From Strangers to Strangers: (Non)Migrant Encounters with Difference in Café Spaces

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Abstract
In this paper, I revisit the concept of conviviality (Gilroy, 2004, 2006a, 2006b) and its much-romanticized use in understanding encounters with difference in everyday urban life. In contrast to the tendency to privilege daily interaction with difference in semi-public spaces as cohabitation of difference, or ‘indifference to difference’ (Amin, 2012, 2013), I see that the concept overlooks the evident asymmetries of so-called prosaic negotiation of difference, as it fails to answer how individual experiences of so-called unremarkable difference at a micro-level can translate into group-experiences at a macro-level to the same degree. In critique of the concept that celebrates encounter with difference as an ordinary feature of urban multiculture, I stress that the individual moments of prosaic interaction shall not be mistaken as moments of cultural transgression, where cultural, ethnic, racial and/or religious differences become unruly and unremarkable. Rather, I argue that the concept, of which strength is said to do away with the patronizing principles of ‘European, white normativity’ (Valluvan, 2016), fails to register how habitual encounters with others can go beyond individual moments into ‘respect for difference’ (Valentine, 2008). For this, I introduce my observations on encounters with difference in three café spaces in three different neighborhoods in Vienna, Austria to demonstrate whether low-level sociability witnessed among my participants from each site translates into a normative urban multiculture.

Introduction: Everyday Encounters with Difference and Urban Multiculture
“Gourmandise is one of the principle bonds of society. It gradually extends that spirit of conviviality, which every day unites different professions, mingles them together, and diminishes the angle of conviviality”, wrote a famed 19th-century gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in his 1825 work ‘The Physiology of Taste’. Since then conviviality, of which its 19th century understanding implicated a satisfying meal and lively discussions shared by people from all walks of life (Adolf et al., 2016), was taken by Ivan Illich (1973) in ‘Tools for Conviviality’, where conviviality meant a localized learning process among interdependent people for more participatory and democratic societies. Whereas the recent development of the concept took more a political tone, namely in France and Germany, e.g. Alain Caillé’s convivial-ism – a ‘post-materialist vision’ of living-together (Vandenbergh, 2014), debates that concern and critique ‘multiculturalism’ take Paul Gilroy’s (2004) reflection on conviviality as the point of departure in discussions on living-together with cultural, ethnic, and racial differences in everyday life. Gilroy’s (2006a, 2006b) conviviality raises concerns over ‘New European Imperialism’ that still lingers inter-cultural and -ethnic relations in postcolonial European cities and seeks for ‘living together in real time’ beyond ‘fixed forms of hierarchy’. This is a departure from multiculturalism – that is, fixation of imagined group ideals in the social hierarchy, to multiculture – that is, a social setting that nurtures ordinary group-particularities in everyday urban life. In Gilroy’s multiculture, where encounters with others become a banal and mundane part of everyday urban life, particularities that ‘different metropolitan groups’ bear shall have unremarkable presence, and ordinary people who embody these particularities shall have the capacity to negotiate and overcome their differences. Negotiation of difference with ‘strangers in the city’ (Amin, 2012) is possibly most vivid in the city’s semi-public spaces – or ‘micro-publics’ (Amin, 2002; Hall, 2012),

1 By ‘groups’, Gilroy (2006) means the bearers of ‘racial, linguistic and religious particularities’. While the concept of conviviality aims to do away with ethno-normative fixation of the imagery of ‘groups’ (Gilroy, 2004), it remains yet dubious, as in much of the literature revisited in this paper, in how far the concept understands the ‘group’ as an constructed – rather than given – entity. This, as I will explain throughout the paper, is perhaps, due to the fixed notion of ‘difference’ that sees the (super) diversity (Vertovec, 2007) as a taken-for-granted condition for contemporary urban life. To this, I shall note that the term, ‘group’, that I use in this paper, as in ‘group-experience’ or ‘group-level’, denotes Rogers Brubaker’s (2002) sense of a ‘contextually fluctuating conceptual variable’.
where prosaic inter-cultural and -ethnic interactions between the city’s inhabitants are carried out. Convivial reading of urban life starts from an ‘optimal social setting’ grounded in the ‘condition of ethnic plurality’ (Nowicka and Vertovec, 2014), and this is perhaps why the concept of conviviality attracts the eye of the emerging literature on interethic relations in the urban cities. A wide range of literature has indeed explored how encounters with difference are carried out in everyday urban life; how the city’s semi- public spaces are utilized for such social interactions; and how these spaces can incubate convivial multiculture, although not void of tension and conflict.

In this paper, I give a particular attention to encounters with difference in the city’s café space – a small-scale meeting ground, where individuals and groups with difference are encouraged to both voluntarily and involuntarily socialize for both focused and unfocused engagements. Café space – a “space of habitual, local and up-close forms of contact” (Hall, 2012: 54) – exemplifies the way we live our daily urban life, as its semipublic interior provides a social setting not only for engagement in a light form of sociability2, and but also for inattention given to differences that strangers in the city bear. My interest, however, does not lie on mere reification of social interactions governed by ethnic plurality in the city’s semipublic spaces, nor do I believe that encounters with others in café spaces to be an epitome of urban multiculture, where cultural, ethnic, and racial differences of others are rendered unremarkable. The very limit of diversity-conscious convivial reading of interethnic relations perhaps lies on overestimation of interpersonal interactions in semi- public spaces to convey meaningful contacts that can traverse beyond individual experiences. Other than simply seeing the multiplicity of ‘groups’ in the city to result in our convivial, yet racist; or open, yet closed relationships with others, this paper looks at two different levels of interactions involved in the city’s semi- public spaces, namely, at an individual level – performed within the rules of civil inattention (Goffman, 1963), and at a group level – featured by persistent prejudice towards differences of others. In a wide range of literature, it does seem apparent that café space does offer strangers a shared space for moments of individual encounters with culturally, ethnically, and racially different others. But just in how much can these routinized individual experiences of encounters with difference contribute to positive group-experiences? In what follows, I introduce the findings3 from my regular visits to three café spaces in three different neighborhoods4 in Vienna, Austria that are unique from one another in terms not only of their locations, but of both real and artificial ‘mixedness’ – and I will get back to it later – that dominate the atmosphere of each space. It should be noted that the term café I use in this paper does not strictly speak of a place where non-alcoholic beverages and quick snacks are served. Although the distinction between, for example, the ‘alcohol-serving’ bar and ‘hot-drink-serving’ café is crucial in certain contexts (Laurier and Philo, 2006a), my three café spaces blur this traditional boundary. This is perhaps because, in an Austrian – or broadly in a Central European context, the distinction between bar, café, and restaurant spaces is drawn by its class-nuanced interior and atmosphere5, and not much so in the items that are served to customers.

What is Café Space?

When Jürgen Habermas (1989) commented on the public sphere – “the sphere of private people come together as a public” (1989: 27), he postulated the transformation of the public sphere led by the emergent bourgeois class from what was hitherto grounded in the princely ownership. The shift of power to the courtly-

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2 By ‘sociability’, I mean George Simmel’s (1910) sense of ‘play-form of association’ between the city’s inhabitants in semi- public spaces – e.g. ‘pleasure’ of living-with-difference. I shall point out that ‘sociability’ is not to be equated with mere co-presence of cultural, ethnic, or racial differences. It is in this light that Nina Glick-Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar (2015: 3) see much of the diversity-oriented understanding of living-with-difference to be focused on ‘sociality’ – that is: the “entire field within which individuals are embedded in a ‘matrix of relationships with others’”.

3 These include written accounts and descriptions gathered from my participant observation that spanned 6-month period of time.

4 The geographical settings for this research include: Wunderbar, a downtown café space frequented by inner-city residents, professionals and international youngsters; s’ Weckerl, a South-Asian-run café space inside a railway station featured mostly by its working-class patrons; and Club International, a Croatian-run café space visited by young, urban and ‘hip’ youngsters – or ‘strawmen in skinny jeans’ (Clayton, 2010) – in an increasingly gentrified neighborhood that had long been associated with migration-led ghettoization.

5 Famous Viennese coffeehouses, Kaffeehäuser, with a bourgeois- and k.u.k. flair, and traditional, local, middle-, and working-class café-, or bar-like establishments, Beisln, are a good example of such distinction (Musner, 2009).
noble society from the ruling estate mediated by the monarchs thus marked the emergence of a new cultural-political arena, of which function to control now lied on the ‘town’ – that is, the ‘life center of civil society...in cultural-political contrast to the court’ (1989: 30). Differently put, the rise of the educated middle-class presented a shift, as well as a blur, between boundaries of the private and public realms, whereby the locus of culture-political life is found in the new public sphere, whose institutions, as he writes, were the coffeehouses, the salons, and the Tischgesellschaften (table societies). The egalitarian nuance of Habermas’s notes on ‘coffee houses’ in the ‘rational-critical’ public sphere slightly differs from the references to the café space made in much recent convivial literature (Bell, 2007; Felton, 2012; Franck, 2005; Jones et al., 2015; Laurier, 2008; Laurier and Philo, 2006a, 2006b; Shaftoe, 2008). But his elucidation on the public sites as where members of society engage in public debates over a cup of coffee nevertheless alludes how these sites in-between public and private realms are used by the city’s inhabitants as a place of social mixing. Similar idealization of the café space resonates in the works of Ray Oldenburg (1997, 1999; Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982) and in his ‘thirdplace’: a space that capacitates public gathering among the inhabitants beyond ever-privatizing home life and “work lots of modern economic production” (1982: 269). According to Oldenburg, the ‘thirdplace’, from a corner café to a chess table on the town square, is a site of ‘pure sociability’, whereby the people of modern society – deprived of the joie de vivre – can gather beyond ‘purposive association’ that one normally has from all types of association with the ‘outside world’. Seemingly mundane encounters with strangers, such as holding the door for someone, characterize the ‘spirit’ of the kind of sociability that occurs in the ‘thirdplace’, where one is oblivious to others’ social qualification – be it age, class, gender, race, or religion. It is a site, write Oldenburg and Dennis Brissett (1982: 271) that offers the “most purely democratic experience”, akin to Habermas’s conversational mode of politics in the public sphere for local democracy (Laurier, 2008).

Albeit evident generalization and idealization of social interactions between people in the ‘thirdplace’, Oldenburg’s illustration of (positive) social participation with others in public spaces still resonates in contemporary academic reflections on the ‘everyday urban’ (Amin, 2002). In this very light, recent studies that explored daily encounters with difference in the urban locales explored how the city’s inhabitants co-dwell with the unknown others in semi-public spaces as a neutral container of conviviality – ‘new attitudes and identities’ (Amin, 2002); ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey, 2005); ‘baseline democracy’ (Thrift, 2005); ‘generous hospitable engagement’ (Nava, 2006); or ‘ordinary cosmopolitanisms’ (Lamont and Aksartova, 2002), there has been a turn in literature, which sought to examine the spatial relation between semi-public spaces and conviviality by looking at the multifaceted ‘expressions’ available upon encounters with difference in urban multiculture (Neal et al., 2013).

How do then strangers in the city socially mix, interact, and co-dwell with one another? What does our banal encounters with others, for example, at a café tell us about the ‘everyday urban’? For this, Eric Laurier and Chris Philo (2006a) delve into the café space by reassessing the Goffmanesque understanding of the rules of normality in social interaction – that is, our appropriation of behaviors in compliance with a ‘machinery of social interaction’. Laurier and Philo, on the contrary, argue that it is the locally-built environment that reveals how the inhabitants interact with one another by appropriating their behaviors in the given settings. In specific, distancing from Goffman’s (1971) notion of gesticulation in everyday life as our self-conscious effort to hinder negative presentation of self, Laurier and Philo’s ethno-methodological approach, influenced by Harvey Sacks’ (1992a, 1992b) conversation analysis, focused on how bodily gestures in particular spaces involve on-site interaction and encounters with others, where intersubjective understanding that concerns the unacquainted is created, maintained and repaired (2006a: 195). In the locally-built environment called café space, temporal – yet multifaceted – interactions between strangers in the city occur, and these are accompanied by embodied gestures that are made intelligible by the particular setting that the café space offers. It is this very local setting, write Laurier and Philo, that provides people with a place of receptivity and conviviality in the city of strangers, where they greet and welcome, or turn a cold shoulder to and remain indifferent to one another. Focusing on
our micro-level interaction with others in semi-public spaces, Laurier and Philo do shed light on an important aspect of how we negotiate our differences at an interpersonal level; how the semipublic interior of café spaces offers us an occasion to socialize beyond the private-public binary; and how our social interactions with others are convivial, yet, at the same time, indifferent. But in how far do our daily encounters with others in semi-public spaces really tell us how we negotiate differences that strangers in the city bear at a group-level? Do our routinized contacts with difference at an individual level can really be an ordinary feature of our daily life that contributes to urban multiculture?

Games People Play...

In recent scholarship, concerns over the diverse nature of conviviality became more strongly voiced. By revisiting the ordinary appreciation of living-with-difference in the ‘everyday urban’, many ‘faces’ of conviviality have been accentuated along the line of the ‘negative dialectics of conviviality’ (Gilroy, 2004), that are namely: multi-presence between hospitality and conflict (Karner and Parker, 2011; Valluvan, 2016: 205); the ‘metropolitan’ and ‘suburban paradox’ of conviviality and racism (Back, 2009; Tyler, 2016); and a balance between closeness and distance (Wessendorf, 2014) in our daily interaction with others in the city. Here, the ‘everyday urban’ is seen to require no particular sense of multicultural collectivity, as, first, indifference to and unremarkable difference aims neither fission nor fusion of “racial, linguistic and religious particularities” (Gilroy, 2006b: 40), and, second, habituation of difference rooted in banal and ordinary interpersonal interactions indicates “just living together” (Gilroy, 2006a: 7), where tensions are inherent, but solutions are simultaneously present. In such regard, the critical revision of “romanticized and overly celebratory accounts of conviviality” (Tyler, 2016: 2) discussed how our interaction with difference is as much banal and common as it is antagonistic and suspicious.

From the aforementioned scholarly notes on café space, we now came to know that the locally-built environments that certain spaces in the city are said to offer a way that we negotiate our differences and mediate possible tensions with others. This argument is a space-, as well as diversity-conscious one, because, as Sivamohan Valluvan (2016: 218) writes: “different spaces privilege different interactive trends, leading to variation in the degrees of allowance concerning the ability to destabilize ethnically-framed conflict narratives”. Here, the existence of culturally-, ethnically-, and racially-diverse inhabitants of the city is thought to be the very essence of our banal encounters with difference that mediates the patterns of our social interactions across different spaces. It is this cohabitation of difference in our public life – ‘commonplace diversity’ (Wessendorf, 2014) – that makes us indifferent to, instead of in appreciation of, diversity as a “matter of everyday practices and strategies of cultural contact and exchanges with others who are different from us” (Amin, 2002: 976). This is the very reason why Susanne Wessendorf (2014), in her ethnographic accounts on Hackney, London, argues that the superdiversity in the public realm allows people to engage with one another with ‘intercultural competence’ – thus, without any particular attention given to each other’s differences. Asking for directions to fellow passengers on the bus; holding the door for other customers at a shop; or exchanging greetings with neighbors among countless other examples of our daily interaction with others are the everyday moments of ‘commonplace diversity’ that are, as she (2014: 393) writes: “...characterized by social interactions which are shaped by ‘civility towards diversity’’. ‘Civility towards diversity’, whereby we learn to act civil towards others in public space, is also said to mediate possible antagonisms among those in what she calls the ‘parochial realm’ where differences are acknowledged and often talked about, but the courtesy of civility is given “by both avoidance and engagement” (2014: 400).

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6 This is ‘postcolonial melancholia’: multi-presence of inevitable cultural diversity and yet-persistent institutional racism. This is most apparent in the ever-growing inequality among cultural, ethnic-, or racial-others, in spite of the celebration of ‘difference’ in our neo-liberal consumer culture (Gilroy, 2004).
7 That is: a communitarian identity fixated in the boundaries of culture, ethnicity, race, or religion, rooted in the “flattening tendency of much contemporary output on multiculture” (Gilroy, 2006a: 6).
8 In his discussion on racism, for example, Paul Gilroy (2006a: 6) notes on the concurrent presence of racial tensions and solutions at the interpersonal level, which he sees as “creative and intuitive capacity among ordinary people”.
9 Similar to, but somewhat different from, semi-public space, this is where more in-depth encounters with others beyond public spaces are said to occur. Wessendorf’s (2014) understanding of convivial relations in the parochial realm is addressed through her observation on the weekly coffee morning for parents with diverse ethnic backgrounds at a local primary school.
The courtesy of inattention given to the differences that strangers in the city bear as a mode of social interaction in semi-public spaces echoes Erving Goffman’s (1963: 24) emphasis on public behavior of those in ‘unfocused interaction’ through the “management of sheer and mere copresence”. Albeit different takes on his dramaturgical analysis of public behavior (Laurier, 2008; Laurier and Philo, 2006a, 2006b), the Goffmanesque (1955, 1953, 1967, 1971) rules of interaction in public have strong resonance in diversity-conscious conviviality that remains ambiguous in Hannah Jones and others’ (2015) argument. Accordingly, it is ‘civil inattention’ (Goffman, 1963) that we are said to conduct in our daily interaction with strangers as “banal (rather than celebratory) forms of multiculture that are central to current conceptualizations of conviviality” (Jones et al., 2015: 646). It is in this light that Jones and others (2015) identify our behavior in the café space to be performed within the rules of ‘civil inattention’, whereby the co-occupants of the café space come to acknowledge the presence of others without having them noticed that their differences are being tested and sanctioned. Differently put, it is the ‘semi-public interior’ (Hall, 2012) of the ‘visibly multicultural’ (Jones et al., 2015) café space that allows us to engage in light conversation with, but also to, in Laurier and Philo’s (2006) words, give a ‘cold shoulder’ to others – the ‘thin forms of sociality’ (Jones et al., 2015), “where people converse and others watch, some congregate in groups, while others exercise their preference to remain on their own” (Hall, 2012: 53).

While ethnographers point out the concurrent presence of conviviality and contestation, it shall be noted that much of convivial arguments on urban sociability in café space – together with various other semi-public spaces, tend to overestimate our daily encounters with others in the city as “pathways to form positive relations across ethnic difference that represent a break from more hidebound and conventional notions of community” (Tyler, 2016: 4). It is true that we, as strangers in the city, strike up a friendly conversation with others waiting in line at the food court in a shopping mall. It is also true that we might remain indifferent to and disinterested in the presence of others at an inner-city café and, therefore, turn a ‘cold shoulder’. However, if the congregation of differences is to be understood as the very source of our performance towards others in semi-public spaces – be it convivial/racist (Tyler, 2016); happy/hard (Wise and Velythusam, 2014); hospitable/hostile (Valluvan, 2016); open/closed (Wessendorf, 2014), it is hard not to question whether ‘multiplication of significant variables’ (Vertovec, 2007) isn’t merely assumed as a taken-for-granted urban condition of contemporary multiculture made possible by ‘cohabitation and interaction’ (Gilroy, 2004) with difference that we are said to understand as an ordinary feature of our everyday life. Can ‘civility towards diversity’ really be understood as a normative mode of our social interaction that governs the way we perform courtesy towards the differences that others bear? Does ‘civil inattention’ towards difference in the ‘mixed’ café space really tell us about the way ‘culturally different populations’ (Jones et al., 2015) learn to negotiate these differences with a ‘creative and intuitive capacity’ (Gilroy, 2006b)?

What is apparent in the evidences gathered in my research is the evident ‘mixed’ outlook of each café space, which doesn’t differ much from the earlier mentioned ethnographic accounts. Outwardly, it is hard not to notice the ‘mixedness’ of cultural and ethnic differences that dominates the ‘multicultural’ ambiance that characterizes the three café spaces observed for this research. Similar to the café spaces in the works of Suzanne Hall (2012); Laurier and Philo (2006a, 2006b); and Jones and others (2015), my café spaces too ostensibly resemble the ‘heart of sociability’ (Felton, 2012), where both regulars and newcomers with diverse backgrounds find themselves in an ‘urban venue’ (Hall, 2012) to engage in light conversation with strangers or to congregate in smaller knots to mind their own business. These café spaces on the surface echo the ‘great good place’ (Oldenburg, 1999); the ‘micro-public’ (Amin, 2002); or the ‘prosaic public’ (Hall, 2012), where people find themselves beyond purposive association without any formal membership; where the boundaries between the private and the public are blurred; where both voluntary and involuntary face-to-face contacts

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10 Sign-vehicles, writes Goffman (1971) to be naturally-accepted ‘items of expressive equipment’ of self. These include, for example, from racial characteristics to facial expressions.

11 In her ethnography, Suzanne Hall (2014: 72) points out a multitude of social interaction that occurs in the café space “negotiated by the everyday rituals of sitting...(in) the social forms of active and passive participation”.

12 My previous footnote (2) will clarify the distinction between sociality and sociability that remains ambiguous in Hannah Jones and others’ (2015) argument.
beyond cultural and ethnic particularities are offered. This seemingly positive living-with-difference is the consistent feature of the three café spaces alike, and is well-exemplified by the visits I made to *Wunderbar*.

A day in this downtown café begins at 5 in the afternoon. Apart from passers-by and tourists who accidently discover the outdoor service area in the summer, it is usually the elderly regulars who fill in this brown-walled, smoky, and dimly-lit space. After a quick exchange of greetings and an order of non-alcoholic beverages, regulars sit either at the bar area or at a table close with newspapers, crossword puzzles, or a Sudoku book – if not mindlessly stare out of the window, until youngsters in groups begin to crowd up the place at the sitting area between 7 and 8. Until the new groups of regulars walk in, who usually appear on Fridays and Saturdays, there is rarely any interaction between the customers, as those in the sitting and the bar area remain in clusters – if not alone. As the night progresses, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the place becomes more visible. It is not only evident that the newcomers at the sitting area exhibit obvious ‘mixedness’¹³, but the regulars at the bar area are featured by the equal level of diversity. From a Slovenian business man to an Austrian security guard, from a Macedonian waiter at a downtown restaurant to elderly pensioners, sporadic face-to-face contacts between the tippled regulars dominate the evening atmosphere, where they engage in light conversation on gossips, e.g. “Oh that girl is now pregnant, did you hear that?” (J, field notes, February, 2017); news, e.g. “Did you hear that ‘fat boy’ (referring to Kim Jong-un) shot another missile?” (B, field notes, February, 2017); or work, e.g. “It’s hard studying in Linz and working in Vienna at the same time” (M, field notes, January, 2017). What is noteworthy too about interactions between the customers at this stage is that face-to-face engagements between the newcomers become more frequent, as they are often guided into unintended socialization with strangers by standing at the congested bar area or sharing tables together.

¹³ Given its proximity to the city center, it’s not surprising that a handful of newcomers who visit this place for the first time are English-speaking youngsters.
From both un- and intended; un- and focused engagements between the diverse patrons in this café space, it can easily be assumed that this urban venue indeed offers strangers in the city a sense of light sociability, whereby cultural, ethnic, and social differences that each other bears are actively and confidently negotiated. The palette called Wunderbar is not only colorful, but vivid enough to draw a conclusion that we may superficially and contingently recognize others’ differences, e.g. “How often do you go back ‘home’?” (M, field notes, December, 2017), but may also remain disinterested, because, in a ‘super-diverse’ context (Wessendorf, 2012), “these difficulties of categorizing strangers seem to lead to a certain pragmatism, where...you cannot afford not to be civil towards people who are different” (2012: 398). The ostensible diversity of the café space, however, tells us considerably little about how individual encounters with difference at a micro-level at the ‘micro-public of everyday social contact and encounter’ (Amin, 2002) can really translate into positive group-experiences, or as Gill Valentine (2008: 325) writes, “respect for difference”. Surely, as Gilroy (2006a, 2006b) and Ash Amin (2002, 2013) note, convivial reading of living-with-difference at the ‘micro-public’ does not envision a utopian multiculture, where the differences that strangers in the city bear are morphed into the ‘wholesome dream of multicultural society’ (Gilroy, 2004), but where encounters with unruly difference become a matter of our routinized daily life. In this convivência statement of living-with-difference, however, it seems yet unclear how routinization of difference in ‘local sites of everyday encounter’ (Amin, 2002) can lead us to act and think the same way towards the groups that each one of us are identified by; and how banal and ordinary encounters with difference at an interpersonal level can be maintained beyond these individual moments of face-to-face engagement.

Another – yet just like any other – evening at Wunderbar, the moment of cohabitation of difference was abruptly disrupted as a dark-skinned newspaper seller appeared. As he walked in the front door, a Macedonian regular, who’s also the brother-in-law of the now deceased owner, pushed through the crowd and forced him aggressively out of the place. At this ‘micro-public’, where informal membership and its non-institutional interior are said to offer an arena for local negotiations of difference, prejudice and judgements given to, at least certain types of, difference seemed to nevertheless linger strongly in its ostensibly diverse interior. When the newspaper seller was pushed out; when the customers were told “look out for your items, because they steal” (M, field notes, January, 2017); and when this action was not sanctioned by any other customer raise concerns over whether identification of difference within the rules of civil inattention (Jones et al., 2014) is indeed a signifier of banal forms of multiculture; a courtesy to others in the locally-built environment; or a convivial interaction between differences.

When acted by the rules of civil inattention, writes Goffman (1963: 84) that “(one) has nothing to fear or avoid in being seen and being seen seeing, and that (one) is not ashamed of (one)self of the place and company in which (one) finds (one)self” – hence, as postulated in his earlier dramaturgical analysis of face-work (1955, 1967), one has, is in, or maintains one’s face in the situation by complying with the ‘rules of the game’. This form of unfocused interaction, which Goffman framed as a “courtesy” (1963: 84), however, hardly denotes a “positive interaction” (Jones et al., 2015) between the participants in the situation, but, rather, the kind of interaction, where one performs civil inattention by giving no recognition to others in the situation abided by the “particular expressive order” (1967: 9). From being-in-face, as an emotive representation of self, one feels ‘good’, ‘proud’, and ‘honored’, which necessitates the maintenance of a positive self-image during encounters with others – therefore avoiding shameful and embarrassing defacement. Thus, one performs this courtesy for the sake of the consistency between one’s face and actions, rather than of ‘social delicacy’ (Jones et al., 2015); ‘prosaic interaction’ (Amin, 2002); or ‘co-habitable multiculture’ (Gilroy, 2006b). In such sense, banal and convivial interaction with others in its semi-public interior may indicate a mere attempt of people or a group to maintain a self-given face than it does for a mutual respect for difference of others in the situation.

14 This question was addressed to me by one of the regulars on one evening visit. ‘Home’, here, referred to my origin, rather than a sense of belonging. Reference of ‘home’ to my background became clearer in the question that had followed: “I mean, your ‘real’ home” (M, field notes, December, 2016).
At s’Weckerl, a South-Asian-run café inside Heiligenstadt train station that sits adjacent to the largest public housing in Vienna, Karl Marx-Hof, most of the regulars who appear in the morning or early afternoon are elderly pensioners, while younger customers who are still in their work-uniforms show up from late afternoon onwards. While tourists or commuters either get a take-out coffee or sandwich, or briefly sit at the outdoor service area or at the bar, most of the regulars, who seem to all know each other and waiters well, cluster in smaller groups in the smoking area or at the tables. With a TV screen on in the middle, regulars often sit all towards the bar area and talk about whatever is on TV, e.g. football games or ski events on the weekends; and news programs on the weekdays. On one evening, a regular who was reading the newspaper at the bar notices me glancing over the headlines and starts a conversation on the re-vote of 2016 Austrian presidential election scheduled for next month. He, who regularly travels from a neighboring district for an after-work drink, points out to the frontpage and shares his dissatisfaction with the ‘elites’, migrants, the ‘refugee crisis’, and so on – a general repertoire of right-leaning messages in Austrian tabloids. To my non-reactive response, he pauses for a moment, then makes sure that I’m not getting the wrong idea of what kind of a person he is, and, most importantly, that he is not a ‘racist’ (A, field notes, November, 2016). As he points out to the waiters of South Asian descent, he assures that he is an open-minded, weltoffen, guy who has no problem with people, in his words, “like you and like him” (A, field notes, November, 2016) – although his courtesy and inattention to difference didn’t seem to extend to “those Neger on the metro and at Praterstern”15, who allegedly “rape young girls” (A, field notes, November, 2016). When he made clear that he is not a ‘racist’ or that he has no problem with people like me and the waiters, the differences that the co-occupants of this café space bear weren’t merely ‘there’ without being tested or sanctioned, but appeared seemingly subjected to a mode of being-in-

15 A square adjacent to one of the largest railway stations in Vienna, Praterstern, of which drug-ridden hang-out scene gained extensive media coverage in the midst of the ‘refugee crisis’ (die Presse, 2016).
public, whereby he assured that his behavior towards the others in this café space does not breach “mundane and ritualized codes of etiquette” (Valentine, 2008: 329).

From my visits to these two café spaces, where a great degree of ostensible diversity is observable, it is apparent that the inattention performed by the diverse co-occupants to difference that others bear is not void of tension and suspicion. Routine interactions with difference within the interior of café spaces might appear as a ‘learned grammar of sociability’ (Buonfino and Mulgan, 2009), but the sanctioned differences exemplified by ‘criminal nature of Gypsy newspaper sellers’ (M, field notes, January, 2017) or ‘child-rapeing Neger’ (A, field notes, November, 2016) suggest that it is not the normalcy of, or commonplace diversity (Wessendorf, 2014) that governs our behavior towards others, but the kind of inattention that we perform in face-to-face engagements amid mere co-presence with strangers in the city. It is then hard not to ignore that diversity cannot be understood as a taken-for-granted urban condition that serves to guide our behavior towards others simply as positively, e.g. conviviality, and negatively, e.g. racism, but a construct that underlies more than mere physical presence of others in our everyday life. As appears, the proliferation of ‘groups’ seldom qualifies as an optimal social setting for convivial social interactions between strangers in the city. ‘Ethnic plurality’ (Nowicka and Vertovec, 2014) seems to too have its own limits.

Diversity as an Optimal Social Setting?

An afternoon at Club International on Yppenplatz¹⁸ is vibrant and young. Outdoor service area is filled mainly by Austrian and German students, and young parents with strollers out for a lunch or a coffee. This 30-year-old establishment is a ‘social club’ (Hall, 2012) that offers German language courses, living space for students and migrants, and art exhibitions among other functions it serves as a small-scale meeting space. This café space that sits adjacent to the location of an annual multicultural festival offers a local base for both in- and formal social and political activities, while catering to ‘hip’, urban, and young regulars who consume the unmistakable multicultural vibe of what one of the self-identified ‘Yugo’ waiters called ‘international café’ (Anonymous, field notes, October, 2016). At this café space that is just a stone’s throw away from the so-called ‘Balkan-mile’¹⁷, diversity – by this I mean the proliferation of ‘categories’ – is less visible, but ‘diversity’ – by this I mean the flair of ethno-normative multiculturalism – is ironically most apparent. It is where ‘diversity’ is most visibly talked about, e.g. “we are Yugos, but we run an Austrian, oh wait, an international place” (Anonymous, field notes, October, 2016); where ‘diversity’ is most visibly consumed, e.g. “get their Ćevapčići”¹⁸. It’s the best!” (Anonymous, field notes, October, 2016); where ‘diversity’ is most openly negotiated, e.g. “where are you from? Is every waitress here Croatian?” (Anonymous, field notes, October, 2016); and where differences appear to be neither tested nor sanctioned, e.g. “[jokingly to the waitress] you need to work on your grammar!” (Anonymous, field notes, October, 2016). Here, the moment of conviviality seems to derive not from mere multiplicity of differences in everyday urban life, but from the commodification of ‘diversity’ that caters to visitors to this exciting migrant, yet increasingly gentrified neighborhood. With virtually no presence of culturally and ethnically different others, the customers in Club International seem to consume diversity as a product that one can enjoy from being in this diversity-themed café space, as a young German student told me on an afternoon visit: “I love Vienna. I didn’t know how diverse Vienna was” (L, field notes, November, 2016). Lack of ostensible diversity presented by the patrons of this café space seemed to matter less, as being in this ‘hipster’ neighborhood seemed to overcome the irony of being ‘diverse’ without having diversity.

¹⁶ A neighborhood in Vienna that has lately gained reputation as an epitome of successful integration (der Standard, 2016). This neighborhood is featured by a number of integration-initiatives organized both at a private, community, city, and state-level; migrant bakeries and shops; alternative galleries; and ‘hipster’ cafés among many others. Re-branding of this multiculture-themed neighborhood, understandably, was accompanied by rapid increases in rent- and home-prices.

¹⁷ A block-away street, originally known as Ottakringerstrasse, which hosts a large number of Croatian; Serbian; Albanian; and Turkish establishments (der Standard, 2014).

¹⁸ A Yugoslavian specialty, similar to Turkish köfte, offered by most of the ethnic restaurants in the neighborhood.
Social interaction with difference at Club International prompts the question as to whether our mundane and banal contacts with difference in everyday urban life is enough to guide our convivial or racist behavior towards others, and whether the semi-public interior of café space is enough to provide a ‘sense of being at social comfort’ (Jones et al., 2015) beyond difference. It furthermore raises the question as to whether the proliferation of cultural, ethnic, and racial categories in a ‘super-diverse context’ can really be instrumental in generating cohabitation of difference, and whether the co-dwelling in close proximity is sufficient enough to have these tested and sanctioned differences ‘rendered unremarkable’ (Gilroy, 2006b). Of course, the kind of interactions that occurs at Club International tells us more about just than how encounters with difference in and informal membership to such diversity-themed space offer inter-cultural or -ethnic understanding. The reason why the multicultural flair of this particular café space appeals to ‘hip’, urban, and young customers is possibly due to the increasing gentrification in the neighborhood that, as Sharon Zukin (1998: 831) writes, “gentrifiers provided a material base for both new cultural production and consumption”. Conversely, the reason why it fails to host culturally and ethnically diverse others is possibly due to the ethno-normativity that this café space produces, e.g. waiters with a heavy Yugoslavian accent serving Ćevapčići; or the minority-status, also -victimhood, that multicultural programs organized by community-actors and activists on near-by Yppenplatz and Brunnenpassage promotes, e.g. integration-initiatives or ethnic-food; -music festivals. Differently put, this diversity-themed café space is not simply where positive reception towards difference is produced, nor where cultural and ethnic differences are come to be recognized ordinary, but, rather, where fixed boundaries of cultures and ethnicities are more strongly preserved, where exotic differences of others are commodified and consumed, and where a unilateral form of cultural exchange occurs.

19 This might explain why other ‘ethnic-theme-free’ café spaces a street down from Yppenplatz appeal more to second-generation- (Café STYXX; or Café City); or to older Serbians and Croatians (Green Bogey).
The contradictory nature of social interaction at Club International exemplifies the limit of the semi-public space, where the artificial ‘mixedness’ of cultural and ethnic difference remains insufficient to provide an inclusive space for a diverse range of city’s inhabitants. On the other hand, social interaction at Wunderbar and s’ Weckerl exemplify another limit of the semi-public spaces, where the real ‘mixedness’ of cultural and ethnic difference remains equally insufficient to provide meaningful contacts beyond individual moments, where prosaic and habitual encounter with difference at an interpersonal level fails to destabilize negative group-attitudes and -prejudice. To this flawed use of ‘mixedness’ in literature, Amin (2012, 2013) argues for a ‘dispersed sense of the plural communal’ through prosaic interactions across social and cultural divisions. This is best achieved, according to Amin, through a politics of the commons that “reinforces a sense of the communal as of and for everyone, including the stranger” (2013:7) – therefore, ‘mutual awareness’ towards ‘progressive social forces’ against the biopolitical machinery that fixes certain differences as undesirable and that locates strangers in the city in the social hierarchy. Amin elucidates that collaboration between strangers in a ‘common activity’ can foster prosaic negotiation of each other’s difference, which, in turn, facilitate ‘moments of cultural destabilization’. This is said to occur mostly at the ‘micro-publics’ of everyday life, where people with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are encouraged to step out of ‘fixed relations and fixed notions’ (Amin, 2002), and learn a new way of relating to and identifying with others. Prosaic interaction at the ‘micro-publics’ for a politics of the common, however, leaves an important issue unanswered. As exemplified in the aforementioned findings, it is apparent that there exist different types of social interaction in each of the café spaces; that the patrons of each space engage with others with different intentions and in different manners; and that the semi-public interior offered by each space appear to provide contrasting atmospheres. This raises the question of the heterogeneity of café spaces, and that of the ‘types of encounters (that) are sought’ (Valentine, 2008) in each space, because, as a Chinese adage would have it: ‘they’re in the same bed, but with different dreams’.

In Conclusion
Three café spaces visited for this research are all unique from one another. Because their locations vary, it’s not surprising that the kind of customers they attract too varies. Because the kind of customers they attracts vary, it’s not surprising that the kind of interactions that occur in each café space appears too distinct from one another. This heterogeneity of café spaces calls into question of, as Valentine (2008: 332) writes, “which types of encounters are sought, and by whom and which are avoided, and by whom”. It is evident that interactions that happen in café spaces appear differently to varying degrees, and are also engaged differently by different customers. As exemplified in encounters with difference at Club International, it is apparent that different individuals and groups look for particular experiences with others and, in turn, the particular setting of this café space enables, in this case, purchase and consumption of ‘diversity’. I must note that this was very different at Wunderbar, where the owner’s brother flatly refused another costumer’s request to play Yugoslavian ‘Turbo-Folk’ on one evening (B, field notes, January, 2017). In spite of the ostensible diversity that dominates the semi-public interior of this café space, it seemed certain differences remained yet tested and sanctioned, possibly because ‘Yugo-ness’ that the act of playing ‘Turbo-Folk’ was not the kind of experience that this downtown café space offered; that the regulars and international youngsters looked for; or that the owner’s brother of Yugoslavian decent could afford.

In this paper, I sought to revisit the concept of conviviality in relation to social interaction between strangers in the city in café spaces. From my regular visits to three different café spaces in different neighborhoods in Vienna, Austria, I aimed to explore daily encounters with difference that occur in these respective semi-public spaces in different geographies that are inhabited by different customer-groups. Contrary to the standpoint of diversity-conscious convivial literature, my findings questioned whether cultural and ethnic ‘mixedness’ in café space can be assumed as a taken-for-granted urban condition that guides our behavior towards others, as some suggest, both convivial and racist. Different ‘faces’ of encounters witnessed in my café spaces, however, prompts the question of in how far our encounters with difference at an interpersonal level can influence over our negative attitudes and prejudice towards cultural, ethnic, and racial others. I would like to once more stress that our interactions with others in café space seem not merely determined by multiplicity of ‘groups’ in super-diverse urban life – therefore, no simple multi-presence between
conviviality and racism. On the contrary, our daily encounters with difference in café spaces, or in other similar semi-public spaces, involves two different levels of interactions between the co-occupants, namely, at an individual level – performed within the rules of ‘not-so-positive’ civil inattention, and at a group level – featured by persistent prejudice towards differences of others. As I pointed out, this is perhaps, because interpersonal interactions that are performed within the rules of civil inattention are guided by a mere mode of being-in-public, and it is possibly the very reason why interpersonal interactions – whether convivial or racist – can rarely translate into positive group-experiences beyond individual moments of encounters with difference.

Bibliography


(Saccessed on 05 March 2017).


