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JOE'S RHETORIC
FINDING AUTHENTICITY AT STARBUCKS

Abstract. In this essay, I explore the materiality of rhetoric through a close analysis of one Starbucks coffee shop. Starbucks' rhetoric works to suture individual bodies and subjectivities into a seemingly natural world through the practices of production and consumption of coffee and through the use of "natural" colors, shapes and materials. This turn to nature is augmented by a claim to authenticity made by the coffee itself and is further reinforced by the rituals surrounding the buying and drinking of coffee. These rituals provide sanctifying performances that strive to cover the sins of postmodern consumer culture.

For many of us and for much of the time, our most pressing and constant concerns are not with formal politics or large philosophical problems, but with our daily habits of eating, drinking, conversing, working and all the myriad of other activities that make up our lives in the everyday. The decisions we make, the actions we take, the conversations we have on this most mundane level are the warp and woof of who we are. Our identities cannot be said to exist outside of these little actions, these minute-by-minute performances. Rhetorical analysis of the everyday, then, seems to be a crucial activity for those of us determined to understand the material ways rhetoric constrains and enables our subjectivities.¹

In some sense, everyday materiality has been central to the tradition of rhetoric as a practice. Indeed, in Aristotle's distinction between dialectic and rhetoric one senses that what makes rhetoric rhetoric is the material effectiveness of rhetoric and the ways rhetoric functions in the everyday life of the citizen (Campbell 292). Yet, as Carole Blair points out, our turn to the idea of the "symbol" in contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism elides the materiality of rhetorical practices. Rhetorical theorists have theorized rhetoric through notions of symbolicity that emphasize the ways the symbol is ephemeral and always points outside of itself to some other more fundamental reality. As rhetorical critics and theorists we seldom pay strict attention to the materiality of the symbol, instead "symbols refer us consistently beyond themselves to their referential or meaning domains. The material articulation of the symbol itself seems of no more than vehicular interest, as a means of transport to its telos—its meaning" (Blair 19). The problem with an exclusive focus on symbols and meaning making is that this focus can obscure the consequentiality of rhetoric. Rhetorical criticism that focuses on the symbol
serves the purpose of decoding at least some of the meanings of rhetoric, but does not necessarily get us further down the road of understanding the material work the rhetoric does (Blair 19).

One way of taking seriously the materiality of rhetoric is to turn to rhetorical "texts" that resist purely symbolic "readings." This fosters a desire to turn to "non-discursive" texts like visual and spatial texts. These "non-discursive" texts are not necessarily more material than, say, a political speech. However, when the word—the ultimate symbol—is missing, a purely symbolic reading is at least more difficult. One of the salutary effects, then, of rhetorical criticism's turn to material place is the ways in which these places help us think about the materiality of rhetoric.

In an attempt to make the materiality of rhetoric even more apparent, I want to suggest that we can benefit by paying particular attention to the mundane or even banal spaces of everyday life. Spaces like museums, national parks, art installations and memorials are often visited precisely because of their symbolic importance. While everyday spaces like coffee shops are filled with symbolic visual and material elements, these elements are less obviously symbolic than those that make up a memorial or a museum. The force of an everyday space arises out of the subtle interconnected ways in which the spaces are "accidentally" constructed and, just as importantly, in the ways that these banal spaces of the everyday are visited in nearly non-conscious ways. It is in the interstices of the everyday, it is in the littlest actions of our daily lives, that we most thoroughly materialize our selves and our bodies (Barthes 140, Lefebvre Critique, Bourdieu 167-169). And if we want to think of identity not as abstract or disembodied, if we want to think of subjectivity as more than an immaterial mental operation, then we need to place our investigation of subjectivity in the material spaces of the everyday.

In so doing, we can begin to get after the profound consequentiality of rhetoric or rhetorical spaces. These spaces provide the material/rhetorical resources of which, in which and through which, we create our bodies and ourselves. Our collective and individual subjectivities are always at stake, and they are always at stake even in, perhaps especially in, the mundane and banal practices of the everyday. Our selves are under construction as we hoist a cup of coffee, buy a magazine, teach a class, read a book, discuss the weather, ride our bikes to work. Rhetorical critics and theorists determined to get after the consequential materiality of rhetoric can turn to the places of the practices of the everyday. We can turn, in short, to Starbucks.

Of course we can turn to many places for this study, but Starbucks serves as a good place to further explore the materiality and everydayness of rhetoric precisely because it has become so intertwined in the everyday lives of so many people. Starbucks is by far the largest chain of coffee shops in the world. More than that, it has become a cultural institution that filters through
a range of other popular discourses including journalism, film, television, and novels. What is crucial about Starbucks, though, is the ways it is at once a globalized consumer institution and a local place in which the mundane daily activities of sipping coffee, writing in journals, and conversing with friends are practiced. As such, then, Starbucks is an important node in a series of difficulties and possibilities that characterize the contemporary moment, in particular the difficult contradictions between global and local, spectacle and authenticity, consumer culture and individual identities. As a material place in which the mundane and everyday practices that constitute the embodied performance of ourselves within the context of globalized cultural structures, Starbucks draws together crucial issues of body, space and subjectivity in the contemporary moment.

A major characteristic of the contemporary moment is the deep difficulty we have “locating” ourselves in time and in space (Bahba 1, Collins 31-33, Iyer 13-18). The globalization of cultural forms, the spread of high-speed and mobile communication technologies, the ability to travel the globe with amazing ease, and the overwhelming quantity of fundamentally fragmented information and images all undermine more traditional ways of creating a sense of locatedness (Bürgin 155-158, Collins 33, Ewen 32-37, Lefebvre 188-203, Soja, “Postmodern Urbanization” 131-133, Poster 11, Kaplan 45-50). Postmodernity makes it profoundly difficult to locate oneself within either a meaningful historical trajectory or a coherent geographic space.

The difficulty of locating oneself in time and space is troubling in and of itself, but this difficulty is even more troubling because of the interconnected problems of subjectivity. For the subject to come to “know” itself in some more or less coherent way depends on an ability to “locate” itself, while the subject’s ability to locate itself depends in part on the ability to create a coherent subjectivity (Grosz 97). As space and time become fragmented and seemingly discontinuous, the subject also becomes fragmented and discontinuous. As Anthony Giddens argues, the radical reformulation of both space and time is

coupled to the expansion of disembedding mechanisms—mechanisms which pries social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space distances. The reorganization of time and space, plus the disembedding mechanisms, radicalize and globalize pre-established institutional traits of modernity; and they act to transform the content and nature of day-to-day social life (2).

Within this context, Giddens argues, the self is constructed in a deeply self-reflexive way in which existential doubt is a dominant feature (3, 21).
These disembedding mechanisms unseat familiar time/space relationships and in so doing begin to remake built space itself. Henri Lefebvre in his dense discussion of the relationship between bodies and spaces writes the following as a sort of aside:

It may as well be noted at this juncture that the architectural and urbanistic space of modernity tends precisely towards this homogeneous state of affairs, towards a place of confusion and fusion between geometrical and visual which inspires a kind of physical discomfort. Everything is alike. Localization—and laterlization—are no more. Signifier and signified, marks and markers, are added after the fact—decorations so to speak. This reinforces, if possible, the feeling of desertedness, and adds to the malaise. (Production 200)

Lefebvre, in his sometimes overly nostalgic mode, points to the ways contemporary urban and architectural practices create and maintain abstraction. He suggests that the contemporary world unmakes locality by homogenizing all spaces. The only distinguishing marks are those added on as decoration. Lefebvre is clearly concerned with the visual homogenization of both cities and buildings. But for Lefebvre this homogenization of social space is more than visual, it is a homogenization of the practices of production that at once produces space, the subject and its body. The workplace, for example, is created not simply by the ideology of capitalist work, but is created by the working practices of bodies-in-space. As capitalism globalizes, the practices in particular spaces lose their connection to the spaces in which the work is practiced (see Soja Postmodern Geographies 222, Sorkin xi-xv). Workplaces become undistinguishable nodes in a globalized network of work. This, Lefebvre suggests, creates “a kind of physical discomfort and a generalized malaise” (Production 200).

This spatialized abstraction—the ways space is no longer rooted (if it ever was) in the materialities of geography (or, for that matter, in the temporalities of history)—and the discomfort that comes with it has its related bodily concerns. In postmodernity, the body itself seems increasingly stripped of its naturalness. As Donna Haraway has been exploring for years, the body is no longer “natural” nor is it simply located in the “natural” world. Instead, it is always already extended and imploded through technological, cultural and ideological constructions of the body and the self. Reproductive technologies; concerns of race, ethnicity and color; arguments about gender, sex and sexuality; debates about localism and globalism; communication via the web, the net, the cell phone; the de/re/construction of body through “plastic” surgery; the explosion of psychotropic drugs; taken together (and this is but a partial list) question the quality of the body as bounded, material or natural
Increasingly, the body we experience may be what Jacquelyn Zita calls the third corpus: that body that is not the first corpus of the "biological" body or the second corpus of the body as inscribed by disciplines that create the culturally specific body through skills and tools but as a third corpus extended through "institutional, semantic, and technological structures that produce the body in culturally significant relations of power and meaning" (8-9). The body, extended through a range of structures, is not "natural" and increasingly that body that counts as natural—the white, male heterosexual body—is under critique (Robinson 4-6). This critique exposes the ways the body is never experienced in unmediated ways. As such, then, the body cannot serve as the ontological grounding for subjectivity.

Thus, this fragmenting of the body articulates with the fragmenting of subjectivity, and both of these articulate with the fragmenting of social space. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, subjectivity and body are created of the same discursive and material structures, such that one depends and relies on the other (47). What is more, the space in which the body resides is also created within these structures and by these structures. What I am suggesting is a tripartite relationship among bodies, subjectivities and spaces such that each is interdependent on the others. In short, the subject is both embodied and emplaced, for the subject goes nowhere without its body, and the body must always have a space of its appearance.

This tripartite set of interactions motivates this study of space in general and Starbucks in particular. For if we want to begin to understand the cultural possibilities (both progressive and regressive) of and in postmodernity, it seems that we have to take the spaces of postmodernity seriously. What is more, turning to the daily spaces in which embodied subjects enact themselves to investigate how the space interacts with the problems of both bodies and subjectivities becomes fundamental to a thoroughgoing understanding of the possibilities and liabilities of our contemporary condition.

But, the changing of the structures of subjectivity and its spaces does not mean that creating meaningful life is now impossible. Instead, as Jim Collins argues, as our cultural and technological lives change, so to do our abilities to think about these changes. As critics, we must work to understand the ways contemporary cultural structures foster fragmentation and, at the same time, help individuals negotiate, make sense of and handle these new contexts of subjectivity (Collins 20, 37).

The responses to spatial fragmentation are as widely variable as a fragmented culture might suggest. On the one hand, some cultural texts revel in the fragmentation and dislocation, seeing in this condition the possibilities of the freedom of self-definition. Popular culture texts like the Simpsons and Scary Movie exploit the intertextuality of contemporary culture and consis-
ently play with the potentialities of shifting identities through an almost giddy relationship to postmodern textual excess. Theoretical work like that of Rosi Braidotti emphasizes the progressive possibilities of nomadic subjects made possible by contemporary cosmopolitan conditions (Braidotti 1-39). Contemporary architectural practices like those of Frank Ghery and theme park shopping complexes like Universal CityWalk in Los Angeles also revel in these fragmentations.5

But while some cultural texts celebrate the potentialities of fragmentation, other texts respond to the undermining of the seemingly natural, authentic and stabilized self and the concomitant fragmenting of space/time with a rhetoric of the authentic and the natural (Collins 149-156). Redeveloped old towns, the replacement of high modernist architectural forms with historicist spaces, the explosion in numbers and popularity of historical museums, and the exponential growth of visits to state and national parks all suggest that individuals are searching for spaces that seem authentic or real. These spaces provide the visual and the material resources with which individuals can attempt to negotiate the fragmentation and destabilization that characterize their cultural context.

Starbucks coffee shops work in these intersecting spatial tendencies. Indeed, few places work harder to at once contain and exploit the cultural strains of fragmentation than Starbucks. Individual Starbucks stores provide the rhetorical resources for creating coherency in the context of the seeming cultural chaos that is constitutive of postmodernity. At the same time, Starbucks, as a globalized consumer institution whose green logo seems to be colonizing coffee across the world, serves as a very visible and constitutive element of the context to which it responds. As such, Starbucks embodies the kinds of contradictions individuals themselves face. Starbucks, then, in its proffering of coherent authenticity and as a globalized, stylized and aestheticized consumer institution serves as a powerful cultural node that brings together apparently contradictory cultural forces.

STARBUCKS FROM THE GROUND(s) UP

I want, then, to turn to the characteristics of one particular Starbucks to read the intersections of the global and the local, the coherent and the fragmented, from the ground(s) up. The rhetorical questions are these: What are the intersections among the visual, the spatial, the discursive and the practices of coffee production and consumption that makes Starbucks a compelling place to visit? In what ways does Starbucks negotiate the difficult intersections of the local and global, and the coherent and the fragmented? 6 Starbucks negotiates these difficult tensions by embedding the consumer in a practice of production and consumption emphasizing nature and, at the same time, promotes a series of ritualistic practices that embed the consumer into a
sort of metaphysics of coffee. Taken together, the practices of production and consumption create a stabilized, localized authenticity that directly responds to the difficulties of the current condition.

**Nature, Coffee, and the Material**

The natural as either concept or practice is troubled within the context of contemporary everyday life. Daniel Roche argues that as human needs move from the primal or absolutely necessary, nature itself changes. “The history of consumption,” Roche writes,

from Antiquity to modern times, can ... be interpreted like that of a script which everyone understands, in which the abstract and the sensible, the natural and the artificial are inseparable. From the moment when artificial needs take precedence over natural needs the nature of nature is changed (254).

It is within this context that something as thoroughly “produced” as is coffee can come to be seen as natural. In a world that is packaged and synthetic, “natural” can be a powerful inducement to consumption—especially for food. Indeed, much is made of “all natural” ingredients of many food products.

Coffee becomes the centerpiece of the seeming naturalness of Starbucks and also serves as one way in which the naturalness of consumption is thoroughly embodied. This materially embodied rhetoric of the natural begins with the smell and the sound of the shop. The smell of fresh ground and brewed coffee immediately lets the visitor know that this is a coffee shop, and what is more the smell, while culturally encoded, is one that may seem natural in particularly powerful ways. What the smell immediately tells the visitor is that the coffee is “fresh,” a sense that is closely connected to “natural” (it is hard to think of a soda as being “fresh,” for example). A material process of transformation emphasizes the naturalness of coffee releasing the fragrance of coffee that accentuates coffee’s materiality. The process of grinding and brewing in all its noise and smell involves both the worker and the consumer directly in the process of transforming the natural bean into the drinkable cup of coffee. This bodily involvement in the process of making coffee allows the consumer a direct connection to the “original” state of the coffee and thus a connection to the natural world itself. In short, the coffee shop and its constitutive practices connect, in Roche’s words, “the abstract and the sensible, the natural and the artificial” and does so not simply at the point of actually drinking but by involving the subject in a system of sensible transformations.

These transformations result, of course, in the drinkable cup of coffee.
In drinking the coffee, the Starbucks habitué literally incorporates this already natural drink. The incorporation of the drink, with its naturally occurring stimulant (Ruth Reichl calls a cup of espresso a “a single gulp of pure caffeine” [193]), allows the coffee drinker not to simply consume through seeing or buying but by—in literal, material and bodily ways—incorporating the coffee itself, an incorporation already made possible through the materiality of sight, sound and smell. Here, however, taste takes over, as do the sensations of viscosity, warmth, and the eventual bodily stimulation caused by caffeine (even decaffeinated coffee contains significant amounts of caffeine). Starbucks, then, involves the consumer in the process of transformation of the “natural” bean into a drink, a drink that in its materiality carries with it the traces of its naturalness.

This materiality—a concreteness resisting the abstractions of postmodernism—is reinforced yet again by the taste of the coffee. Starbucks always has multiple brews of coffee available. The different coffees taste different because of the region in which the coffee beans were grown, the darkness of the roast, and, if blended, the nature of the blends. These distinctions (equivalent in some ways to the distinctions of fine wines by appellation) connect the coffee to the earth in which they were grown (what the French call terroir, that is, the ways the earth is expressed in the wine).

Once again this connection emphasizes the “naturalness” of coffee. The distinction between say Mexican and Tanzanian coffee is one that matters in an embodied way through taste and is generated by the very materiality of the production of the beans. Indeed, the tasting of the earth in the coffee can serve as a powerful mode of emplacing the body. In an age of globalized simulacra, the terroir of coffee negotiates this globalization by at once acknowledging globalization (the coffees of the globe are all located at the local Starbucks) but replacing the simulacra with a “real” and material experience of globalization. The changing tastes of the coffee and the seeming facticity of drinking the coffee serve as bodily and material incorporations of globalization. At the same time, the global is not simply localized at the coffee shop, it is localized in the site of the body itself. It seems crucial, then, for a globalizing Starbucks to serve and sell coffee that is at once a product of this globalization but also works to settle this globalization in the particularities of the earth that produces the coffee and the “tastes” that earthly coffee embodies.

The grinding, brewing and drinking of the coffee connects the drinker to the otherwise abstract transformations that are part of coffee making. But Starbucks pushes this connection backwards in time through the display of beans near the cashier. This display starts with green, unroasted beans, then shows the beans darkening through the inferior roasts typical of the big coffee companies, ending in the rich, dark roast that is the signature of Starbucks'
style. As the customer is ordering coffee and listening to and smelling the transformation from bean to drink, s/he can also see the transformations that happen before the day of the drinking. The raw bean is visually transformed into a dark, rich and shiny bean. The visual display concretizes the abstract and globalized process that gets the bean from the coffee plantation to the Starbucks in Fort Collins, Colorado. At the same time, however, the display leaves abstract the global economies and labor necessary to grow, pick, cure and roast the beans. The material bodies that make the coffee possible remain unrepresented. Their bodies are replaced by the bodies that make the coffee in Starbucks—bodies that do not conjure the kinds of colonizing economic and cultural strategies that underlie the coffee industry. This display—and the entire practice of brewing the beverage—materializes a complex rhetoric that serves to involve the customer in a concrete transformative process while striving to cover over the difficult social, cultural and economic conditions that make the coffee available in the first place.

At the same time, this display points to the ways Starbucks embeds the drink and the drinker in a visual scene of naturalness. Starbucks visually embeds this natural drink into a natural place for the embodied subject through wide-ranging elements including the color of the stores, the forms and materials used in decorating. Perhaps the best place to start the discussion of the visuality of naturalness is with the dominant color in the space, namely the color in the Starbucks logo. While some might call the logo’s color Kelly green, or, as one colleague suggested, rainforest green, the green in the logo and the green that is themetized throughout Starbucks stores may as well be called “Starbucks green.”

This green creates a host of connections. Most greens, of course, connect closely to nature, since green is the color of growing plants. Considering that Starbucks is a coffee shop and a coffee company, the green seems to connect to the lush forests of Central America. By associating Starbucks with the coffee growing regions of the world, the green logo makes an implicit argument about the quality of the coffee itself. This association does its work much as the Juan Valdez character in the Columbian coffee commercials does by connecting the coffee to the great coffee growing countries. The difference, of course, is the green emphasizes nature and floral growth, while the image of Juan Valdez pulls up, in spite of itself, a host of discomforting images of banana republics and racial and class oppressions. As such, then, the green steps over one set of uncomfortable global relationships that make coffee possible, covering the (brown) bodies of the people who grow, pick and process the coffee and in so doing locates the Starbucks customer’s body in relation with coffee trees and rainforests rather than oppression and back-breaking work.³

The green is also associated with Seattle and the Puget Sound region of
Washington State. Indeed, the only rainforest in the continental US is just across the sound from Seattle in the Olympic mountain range. Seattle itself is often seen through the prism of its rain and the resulting lush green landscape. This association to Seattle, of course, is fostered by the knowledge that Starbucks is headquartered in Seattle, and further reinforced by the fact that Seattle is the unofficial headquarters of the specialty coffee boom. By the 1990s Seattle had entered into national consciousness as a special place. Not only did it seem to found the coffee craze, it was the home of Boeing and more to the point, Microsoft and its many offshoots—companies that were driving the "new economy," an economy that made spending exorbitant amounts of money on a coffee drink possible, and an economy that seemed to promise an endless growth (and here the green returns not only as a color of growth but, of course, as the color of money) and an escape from the troubles caused by heavy industry.

Seattle was also home to the contradictions of the new world order—the anger, frustration and anomie of grunge music in the late 1980s and early 1990s was one example, and the explosions of the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests at the end of the decade suggest the deep anger the inequalities of the new world order and the ways that this anger located itself in Seattle. Indeed, the New York Times, in its coverage on the WTO protests, reported on the ways Seattleites struggled with the contradiction between the violence of the protests and their view of themselves as relaxed urbanités (Verhovek).

The green of the logo, then, has powerful resonance both as a way of embedding the embodied subject in nature and as a way of associating Starbucks with the cultural authenticity of Seattle. But as the above analysis points out, these associations are troubling. They are troubling because the very associations that provide comfort also remind us of discomforting conditions. As green refers to the jungles where the coffee is produced and thus seems natural, it also only barely hides the ways the jungle and the native peoples and ways are destroyed to provide the resources necessary to maintain global chains like Starbucks. Similarly, in referencing Seattle, the green brings up images of a new economy that is both exciting and deeply disturbing. Indeed, the deeply held passions against Microsoft and Starbucks expressed during the WTO protests in Seattle point to a striking ambivalence about the new world order. In short, Starbucks' green provides associations that are comforting and in the very same gesture disturbing. This seeming paradox is the story of the success of Starbucks.

A range of forms and materials throughout the cafe reinforce the color's connection to the natural world and the urban landscape of Seattle. Lights, signs, counters, busing trays and carpets all utilize curved forms, reminiscent in many cases of the forms of Art Nouveau. This connection to Art Nouveau
is powerful, for Art Nouveau of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century explicitly turned to the forms of nature for inspiration (Duncan 13-14, Escrit 7-8). Out of this move to nature came a range of decorations—lamps, chairs, tapestries, tables, carpets and the like—that emphasized the curves of floral life. Sometimes plants would be explicitly represented in the design; other times plants would serve as a design reference but would not be directly represented. Further, Art Nouveau emphasized “total design,” with its proponents arguing that modern spaces should be all of a piece, where all design elements from chairs to curtains to floor coverings should work together (Greenhalgh 13). So it is in the interior decoration of many Starbucks.

The carpet in the Starbucks on Drake in Fort Collins, Colorado, has a kind of vine and leaf pattern. It is not representational of, say, ivy, yet it owes its form to veining plants. Not surprisingly, the colors of the carpet are light green (a green that compliments the green logo) and a light greenish yellow. Similarly, countertops are curved, signs topped by paisley-like designs in metal, busing carts are of unpainted wood and are framed on the side and back by yet more curved wood and metal. Add to these curvilinear motifs the use of “natural” materials including stained woods, textured tiles and unfinished metal, and the interlacing design motifs emphasize the site’s naturalness.

If, then, the subject is embodied and emplaced, what might be the rhetorical force of Starbucks? If Starbucks consistently draws on the resources of nature to create itself as a natural place, might not its nearly didactic message be that the body is also natural? But what an odd rhetorical claim for Starbucks to make! For surely the body is natural. Yet, as pointed out above and as everyday life makes clear, in postmodernity the naturalness of the body has been profoundly unsettled. It is increasingly clear that our bodies do not, by themselves, found or justify our experience, nor can they support the weight of our claims to identity or selfhood. And so, we enter into the naturalism of Starbucks in hopes of catching a glimpse of the possibility of the return of the body as a natural and foundational object.

This concern over the body is not new, and in fact was of crucial concern to many artists working in Art Nouveau in Europe. For example, the problem of the relationship between the concrete or natural body, and the body without the material, cultural or psychological coordinates necessary to give comfort to the body was, according to Carl Schorske, at the heart of Gustav Klimt’s work. Schorske writes:

In the [eighteen]nineties, the very nature of reality became problematical for Klimt. He did not know whether to seek it in the physical or the metaphysical, in the flesh or in the spirit. These traditional categories were losing their clarity and independence. The crisis of the liberal ego
came to focus on the indeterminacy of the boundaries between them.
In Klimt's constantly shifting representations of space and substations—
from the naturalistically solid through the impressionistically fluid to
the abstract and geometrically static—we can see the groping for ori-
entation in a world without secure coordinates. (226, emphasis added)

Klimt was not alone in this grasping. Indeed, Art Nouveau—whether
that found in Klimt's Vienna or in a range of other European cities—was a
direct response to and constitutive of the profound changes typical of fine dé
siècle modernism. Art Nouveau's turn to nature, to the exoticism of the East,
to attempts to create total environments and its nostalgic referencing of Roc-
coco art and architecture all signaled a deeply conflicted response to a pro-
foundly ambivalent moment (Bauman 107-201, Terdiman 39). The turn to
Art Nouveau in Starbucks is more than just an attempt to reclaim nature for
denaturalized bodies; it is a covert connection to historical responses to simi-
lar problems. In this way, Starbucks works to suture the body into both a
natural space and culturally significant historical trajectory. But in referenc-
ing Art Nouveau, Starbucks runs into the same paradox found in the green,
for the reference pulls up not only the comforting relations of nature but also
the disconcerting "crisis of the liberal ego" (Schorske 226).

It is no surprise, then, that we order coffee to drink, a coffee that through
the design of the shop (green, floral patterns, natural materials), through the
discourse of the literature and signage, and through the practice of the pro-
duction of the coffee drink itself is itself seen as "natural." In drinking the
coffee we hope to materially consume the naturalness that we have already
consumed through sound, smell and sight. Thus the "intertextuality" of the
site is powerfully and profoundly embodied, for not only is the eye and thus
vision embodied, but the coffee shop experience includes the material em-
bodyment of the signs of the nature that we fear we have lost. As Schorske
writes about Gustav Klimt's paintings in the 1890s, we in Starbucks are "grop-
ing for orientation in a world without secure coordinates" (Schorske 226).
And we are groping for this orientation with a coffee cup in hand.

The visual elements of Starbucks incorporate the body into a vision of
nature, a nature the body incorporates through the drinking of coffee the shop
offers. Starbucks' rhetoric of naturalness, then, is complex and multi-modal.
The colors, forms and materials that create a vision of the natural combined
with the smells and sounds of the production of the coffee introduce the body
to the coffee itself and, in drinking the coffee, the body finally and literally
incorporates the nature it has sensed in other ways.

THE PRODUCTION OF AUTHENTICITY

While the coffee—its production, along with the way it smells and
tastes—connects to the natural, the coffee has a powerful cultural authenticity about it. This authenticity articulates with the seeming naturalness of the visual design of Starbucks—indeed nature is often used to justify claims to authenticity. But authenticity articulates with the natural in the larger pursuit of providing comfort and coherency in a time of discomfort and incoherency. Where the naturalness of the visual design and the smells and tastes of the shots of java work to suture the subject's body into nature and thereby provide a seemingly firm ontological grounding for the self, the cultural authenticity of the coffee works to suture the subject into seemingly real cultural structures thereby providing a kind of epistemological grounding for the self.

One of the most important markers of the authenticity of Starbucks coffee is the selection of drinks available, including espresso, cappuccino, latte, macchiato, and frappacino. To make matters more complex (and thus, more appealing) are the sizes: tall, grande, viente; and the options: single shot, double shot, triple shot, non-fat, low-fat, and full-fat, milk or soy milk. And if your Starbucks is in a coffee town like Seattle or Portland, Oregon you get to choose your cappuccino "dry" or "wet." We are no longer in the land of the bottomless cup o' j[o]e bought at your local donut shop, but in the new land of the endless faces o' j[o]e bought at your local Starbucks. What these choices provide for us is not simply the "freedom of choice" that is constitutive of capitalism, but the security of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 186). Coffee's authenticity becomes secured by the kinds of cultural knowledge necessary to choosing, brewing and drinking. This sort of cultural capital begins to link cappuccino with knowledge of jazz, fashion, design and the like. Choosing your drink becomes part of the management and justification of your identity—I'm an espresso kind of person, or, I know enough to order my cappuccino dry.

Increasing the quality of this knowledge are the constant references to Italy made by Starbucks' drink names. Just as importantly, the coffee shop itself harks to a European habit of cafés and café life, where visiting the café is part of public intellectual life. Thus the cultural knowledge of coffee beverages gets linked to the capital attendant to European culture and, in so doing, begins to take the status of high(er) art. Here, we begin to see the bleeding of the neat categorization that has been my conceit. For the "natural" visual design drawing on European Art Nouveau traditions serves the function both of suturing the body into nature and of creating the authenticity that comes with cultural capital.

These references to Europe ("the old country") do even more than simply provide authenticity through cultural capital. They also serve to locate Starbucks in an historical trajectory. In referencing a continent with a tradition, and in making coffee the old-fashioned way, Starbucks serves to locate the coffee drinker in comforting tradition. This coffee tradition responds di-
rectly to what Giddens calls our “post-traditional” era (2-3). With the references to nature and this move to place the space in a particular historical lineage, Starbucks works hard to locate the subject in both space and time, thus providing a coherent space and time in which the subject and the body can find comfort.

The comforting traditions of the names exist not just in the reading of the names by the consumer. Instead, the consumer utilizes these names in the ritualized ordering of the coffee. Because Starbucks provides so many options ordering can be daunting. There seem to be three kinds of Starbucks customers as defined by ordering rituals. The first, and least frequent, is the new customer coming in either on their own or with a customer familiar with Starbucks and the nearly overwhelming choices proffered. These customers need education and initiation into Starbucks culture. For example, one woman, clearly never having visited Starbucks before tried to simply order a cup of coffee. The barrista had to explain the different kinds of coffee available (Sumatra, House, House decaffeinated on that particular day). At the end of a fairly lengthy explanation she said, “we sell the real stuff here.”

Here the barrista functions as a cultural worker who, as Susan Zukin points out is an important part of the “critical infrastructure” crucial in postmodern consumer culture (202-206). The cultural worker plays the important role of teaching about and interpreting the cultural forms available for consumption. In this case, a coffee education is needed, and the barrista is available to help the consumer negotiate the rocky shoals of choosing coffee in a postmodern coffee shop. Clearly, Starbucks offers more than just coffee for consumption, it also offers knowledge. This example, which is repeated in some variation throughout the day, provides important insights into the ritualistic nature of Starbucks. First, there are arcane sets of knowledge necessary to successfully negotiate a Starbucks store and order a coffee. At the same time, there are groups of people willing and able to help initiate the new customer into the ways of Starbucks. The barristas work hard to explain the drinks and the minute differences among coffee, coffee types, brewing procedures, coffee drinks, flavors, milks and the like. Without the initiation, Starbucks is mysterious and a little intimidating. But with education, the mystery wears off and the knowledge needed to be a successful Starbukian is learned. But with this initiation may come a certain comfort in knowing the rules and the possibilities and the status of being an insider (Burke 333). Of course, Starbucks as a consumer institution devoted to selling coffee by the gallon, must not make the initiation too strenuous. Indeed, after one or two visits, the customer is more or less fully integrated into the way of Starbucks.

This initiation and its importance become clear when compared to the two other types of Starbucks customer. Both of these are well integrated into Starbucks culture, they understand the various drinks and options, they know
the way to order. One, however, orders the same drink every time (the comfort of constantly repeated ritual), the other orders a variety of drinks (the excitement of freedom). The customer who always repeats the drink indicates this with a certain ease of ordering. There is no apparent thought, simply a statement of the drink desired. What is more, the drink is often called in what seems a ritualized way. One man, more typical then not, ordered a “double venti nonfat no whip mocha.” He whipped through these adjectives so quickly it was apparent that he had ordered the drink often and was practiced in naming the drink. The speed and confidence of the ordering turns the ordering into a kind of repeated performance. The repeated performance of naming the drink intersects with a whole series of repeated performances the order sets in motion. The order—named in the exact same way—is called from the cashier to the barrista. The barrista makes the drink following a carefully prescribed method designed to insure that each successive double venti nonfat no whip mocha is as much like the first as possible. The drink, having been made is named once again (“Bill [a pseudonym], your double venti nonfat no whip mocha is ready”) by the barrista. Bill picks up his drink and leaves. Over the course of this short interaction, three people, the customer, the cashier and the barrista name the drink three times—always with the same order and nearly the same inflection. The drink is produced with the same sets of actions as last time the drink was made, and Bill probably drinks the drink in more or less the same way (while driving to work in his sport utility vehicle, for instance). All of this entwines Bill, the drink, the words and Starbucks into a brief, ritualized interaction that is always the same and, thus, always predictable.

This ritualization of the coffee ordering intersects with the practices of coffee making and coffee drinking, providing a moment set aside from the contingencies of the everyday. Here is a set of everyday, ritualized practices that respond to the contingencies of everyday postmodern life. The repetition of the naming of the drink—not only on the particular day of the order, but across the days and weeks—serves as a clear distinction from the fragmentation and uncertainty characteristic of postmodern life in general. The function of Starbucks, in this instance, is not unlike that of the Renaissance garden. According to Lawrence Rosenfield, the Renaissance garden, secluded from the concerns and difficulties of everyday life, provided a place to rejuvenate before returning to rough-and-tumble business and political dealings. The gardens provided this escape through the ways they intersected with the users’ civically trained memories. The images, paths, design and statuary throughout the garden reminded the visitor of the more fundamental characteristics of their identity (Rosenfield 225-229). While Starbucks does not provide the same specific kinds of mnemonic images (how could it in a postmodern world in which memory itself—while powerfully important—is
so deeply fragmented?), it does provide the same sort of ritualized place set aside from the difficulties of the rest of the world. It is a site in which it might be possible to regain lost equilibrium. As such, however, we cannot expect nor hope that the rituals of Starbucks serve as practices of resistance to dominant modes and relations in postmodernity. Rather, Starbucks is a place in which visitors can come to better accept those modes. In short, it is a site that provides rituals that articulate with postmodernity, making postmodern life a bit easier.

Starbucks’ marketing strives to embed these ritualized practices of ordering into metaphysical structures. The brochures always available in the stores offer long descriptions of how their coffee is roasted, how the barristas are trained and their standards of brewing. “Espresso is the soul of coffee…” reads the copy in the Starbucks flyer introducing customers to the varieties of coffee drinks available at Starbucks (Experience np). This anthropomorphization of coffee continues in the description of the perfect shot: “A fresh shot forms three layers, the aromatic crema, the billowing body and the dark, intense heart” (Experience np). Coffee, in particular espresso, is more than just coffee; it has heart, soul and body. As such, the coffee is something with which you can fall in love; it is a drink that can talk back. Perhaps more importantly, the copy introduces the problem of the soul for the coffee drinker.

At first glance, the marketing copy simply reinforces the cultural capital of the coffee itself. The copy reemphasizes the European, and more specifically the Italian, connection of the Starbucks experience. “In Italy, coffee is more than a drink—it’s an indulgence, a small personal ritual” (Experience np). This Italian connection gains Starbucks three particular effects. First, are the obvious cultural advantages connected to being European. This connection is even stronger when connecting culture to food, for important restaurants are European or influenced by Europe and, in the last few decades, by Italian cooking traditions in particular.

In the particular language of the claim, though, the Italian connection makes two further and crucial moves—first it connects this cultural capital to indulgence. Coffee, more than just a drink you might have with a meal, becomes a way of treating yourself well, of giving yourself a gift. Of course, at the prices charged for the coffee, one has to recognize the ways the cup is, in fact, an indulgence, and an indulgence that many cannot afford. This indulgence, then, effectively connects the cultural capital gained through Italy, with the economic capital needed to buy the drink. The indulgence, though, has a second connotation of wealth—that of time. The Starbucks’ drinker not only indulges in an expensive drink but they also have the time to go to the coffee shop. Coffee then becomes part of the leisure activities of those who have leisure time at their disposal. So the coffee is at least a double indul-
gence—one of money and one of time, and in both cases they are ways of being good to the self. But it is a third indulgence as well, for the Starbucks drink is one, as we have already learned, that is rich, and dark, and thick and strong. In short it is an indulgence of taste and, in so being, is a sign of taste of a certain sort.

These indulgences combine to become, and here is the third claim of the Italy sentence, a personal ritual. The ritual serves a number of important roles within this context. Rituals in the middle of the workday can serve to center the individual, providing them the psychic strength to return to work. Ritual, to the extent that it provides needed spiritual or psychical nourishment, can provide the justification for the bodily nourishment (and calories and caffeine). But more directly to the point, rituals in the midst of post-ritualistic, post-traditional society can provide a nostalgic reenactment of missing rituals. In this reading, coffee shops become postmodern churches where our postmodern life is both enacted and sanctified while coffee drinking becomes a postmodern ritualistic performance, the enactment of which sutures our soul into some larger project. As the “rituals” of leisurely consumption are enacted and sanctified they are given an aura of authenticity and sutured into a stabilizing tradition.

What should be clear, now, is that the two phrases “it’s an indulgence, a small personal ritual” is not just (more or less) clever marketing copy, it is a literal and religious claim—the coffee buying and drinking is a ritual that provides indulgences that can cover the sins of living a postmodern life. The irony, of course, is that the indulgence (the expensive and time-consuming coffee habit) is a constitutive element of the sins for which the indulgence is a cover, the sins of a postmodern consumer culture devoted to the performance of culturally created identities, grounded in nothing more then free-floating images (Collins 4).

And here we arrive at Starbucks’ third space between the private spaces of home (and its never-ending family conflicts), and the hurly-burly of public spaces. This is the third space of leisure and consumption, of rituals and the (sinful) indulgences that overcome the sins of the indulgence. This third space of ritual is planted squarely in the lacuna that the Starbucks literature itself creates—for the first two spaces leave no room in daily life for the ritualistic, the spiritual or the soulful. The coffee shop (and the mall and the gentrified cityscape) quite literally take over the sacred space that at one time claimed to ground individual and corporate identity.

Perhaps this conflict is nowhere clearer than in the controversy over the installation of Starbucks in Beijing’s Forbidden City (Smith). What is at stake here—in Beijing in particular and in globalization in general—are the ways global companies are taking over local ways of being and ways of feeling. This colonization of the local unmoors the individual from the local and, in
so doing, makes their identity more fragile, for it is no longer connected to the particularities of geography or, for that matter of history, memory or tradition. It is precisely within this context of the loss of geographic particularity that a new “third space” is needed. As Starbucks overtakes the Forbidden City, the loss of the particular center needs covering and covering that Starbucks claims it can provide.

As we utilize Starbucks space of the (re)naturalized body, we have to recognize that we are grasping for coordinates in the very space that works to destroy the coordinates of the self. For the self is undone by urbanization and globalization; by access to excess, by the confrontation and covering of difference, and by the place; destroying logic of consumer capitalism. Institutionally, Starbucks is this very sort of place. It serves up standardized coffee in standardized settings to standardized people. It expands aggressively across the globe. And, perhaps most damagingly, it proffers a globalized consumer practice as a response to the disorientation brought on by globalized consumer practices (Zukin 214-215). In short, it provides globalized images and globalized space as resources for localizing bodies.

**MATERIALITY, THE EVERYDAY, AND JOE**

Starbucks not just as an institution or as a set of verbal discourses or even advertising but as a material and physical site is deeply rhetorical. What is important about this rhetoric, however, is that it is not only a mental operation, but it is as well a material one. As a material space it not only provides the cultural resources for living in the everyday, it is the site of that living. Rather than only gesturing outside of itself, rather than being a rhetorical action that urges a set of behaviors that would happen in some other place and at some other time (as a political speech may urge future action at the polls), the rhetoric of Starbucks urges an action that takes place in the urging itself. Unlike the symbol, which always points outside of itself to some meaning that is not in the symbol, in Starbucks the text and its *telos* are collapsed (Blair 19). Starbucks weaves us directly into the cultural conditions of which it is constitutive. The color of the logo, the performative practices of ordering, making and drinking the coffee, the conversations around the tables, and the whole host of other materialities and performances offer Starbucks are at once the rhetorical claims and the enactment of the rhetorical action urged. In short, Starbucks draws together the tripartite relationships among place, body and subjectivity. As a material/rhetorical place, Starbucks addresses and is the very site of a comforting and disconcerting negotiation of these relationships.

This rhetoric is powerful not because it is important but because it is banal. Starbucks as an institution is clearly not banal. It is crucial to understand the larger institutional structures of Starbucks—the ways it fosters glo-
balization and enacts various kinds of oppression (Mathieu 123). But the individual stores, the particular drinks and the practices of making the coffee—these surely are banal. But it is exactly these mundane practices that create each store, each customer and each worker in the interstices of everyday life. And these are the very banalities that make up the compelling power of Starbucks. The importance of Starbucks is the ways in which it serves to powerfully locate the subject in a particular space and time. By involving the customer and worker in the production and consumption of coffee; by instituting rituals of ordering and drinking; by linking the coffees to particular places; by emphasizing nature through the design of the stores, Starbucks works hard to respond to the difficulties of finding and making stabilized places in a postmodern world. The deep contradiction of Starbucks is, of course, its involvement in the problems it works to address. An archetypal globalized, consumer organization relying on the abstractions and simulations foundational to the global consumer economy, Starbucks at the same time and with these very same resources tries to create a local, stabilized place.

All of this suggests the importance for rhetorical critics to investigate banal, everyday, material practices. Taking the banal seriously, however, lays us open to criticism. In an (inter)discipline that is already worried about its place in the academy, focusing on those practices, institutions, rhetorics that are not, on the face of things, important further risks marginalizing us. While in taking the everyday as our focus we risk marginalizing ourselves, we also “risk” making our study particularly important. If, in fact, it is within the everyday that we create ourselves, our communities and our politics, then few areas of study could be more important. And rhetoric, with its constant focus on the pragmatic, is particularly well suited to this study.

Taking the materiality of the everyday seriously raises theoretical risks as well. Paying attention to coffee practices and to the embodied performances of the self turns our attention away from the invention of formal and informal arguments. In so doing, we seem to detach rhetoric from its epistemological roots, roots that have served to justify the discipline as an acceptable alternative to other argumentative forms of making knowledge whether in the sciences or in the humanities. But in hoping to become the new philosophy or the new literary theory or in hoping to make science “rhetorical” we continue to risk the eviscerating move to symbolicity of which Blair warns us.

But, these are risks that rhetorical critics and theories ought to take, for one of rhetoric’s distinctions lays in its ability to critically approach the consequentiality of everyday life. In turning to the practices of the everyday, we can localize rhetoric in the particularities of time and space, in the performances of self, in the mundane practices, no one of which is crucial, but each
of which, taken together, are the concrete materials of which we constitute our selves.

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Notes

1 The materiality of rhetoric and a materialist view of rhetoric constitute a significant conversation in the rhetorical literature. For recent interventions see: Cyphert, Selzer and Crowley, Condit, Blair, McKerrow, Goldzwig.

2 A number of rhetorical critics have taken up space and architecture as important sites for rhetorical practice and analysis. See, Armada; Blair, Pucci, Jeppeson; Blair and Michel; Dickinson; Gallagher, “Memory;” Gallagher, “Remembering;” Katriel.

3 On the abstractions of contemporary spaces see Sennett xi.

4 I am reminded of the miles of Los Angeles google architecture. “Googie” refers to the ways simple box apartments were differentiated by “googies” or design additions that had no relationship to the structure itself.

5 As these examples should make clear, celebrating fragmentation can have progressive, regressive and other political impulses.

6 Paula Mathieu makes a compelling argument about the place of Starbucks in the larger problematics of global capitalism. Her focus is on the ways Starbucks works to blind consumers to the deep inequalities that make global companies like Starbucks possible. (123)

7 The irony, of course, is this proclamation is made within the packaging that the claim seems to resist.

8 Ruth Reichl writes of her first visit to a coffee shop in Rome:

The scent of the beans was so powerful that we could smell it from two blocks away, the aroma growing stronger as we got closer to the café. It was a rich and appealing scent, and it pulled us onward and through the door. Inside, burlap sacks of coffee beans were stacked everywhere and the smell of the coffee was so intense it made me giddy.... The coffee was smooth and satisfying, a single gulp of pure caffeine that lingered on the palate and reverberated behind the eyes. I felt lightheaded (192-193).

9 I want to thank the students in the Spring semester 2001 SP412 at Colorado State University for helping me make some of these connections, especially Saun Harrison who consistently reminds me of the oppression that makes coffee possible.

10 It is within this double move—the creation of choices for the advancement of consumer capitalism and for the securing of cultural capital—that Starbucks sound tracks are specially designed and copied onto compact discs available for purchase in the stores. The sound tracks include jazz and blues standards and folk influenced pop.

11 As Lefebvre argues in The Critique of Everyday Life, studying the most banal practices of everyday life is crucial, for anything that arouses deep passions must be connected in some way to real life (118). Surely Starbucks arouses deep passions.
Works Cited


