethnography of Steele's—suggests a much more transient scene, with a constant stream of comings and goings through the coffee-house entrance.

Steele's observations also remind us that different groupings of men, boasting quite particular backgrounds, occupations, interests and the like, tended to congregate in the same coffee-house at different hours, one upshot of which might have been less discoursing between different groupings than envisaged in the Habermasian model. A coffee-house's internal social spaces were likely re-organized over the course of a day, arguably lacking the continuity and universality demanded by Habermas, a point on which Ellis elaborates by considering the wider spatiality of the coffee-houses as linked to the occupational, professional and recreational geographies of the city:

Many of the specialised allegiances between coffee-houses and interest were determined by architecture and geography. The routines of everyday life in court and chambers brought lawyers, law students and clerks back to the same establishments located in clusters near the Inns of Courts: both Nandos and the Grecian were noted for their legal flavour. In different periods, Child's Coffee-House near

St Paul's Cathedral attracted clergymen, whereas the Chapter Coffee-House, nearby in Paternoster Row, was the haunt of booksellers and printers, and the hack writers they employed. Merchants, insurance agents and brokers met at Jonathan's and Garraway's coffee-houses in Exchange Alley … For wits and poets an important concentration of coffee-houses emerged in Russell Street, a broad street leading off the crowded piazza of Covent Garden, close to the theatres. The first of these was Will's Coffee-House. (2004: 150–151)

Ellis (2004: Chap. 11) shows the quite specific coffee-house worlds that grew up around the merchants, who concluded significant trans-actions in the coffee-houses, notably those neighbouring the Exchange which 'became an extension of the trading floor … offering a warm and dry place where business could continue after the official hours had finished' (Ellis 2004: 169). He does the same for the 'scientists', stating that other coffee-houses 'proved to be a remarkably hospitable habitat for the New Science' (Ellis 2004: 163; also Stewart 1986; Withers 1999: 48–49), and also for the 'philosophers' (Ellis 2004: Chap. 12), although in both of these cases many contemporaries apparently took the coffee-house versions of science and philosophy to be a pale imitation of the real intellectual advances associated with Enlightenment Europe (e.g. Ellis 2004: 165, 198–203). As implied, there was a definite geography to the coffee-houses frequented by these different constituencies, and Ellis (2004: 189–190) notes that the refined coffee-houses preferred by Steele—and hence those most closely approximating Habermas's vision—were 'reflected topographically: all were located in the socially exclusive West End of London'. By extension, the remainder, occupying many other locations spread across the city, departed from the ideal.

These observations have been at once about the spaces and the crowds of the coffee-house, but we can glance more narrowly at the multiple *societies* occupying these social spaces. Habermas's over-reliance on *un*critical histories of the coffee-house, as opposed to being more immersed in primary evidence, risks him seriously overplaying both the homogeneity of the coffee-house polite crowd—it becomes as massed, uniform, singular and rhetorical as the rabble crowd on the streets—and missing that many of the differences composing it involved people, groups and factions who were certainly not always polite, civilized and urbanely sociable to all others. Ellis proposes that the sociabilities of the coffee-house were indeed more mixed, hosting not only the different 'professional' constituencies just mentioned but also diverse 'counter-cultural' elements (recalling earlier comments about 'counter-publics'):

A diverse array of figures articulate this counter-culture coffee-house, amongst whom might be numbered the gambler and card-shark, the drunkard duellist, the projector (a promoter of mad-cap schemes), the philosopher and literary critic (given to extreme opinions), the buttonholer (one who literally seizes the observer by the buttonhole, in order to secure undivided attention) and the coffee-woman. (2002: 37)

Ellis thus finds heterogeneous crowds, urban characters picked out amongst the throng, with socio-spatial dynamics rather more complex than those pictured in the polite Habermasian coffee-house. He delights in recounting tales of drunkenness, gambling, debauchery, lewdness and sexual encounters occurring in many of the less salubrious coffee-houses—little different from the taverns—as representatives of the 'low' classes came into contact with their supposed 'betters'

(precisely *not* over a steaming coffee-pot for a debate on the pressing matters of the day). For instance, when drawing upon a 1740s tract about Moll King and her King's Coffee-House in Covent Garden, Ellis (2001: 36) describes a 'coffee-house … transgressive not only because of its character as a place of resort for the sexual underworld, but also for its promiscuous mixture of high and low status groups'.[17] This coffee-house was positively Hogarthian, indeed being illustrated in one of Hogarth's plates, embracing 'a boisterous sociability equated with promiscuity, tumult and poverty: a carnivalised sociability, more popular than polite' (Ellis 2001: 37). Ellis (2001: 73) duly concludes that it 'is clearly a different sort of coffee-house from that celebrated in its Habermasian model, with a significantly different and more subversive regime (boisterous, sexually promiscuous, heterosexual, status-obsessed and heterodox)'.[18]

On the question of the constitution of *the* public, it should be obvious from much said already that, for all the impulses towards egalitarianism, those coffee-houses most akin to Habermas's model, and as preferred by someone like Steele, were relatively elite affairs wherein education, if not class or status *per se*, was a necessary accoutrement for attending. Furthermore, in response to the obvious gender-insensitivity of Habermas's account, Ellis (2002: 9) stresses 'the fact that the early coffee-house was not open to women in the same way as it was to men'.[19] An implicit rule served to exclude women, '[t]here [being] no need formally to exclude them because it was assumed that no woman who wished to be considered virtuous and proper would want to be seen in a coffee-house' (Ellis 2004: 66). The kinds of topics debated in the coffee-house, 'science, commerce, politics', ones demanding the kind of education, knowledge and experience only open to men at the time,

also 'established it as a space for men and men only' (cf. Clery 1991; Klein 1993). Ellis (2004: 67) goes so far as to suggest that, compared to other social spaces in a city like eighteenth-century London (the parks, playhouses, pleasure-gardens; cf. Ogborn 1998), 'coffee-houses were almost more than anywhere else male-orientated, gendered, almost exclusively masculine'. In fact, some coffee-houses *did* contain women, but as serving staff or even as owners (especially widows),[20] and in this respect Ellis (2002: 10; also Ellis 2001: 30–31) teases out the gendered organization of the spaces involved:

the much-vaunted equality of the coffee-house only applied to its customers: and the coffee-house was subject to important social divisions and boundaries. Images of the coffee-house record two significant hierarchies: one of status dividing the workers from the customers, and another of gender, excluding all women but the coffee-women from the coffee-room. The spatial organisation of the room reinforces the hierarchical and gendered structure of the coffee-house: the boys inhabit the space around the table, while the women proprietor is separated off from the customers in her little booth.

Intriguingly, in August 1709 a new periodical called *The Female Tatler* made a brief appearance, in effect accepting that women—at least respectable women—should not be patronizing coffee-houses, and the author declared that she would 'date all my advices from my own apartment, which comprehends, White's, Will's, the Frecian, Garraway's, in Exchange Alley' (in Mackie 1998: 131). The image of this woman writing *The Female Tatler* while gazing from her apartment window at the male-dominated coffee-houses opposite is telling, as too was her wish to 'tattle', 'since tattling was ever adjudg'd peculiar to our sex', and 'to prate a

little to the town' about sundry matters, events, fashions, scandals, woes and vices. The exclusion of women from the rational-critical debate of the public sphere, certainly in its Habermasian guise, is here most tangibly marked, although a more positive claim would be that the likes of *The Female Tatler* reveal the shadowy outlines of (one of) Fraser's (1992) feminized counter-publics.

As for the *practices* in the coffee-houses, we can begin with the anonymous author of a Restoration tract who talks about the 'phana-tique theatre' of a typical coffee-house, one full of 'strange beasts':

The Room stinks of *Tobacco* worse than hell of *Brimstone*, and is as full of *smoak* as their Heads that frequent it, whose humours are as various as those of *Bedlam* and their discourse oft-times as *Heathenish* and *dull* as their Liquor; that Liquor, which by its look and taste, you may reasonably guess to be *Pluto's Diet-drink* [another name for coffee]. (in Mackie 1998: 138)

The reference to 'Bedlam' is instructive, since this was the most notorious lunatic asylum of the age (Philo 2004: especially Chap. 6), very much a space of *un*reason, certainly not reason. Edward Ward's text, *The London Spy*, published in eighteen monthly instal-ments from November 1698 to May 1700, has the following to say about Will's Coffee-House, allegedly a refined place of resort for the 'philosophers':

[It contains] a parcel of muddling muckworms … as busy as so many rats in an old cheese-loft; some coming, some going, some scribbling, some talking, some drinking, others jangling, and the whole room stinking of tobacco like a Dutch scoot, or a boatswain's cabin … Being half-choked with the steam that arose from their soot-coloured ninny-broth, their stinking breaths and the suffocated

fumes of their nasty puffing-engines, my friend and I paid for our [coffee] and away we came. (in Mackie 1998: 144, 148)

Mackie comments on this inlet to a space of embodied practices, rather than detached discoursing, noting how Wards 'Spy' revelled in 'the carnivaleque life of the London streets, shops, coffee-houses, taverns, brothels and baths':

The pictures Ward draws of London life are marked by hyperbole, and aggressively 'low' style, and an almost obsessive occupation with the sensory world. Where Bickerstaff and the Spectator seem all eyes, Ward's Spy engages in the full repertoire of the senses—sight and hearing certainly, but also the more directly palpable perceptions of taste, touch and smell … [T]he whole mood of the experience is different. The feeling of immersion in the smoke and soot, the sheer strength of the sensations. (in Mackie 1998: 144)

Mackie (1998: 137) suggests that the effect 'contrasts sharply with the picture that historical social theorists like … Habermas draw of the coffee-house as a place of rational and genteel discourse', portraying indeed an environment that was anything but the calm home of rational-critical debate. Ellis agrees:

the coffee-house was often anything but quiet, polite and business-like, and, moreover, … this disputatious simulation was a signal source of the customer's interest in attending the coffee-house. The unruly element was described in terms of babble, noise and smokiness, argument and faction. (2001: 37)

This is not the quiet and contemplative polite crowd, but something noisier, more a cacophony of competing voices than a restrained turn-taking; something more

quarrelsome, more Rabelasian, more akin to the cast of eccentrics, perverts and money-grabbers apparently found on the streets than the occupants assumed to ornament the interiors of the Age of Reason. Elsewhere, Ellis (2004: 62–53) underlines the perceived 'noise' of the coffee-house, an 'aural landscape [that] was a complex mixture of human voices and clattering busyness', and he recalls one satirist's description of it as 'an unintelligible buzzing' that commonly 'degenerated into squabble and conflict, precisely because there were no polite limits'.

Intriguingly, Ward's Spy comments on visiting the coffee-house looking for inspiration from 'the powerful eloquence which drops from the silver tongues of the ingenious company that frequent this noted mansion', but what he found there—to his surprise—was 'much company, but little talk', with the men there present remaining largely silent as if hoping thereby 'to be counted a man of judgement' (in Mackie 1998: 437). The suggestions must be that these men were refraining from offering commentaries on weighty matters, lest they reveal their true ignorance. More common, so the evidence implies, was for the coffee-houses to be far from silent, as just noted, and in practice to be very noisy, full to the rafters with what might be judged as relatively idle conversation, not serious discoursing. Ellis (2004: 62–63) is in no doubt that '[c]offee-house conversation was certainly not always civil, rational and ordered', and in the tracts of the satirists like John Starkey '[c]offee-house discussion was repeatedly represented as catastrophically heterodox and ill-disciplined, and given to pointless and intemperate debate, swapping "diverse Monster Opinions and Absurdities"'. Ellis (2004: 63–64) echoes Starkey in speculating that the 'clamour' and 'confused way of gabbling' typical of the coffee-house

'associate[d] it with gossip, conventionally gendered as feminine', and this claim perhaps throws into different relief Steele's decision to call his periodical *The Tatler*. Such a naming arguably gestures to a feminized form of communication, one set at some distance from the image of men hard at work in self-serious discoursing that energizes Habermas (supposedly based at least in part on his reading of Steele's coffee-house based organ *The Tatler*). In short, much of the empirical material covered here—to do with the conjoint spaces and societies of the coffee-house, all as bound up in a dizzying array of embodied practices, noisily conducted conversational tittle-tattle included—neatly parallels the more abstract lines of critique directed above at Habermas's concept of the public sphere.

Conclusion

'Democracy has seldom represented itself without the possibility of at least that which already resembles … the possibility of a *fraternisation*', writes Derrida (1997: viii, emphasis in original), thereby initiating an inquiry into the 'politics of friendship' wherein the aim is to retrieve the concept of 'friendship' from its complicity with 'all those figures of friendship (philosophical and religious) which prescribe fraternity: the family and the androcentric ethnic group' (Derrida 1997: 306). The invocation is 'to live the gentle rigour of friendship' (Derrida 1997: 294), not weighed down with the problematic anxieties, obligations and expected reciprocities of friendship when conceived of through the model of 'brotherhood'. Indeed, the alternative becomes one of friendship with and across *distance*, wherein two or more individuals may not be personally intimate or even really all that connected, except perhaps

by happenstance and moment, but there remains the possibility for their recognizing a relation that they might jointly configure as friendship (with the lingering promise that this can mean something beyond the empirical instance). A similar formulation is arguably at work in Derrida's writing on 'hospitality', which acknowledges that hospitality is something negotiated in the immediacy of encounter, the stuff of 'experience and experimentation' (Derrida 2001: 23), but still carries with it the trace of something more transcendental 'insasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners' (Derrida 2001: 17).[21] The relevance to the paper here of Derrida's disquisitions on friendship and hospitality is twofold: on the one hand, we *do* wish to consider how cafés, including coffee-houses past and present, might be the sites for enacting something akin to friendship and hospitality, notably between people who are not or barely acquainted; and, on the other hand, we can learn from how he wrestles with the gulf between what is occasioned in the here-and-now and the pull of transcendental concepts—ones freighted with all kinds of baggage, some unwanted but others with (what might be judged as) more positive, ethico-politically progressive content.

In the first place, then, we have explored Habermas's claims about the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere in early-modern Europe, within which the figure of the London coffee-house plays an important role both conceptually and empirically. We have argued that Habermas overstates the extent to which coffee-houses were relatively contained and egalitarian spaces of calm rational-critical debate, and we have proposed that an alternative account is needed. This is not to deny that a public sphere akin to Habermas's

depiction may have appeared, and there seems sufficient warrant from specialist historians to agree that something along these lines *did* emerge, comprising a distinctively 'modern' and 'growing acceptance of the legitimacy of public discussion of affairs of state' (Houston and Pincus 2001: 18). Rather, it is to insist that the accomplishment of the public sphere must have been a precarious accomplishment, only being occasioned in anything like Habermas's 'textbook' model within particular spatial–social–practical assemblages, perhaps particular coffee-houses at specific instants, and being supported—carried into being, rendered available for note—precisely by the assemblages so composed. It is to call for more careful imaginings of what these coffee-house occasions would have been like, acknowledging that for much of the time even the approximations of a Habermasian rational-critical debate would have been more the embodied, gesture-full babbling of 'muddling muckworms' than the polite discoursing of 'talking heads'. It is nonetheless to continue taking seriously *ST*'s provocations about a public sphere that is materialized in specific social spaces, facilitating *more* than can life on the street, and there enabling a mode of dwelling in public with others, particularly personally unknown others, that is civil, broadly convivial, hospitable and even friendly, and on occasion highly consequential (because of what is said, felt and done amongst these others, not just the once but repeatedly). An empirical companion-piece to the present paper (Laurier and Philo, 2006) endeavours to illuminate, and to debate further, the implications of casting matters in this fashion.

In the second place, and as should be obvious from many passages above, we keep pivoting between describing situated 'stuff happening' in the coffee-houses and guardedly accepting more general claims

about certain over-arching phenomena (such as a public sphere wherein can arise relatively convivial public debate).[22] Interestingly, in his geographical treatment of *ST*, Howell (1993: 309–313) identifies a tension between 'a normative ideal of popular, participatory political action', boasting a supposed 'universality [of] ... communicative rationality', and 'the particular, the local, ... the specific' circumstances, times and spaces—'the recognisable contexts, real problems, and moral situations'—in which the historical spur for such a normative projection arose in the first place. It is instructive that he does not then abandon Habermas's project entirely, however, and that he prefers instead to recover broader principles of 'something very like a public geography in which the fullest human action, that is to say, political action, can survive and flourish' (Howell 1993: 318).[23] Our approach is a little different, partly because we adopt an ethnomethodological stance on how (an always reversible) stabilization of *the* public and its others, and relatedly of public opinion and its alternates, was achieved out of the socio-spatial fluidity, multiplicity and dissipation of the city. To return to the ethnography *avant la lettre* with which we began, just as Foucault (e.g. 1979a, 1979b 2003) brings to light the many self-serious statements, bureaucratic documents, surveys and reports that stabilize 'the population' of the state, so these descriptions of 'the public' found in coffee-houses are stablizations of yet another aspect of the city into the records. Steele, Ward and others like them could for the first time report on the public of the city and 'its' opinions, but they had to cope with one of the common problems of the city that, unlike the village, opinions representing 'it' are hard to gather (since 'its' residents can only be 'talked to' under special circumstances). As a solution, these early-modern opinion-gatherers either spent their days at one coffee-house, having a cross-section of city groups crossing their path, or travelled from one coffee-house to the next, dropping in on different crowds and eavesdropping different conversations. In the process, they formed an impression of 'something happening', something worth remark, and they began, in effect, to posit the unspoken *rules* of these social spaces; not explicit ones to be sure, but 'an unstated set of relational group dynamics which allowed [the coffee-houses] to establish and confirm ... a distinct sociability' (Ellis 2002: 7).[24] These proto-ethnographers thus began to talk and write into existence a public, a public sphere and the latter's location in the more convivial of the coffee-houses, those where the opinion-gatherers could linger unbothered, and so they crafted—in a mundane, pragmatic, 'reasonable' fashion, not in some strange otherworldly feat of transcendence—a set of notations that Habermas, many years later, could indeed translate into the abstracted claims of *ST*.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 ESRC-funded project 'The Cappuccino Community; cafés and civic life in the contemporary city' (reference no. R000239797). For details, see <www.ges.gla. ac.uk/ ∼ elaurier/cafesite/ > . A loosely parallel

'ethnogeographic' study of contemporary coffee-shops is offered by Long (2005), in which the contrast between the life-worlds of corporate and independent coffee-houses becomes the focus; also Liberty (1998) and Peters (2004).

2 The focus will be very much *ST* itself, with little attempt to relate it to later works by Habermas (e.g. 1984, Mackie (1998)) on the likes of the 'ideal speech situation', even though there is often a tendency to do so, sometimes to the detriment of engaging the historical-empirical content found here but less so elsewhere in Habermas's corpus (Hohendahl 1992: especially 100–101).

3 Habermas narrows his focus to 'the *liberal* model of the bourgeois public sphere', differentiating it from 'the *plebian* public sphere' associated with the French Revolution, 'the Chartist movement and especially in the anarchist traditions of the workers' movement on the continent', even if in various ways the latter 'remains oriented towards the intentions of the bourgeois public sphere' (*ST*: xviii).

4 Withers (1999: 47, emphasis in original) remarks that '[t]he institutions of the public sphere' were 'important to any possibility of the geography *of* the public sphere'. His main concern, though, is geography (geographical knowledges of many different kinds) *in* the public sphere.

5 Habermas draws upon a secondary history of literature and society in eighteenth-century London, two German-language works on the coffee-houses, and also an account of 'The clubs of London' in the *National Review* (April 1857: 301) that neatly describes how '[e]very profession, trade, class, party, had its favourite coffee-house'. We will return to this point about differentiation in the coffee-house world.

6 Tellingly, 'the *Tatler* expressly addressed the "worthy citizens who live more in a coffee-house than in their shops"' (in *The Tatler*, 17 May 1709: see ST: 260, footnote 36).

7 Benhabib counterposes Habermas to both Arendt and Ackerman in her rethinking of *ST*, and much the same manoeuvre, explicitly drawing upon Arendt to spatialize the concerns of Habermas, can be found in Howell (1993), one of the few sustained treatments of *ST* by a geographer (but see also Phillips 1995: especially 93–101; Withers 1999: 47–48).

8 Intriguingly, Sennett (1974: 84–85) argues that the late-eighteenth-century street, or more generally outdoors public space, threatened or at least could not sustain the 'public speech' of coffee-house life, precisely because it allowed too much 'open encounter', lending scant structure to sporadic and chance meetings in which conversations could not be anything but snatched and superficial.

9 This attribution or self-image of the scrupulously egalitarian coffee-house ties in with what Habermas argues about 'the principle of universal access' to the public sphere, and he speculates that this sphere was taken as 'public' in the strict sense that 'all human beings belong to it', or ought to be able to belong to it provided that certain conventions of rational argumentation were followed (see *ST*: especially 85). This claim is also at the heart of what Sennett (1974: especially 81–82) argues about the coffee-houses: 'Distinctions of rank' were 'temporarily suspended', then, and '[p]eople acted "as if" the differences between themselves did not exist—for the moment' (Sennett 1974: 322).

10 He nonetheless admits to idealizing this apparent egalitarian sociability: 'Not that this idea of the public was actually realised in earnest in the coffee-houses ... but as an idea it had become institutionalised and thereby stated as an objective claim. If not realised, it was at least consequential' (*ST*: 36).

11 Fraser offers further points about the public–private divide, powerfully theorizing that gendered separation of the public and private spheres, the latter increasingly mapped on to the home spaces of domestic(ated) femininity, which is now a staple of feminist geography (e.g. Bondi and Domosh 1998; and see pp. 275–276 in their paper for specific comments on *ST*).

12 Fraser repeatedly uses the term 'actually existing', indexing the empirical referents for or correlates of Habermas's more abstract claims about the public sphere.

13 In class terms, Habermas does admit that *de facto* criteria for admission to the public sphere depended on education, and hence on economic position: 'for formal education at that time was more a consequence than a precondition of social status, which in turn was primarily determined by one's title to property' (*ST*: 85). There was also a geographical split between town and country, partly because the public spaces involved were urban-based, but also because the mass of the people in *both* towns and (particularly) the countryside were still woefully poorly educated: thus, '[i]n relation to the mass of the rural population and the common "people" in towns, ... the public "at large" that was being formed diffusely outside the early institutions of the public was still extremely small' (*ST*: 37).

14 A non-representational theory (NRT) critique could be directed at Habermas for prioritizing the cognitively driven rational-critical deliberations of those private

individuals 'making' the public sphere. Our critique is more ethnomethodological, in part because we do not draw a hard and fast distinction between embodied practices and snatched conversations, the latter usually being totally enmeshed in a near-instantaneous flow of conduct and encounter (also Laurier 2001). NRT seems unsure about what to do with conversation, since it still seems just too representational.

15 In a different register, Sennett (1974: especially 79–82) draws links between *performance* and speech: 'Using the same examples [as Habermas] of newspapers and coffee-houses, Sennett points not to rational rules of public discourse, but to the performative aspects of communication in these places. Speakers from different social classes adopted the conventions of the theatre in their verbal expression and bodily presentations. Rhetoric and the dramatisation of difference were made possible by the adoption of common, artificial modes of speech and action' (Bridge 2004: 133–134). Such an insertion of performance into Habermas's problematic has parallels with what we are attempting here.

16 See also Bridge's (2004: especially 133–136; also Bridge 2005) recasting of the universalized sense of rationality found in *ST*, and more broadly in Habermas's notion of the 'ideal speech situation', as he strives instead to conjoin the likes of Sennett (1974), de Certeau (1984) and others in a recovery of the 'strategic rationalities' arising at particular moments in particular places ('speech places') dispersed across the 'unsettled city'. Such rationalities *do* possess a measure of stability realized in how people more-or-less successfully 'signal' to one another, not necessarily though the 'portentous communication' of Reason, but still in such a way that 'rational' choices of how to proceed become possible if transient and local.

17 Note the theme of transgressive mixings that features in the famous Stallybrass and White (1986) text, the coffee-houses being seen as one site for such mixings.

18 The text drawn upon here by Ellis dwells on the so-called 'flash' spoken by Moll with her customers: this being 'an underground criminal lexicon which the text examines in a witty dialogue composed of almost impenetrable cant terms and phrases' (Ellis 2001: 37). Such a language, scantly connection to the 'philosophical' discourses of the Age of Reason, provides another neat instance of disconnection from the elite *dis*coursing of the Habermasian public sphere.

19 To be fair, Habermas (*ST*: 32) acknowledges 'that only men were admitted to coffee-house society … Accordingly the women of London society, abandoned

every evening, waged a vigorous but vain struggle against the new institution'. The latter remark—see also *ST*: 257, note 11—refers to the 1674 'Women's Petition against Coffee', not least because it was thought that excessive coffee-drinking was making their menfolk 'as unfruitful as the deserts' (in Lillywhite 1963: 17).

20 Perhaps repeating the ambiguous status of the 'mistresses' who ran the male-dominated salons or *conversazione* so central to Enlightenment life (certainly in continental Europe).

21 Derrida is here talking about what might be entailed in creating genuine 'cities of refuges'.

22 One referee wonders if we are working with 'covert transcendental claims', lapsing on occasion into 'metaphysical' statements, and thereby compromising the very emphasis on the (Wittgensteinian) 'rough ground of practice' that is more ostensibly the target of our argument. Our conclusion now seeks to (begin to) address these points. Thanks also to this referee for the Derrida prompts.

23 More specifically, he gestures to how an Arendtian refashioning of Habermas allows us to detect in many times and places 'a geography of "the small hidden islands of freedom"' (Howell 1993: 318, quoting Arendt), by which he may mean a plurality of public spaces that include the likes of coffee-houses, past and present. With certain caveats, we might be prepared to configure some cafés on some occasions as such small 'islands of freedom' (Laurier and Philo, 2006).

24 Note Ellis's (2002: 6–8) speculation about the informal rules, his 'twelve principles of coffee-house conversation', that he recovers from the empirical sources (themselves proto-ethnographic descriptions of coffee-house life).

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Abstract translations

«Une bande de crapules embrouillées»: retour sur Habermas et les cafés anglais

Dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche s'intéressant aux cafés contemporains, les auteurs effectuent un retour sur les célèbres travaux d'Habermas de 1962/1989 sur la transformation de la «sphère publique», dans lesquels la figure du café anglais au début de la période moderne prend une place de première importance. Les revendications que Habermas formulent sont examinées et trois lignes

de critique—qui concernent la spatialité, la socia-bilité et les pratiques—sont confrontées à sa description des cafés en tant qu'espaces clos et égalitaires où peuvent se tenir des débats calmes, rationnels et critiques. Un travail théorique est réalisé en parallèle à une relecture des notes fragmentaires qu'Habermas a rédigé sur les cafés, en plus d'emprunts aux textes secondaires et aux sources primaires rééditées. Le principal but est de concevoir des éléments critiques afin que les recherches ultérieures sur les cafés et les établisse-ments du même type, qu'ils soient d'hier ou d'aujourd'hui, reposent sur l'idée qu'ils sont des sites où la vie publique peut se dérouler.

Mots-clefs: Habermas, cafés, spatialité, sociabilité, pratiques.

Volviendo a visitar Habermas y las cafeterías inglesas

En el contexto de un proyecto de investigación sobre las cafeterías contemporáneas, los autores han vuelto a examinar la obra conocida de Habermas 1962/1989 sobre la transformación de la 'esfera pública' en la que las primeras cafeterías modernas de Inglaterra son consideradas de suma importancia. Examinamos el esquema de las afirmaciones de Habermas, y analizamos tres líneas de crítica—sobre espacialidad, sociabilidad y prácticas—en el contexto de la descripción de Habermas de las cafeterías como espacios contenidos e igualitarios de debate crítico-racio-nal. Trabajo teórico se combina con una nueva interpretación de las observaciones fragmentarias de Habermas sobre las cafeterías, junto con ideas sacadas tanto de textos segundarios como de fuentes primarias reeditadas. El objetivo principal es de desarrollar materia crítica que sirva para informar otras investigaciones de cafeterías y otros establecimientos parecidos, del pasado y del presente, como sitios para la conducta práctica de la vida pública.

Palabras claves: Habermas, cafeterías, espacialidad, sociabilidad, prácticas.