

'Busy Meeting Grounds'

The café, the scene and the business

Paper for "ICT: mobilizing persons, places and spaces
An International Specialist Meeting On ICT, Everyday Life and Urban
Change", Utrecht, November, 2004.

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Part of the 'the Cappuccino Community: cafés and civic life in the
contemporary city'.

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Of cafes, computers and carrying work around

I spend a lot of my time working in cafés amidst an ambience of half-heard conversations, half-seen faces, arrivals, departures and the screeching of steam wands heating milk for lattes. The idea for the research project ‘the Cappuccino Community: cafés and civic life in the contemporary city’¹ that the ESRC are currently kindly funding came out of my and Chris Philo’s experience of working together in a café near the university. Several parts of the application form were written and discussed in that same café amongst friends gossiping, regulars reading newspapers and students preparing essays. I feel reasonably confident that at least parts of the reading and writing of the papers we will be dealing with in this workshop were done in cafés. University research and cafes have a longstanding and fruitful relationship.



Image 1 – Business at Button’s Coffee House from 18th Century

It is not just university researchers that work in cafés of course, from their very outset cafés have been places of work for many others (Oldenberg 1997).

Lloyds Insurance of London, famously, began in a coffee house and only later acquired office buildings of its own. To do our work we transport documents, forms, books and diaries and of course various people into the café. And these days when I go to a café I bring my laptop and my mobile phone. I tell myself I ought to get a wireless card for my laptop so that I can connect to the

café’s Wi Fi hotspot. As often as I work on my Powerbook I work on printed-off documents with a pen or catch up on reading an article or browse the newspaper.

A decade ago futurologists predicted that the ‘information superhighway’ would lead people to *substitute* their highway, flyway and railway journeys with video conferencing, instant messaging, internet shopping, banking, e-commerce and e-mail. High street shops would wither as Amazon prospered. The mistake was to place too much emphasis on substitution, as if sending a get-well card would be a substitute for a hospital visit with a bunch of flowers. Things, I think, are rather different with Wi Fi and the variety of other forms of ubiquitous computing, now widely available, which have allowed us to transport an assortment of media with less effort than ever before. So we still do the same journey but can carry more, and, with less work involved in carrying then we undertake further journeys without exhausting ourselves.

¹ More info available at: <http://web.geog.gla.ac.uk/~elaurier/>

To provide this portability requires the steady and patient transformation of various analogue items into digital form. And not all things can undergo such transformations. Nevertheless on my laptop I can carry my diary, my address book, several hundred downloaded articles, all my previous publications, the majority of my correspondence, grant application forms, an offline version of my website, a thousand or more photos, some of my favourites records, a few episodes of a TV show... In other words in my shoulder bag I can carry a large proportion of my office and study which in paper form and as vinyl LPs and video-cassettes would have filled a small van. How odd, really, to imagine that if academics could carry their libraries with them in a shoulder bag that they would travel less? Did the futurologists who predicted this have someone else carrying their books to school for them?

Increasing levels of mobility, nevertheless, remain a fascinating domain for us, not necessarily in terms of explaining them or predicting future levels of car or train travel. They are fascinating in terms of what people are actually up to, how they get up to these things between origin and destination (A & B) and, in terms of this paper, how certain places become loci for actors on the move. As the call notes there have been plenty of studies of where people are travelling to and their reasons for travelling, whether it be to collect children from school or commute to work or go shopping. Glen Lyons and John Urry's have begun a substantial research project in the UK on the activities people do while travelling which I'm sure Glen will talking about at the workshop². There have been precious few transport studies that take seriously what it is we do while travelling and the places that travellers use while still between A and B (Brown and O'Hara 2003; O'Hara et al. 2002; Orr 1996; Katz 1999; Vesterlind 2003; Thrift 2004)³.

With forms, articles, photos and so on having gotten so light could we just really work anywhere? The intercity train, yes, but in a tree or in a football stadium during a game or standing pressed against four other passengers on a peak-time underground train? How absurd of course, the world is not like that! It is minutely, infinitely richly organised into classes of places (Crabtree 2000; Carlin 2003) and times of day: houses, schools, bus-stops and cocktail bars – off-peak, lunch-time, midnight, rush-hour (McHoul 1990; Glennie and Thrift 2002; Laurier 2003) which predicate appropriate and expectable activities. It is also minutely and indexically organised by each and every one of us into *my* house, *your* house, *this* bus-stop, *the* cocktail bar at Sheraton New York and so on. Let us pause for a moment though at cafés in general and consider their rise and rise in the UK, USA and related Anglo-phone countries.

² Figures from a recent briefing by John Urry: “The scale of contemporary travelling is immense. Internationally there are over 700 million legal passenger arrivals each year (compared with 25 million in 1950) with a predicted 1 billion by 2010; there are 4 million air passengers each day; there are 31 million refugees worldwide; there is one car for every 8.6 people; and ‘travel and tourism’ is the largest industry in the world (11.7% of world GDP). In Britain people are physically travelling on average 2.5 times further than in the 1960s with this expected to double again by 2025. British citizens currently make on average around 1000 journeys a year, spending about 360 hours a year travelling. One half of British adults took an air flight during 2001.”

³ Chris Philo, my co-researcher on the café research project, once took a train from Glasgow to London and back again, a journey of almost twelve hours, to give himself uninterrupted time to read a PhD thesis. His journey was from A to A. An example which perhaps help us see that we have to be careful about assuming the importance of having a destination when examining the use of transport and its places.

Perhaps the best introduction to cafés in general is Ray Oldenberg's (1997) *The Great Good Place*. He is the sociologist who apparently coined the phrase, 'the third place', being a place between work and home where we can meet members of the community outside of either the restrictions of work roles or the responsibilities of family. The 'third place' is a term that echoes Habermas's social history of the rise of the public sphere (Habermas 1989) and Mannheim's thoughts on cafés and the rise of democracy. These great, good places to get away from work are clearly *also* good workplaces for certain kinds of workers besides being workplaces themselves for the café staff. To Oldenberg's dismay (see the intro to his latest edition) Starbucks has borrowed his ideas and called themselves the 'third place' and at the same time have become the most visible high street brand of 'globalisation' with some 6000 stores worldwide (1500 outside the USA). Starbucks is vilified by the grand critical theorists of sociology and geography and of course, famously, by Naomi Klein (2000). New technologies of surveillance of both staff & customers, ever fiercer competition for space on the high street against local independents, marketing and mediatisation offering the best channels yet for the spread of globalisation (in the form of Starbucks) to each and every corner of the world. What I think is a more enlightening way of approaching Starbucks is not to treat their rise as inevitable, invidious and powered by globalisation but rather to consider it as contingent and requiring local adjustment to particular places to get it to work. Starbucks managers are full of talk of the specificity of their store, its particular customers, their predictable rushes, particular purchasing patterns and how they adjust accordingly while still doing their best to enrol customers locally as loyal.⁴ At the moment Starbucks is puzzling over how it might set up its stores in Italy where espresso based drinks are already of a consistently high standard, cheap and ubiquitous. One solution is to start with sites where the clientele will be tourists from the USA. The tourists then are part of what Starbucks uses for its success that have already been transported there to (finally I can squeeze in...) to find themselves amongst a familiar crowd in Dean Maccannell's 'Empty Meeting Grounds'.

Globalisation is the macro-explanation for social change in the form of increasing dominance by a totalising 'system' around the world par excellence, the license for all manner of social theories that might elegantly model this organising network of the age (Manuell Castell's monumental 'Network Society' for instance). Yet when anthropologists such as Danny Miller and Don Slater, with less over-arching theories to produce, go look at the internet in Trinidad they find that it is continuous with the spaces of Trinidad and can in no way be separated off. It does not arrive as a pure force descending on to a purely 'social' Trinidad (Miller and Slater 2000), its emergence is patchy in local pockets of order that are filamentally connected together. When geographers do fieldwork in internet cafés they find that the free-floating internet promised by virtuality is being made to work and is being made sense of locally (Wakeford 2003; Lægran 2003). They find no macro and no micro, only displacements sideways and more or less connections. While the internet is characterised as somehow 'everywhere', and yet, in some places such as Nepal with a minimal telephone network and postal system, it is *only* in internet cafés where they have a collection of modems that you can go find it. And if you go find it for the first time in an internet café, then it is the staff and other users *there, on hand*, who will instruct you in how to do searches on the web, fill in forms and send email in ways that are tailored to that place and your skills and purposes.

⁴ We hope to write more on the local accomplishment of Starbucks in a future paper.

This brings us to further appreciations of the café as a place, it is not only a place where we can do certain parts of certain jobs, it is a place where there are other people around who under certain auspices, particularly when we are travelling away from home that we can look to for help in learning how things work around here (Latham 2003; Rabinow 1977). That the web and email are in this place, though in a specific form, as Bruno Latour (1983) noted of laboratories the notion of inside/outside the cafe is irrelevant. Cafés are, like laboratories and factories, successful through their connections to other actors, their proliferation, the ways in which various actors find themselves diverted via them and their alliance with ‘espresso’⁵. In Central London there are around about one thousand cafés & in Edinburgh, where I live, around three hundred and there around about eight thousand coffee houses in the UK (Allegra-Strategies 2004). As a stopping off place for the mobile, then, there are plenty about, though of course their crowds and your relation to them vary and whether you would select them as a good place for stopping off... (Laurier and Philo 2004)

‘scenes’

As cities are increasingly expected to have ‘buzz’, to be ‘creative’, and to generally bring forth powers of invention and intuition, all of which can be forged into economic weapons, so the active engineering of the affective register of cities has been highlighted as the harnessing of the talent of transformation. Cities must exhibit intense expressivity. (Thrift 2004: 58)

Having spent a little time reminding ourselves how easy ICTs have made it to take work in the café and how ICTs have in parallel come to be located in cafés, let us now turn to features of cafés that draw us to them beyond cheap internet access. Good coffee, as a certain sort of urban stimulation and intoxication, is one of them. The buzz, of course, is another, as a certain living phenomenon of the setting (Garfinkel 2002). The chairs, the sofas, sturdy tables, warmth in the winter, a spot on the pavement in the summer and a re-assuring greeting if we become a regular (Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2001). We have written a little before on the different crowd that we can identify and relate to in another paper, and this definitely has relevance for where we take our work and whether we think our class of person can work here. In this paper we would like to think about the ‘scene’.

While the ‘scene’ is something we tend to associate with musicians (the jazz scene in certain Paris cafés or New York bars) or writers (Dorothy Parker and her circle at the Algonquin Hotel (Blum 2003)) there are all kinds of other professions that have some sort of ‘scene’. Andy Pratt’s (2002) work on new media companies and urban quarters examined how Netscape Communications, Macromedia and Wired Magazine set up together in South Market (SoMa), San Francisco⁶. This new media scene was not simply about co-location. It was about the public places that the new media workers could hang out in. In the cafés, bars and restaurants of SoMa the members of this scene purposefully

⁵ Where Latour surprises us by revealing that facts cannot circulate without laboratories, there is perhaps less surprise in noting that cappuccino cannot circulate without cafés. There is still profit though in the description of the craft skills with specific machines that go into making coffee of a consistent quality that will make customers come back for more.

⁶ Danny Miller and Don Slater found a similar scene amongst the web site developers in Trinidad though bound up with certain internet cafés there and bars.

meet up, bump into one another in a small-world way and, in passing, see who went where, who was with who and what they were doing⁷. The cafés are one of the key places where a newcomer can find the scene, where we can see the scene, be seen by its members and try and join in. This is perhaps reminiscent, once again, of what may have been the ‘insurance’ scene in Hogarth’s London, where a bunch of the innovative business people of the time, hung around and came up with a new form of finance and investment called ‘insurance.’

... many anecdotal and ethnographic descriptions of coterie and social circles throughout history provide vivid detail while leaving the question of the scene unformulated. Political economy ignores scenes as a phenomenon by treating them externally as occasions of exploitation or false consciousness (Zukin 1997), that is, as markets and nothing more, and, while there is some commentary on scenes as occasions on which ecstatic outbursts of “tribal” consciousness are affirmed (Maffesoli 1996), there has been no attempt to theorize the scene as a social formation; there have been tendencies either to criticize its pretentiousness or to celebrate its liminality. Certainly, the claim to exclusiveness of the scene is saturated with pretension, and its fervor often appears to celebrate passion at the cost of discipline. Blum 2003 p164.

Alan Blum (2003) is the social analyst who has best described the grammar of the scene. Following his formulation, they are settings where the theatricality of life is intensified and that each scene, be it new media, gambling, raves or hedge funds is located in cities to varying degrees (e.g. Las Vegas, Monaco for gambling) and circulates at varying speeds from place to place. Even for the most legitimate of scenes its whereabouts are something of a mystery to those who are not its members. For its members the scene requires that they be not merely idle onlookers but in some way participants that want the scene to go on existing. A commitment to the scene is necessary since, as Blum reminds us, scenes are also volatile, effervescent and deeply mortal.

In Nina Wakeford’s recent study of independent internet cafés in London she found that ‘The independent cafés in the current study do not orientate themselves around a ‘cybervibe’ or this early version of internet culture’ (Wakeford 2003: 382), hinting at the death of the ‘cyber’ scene. Her internet cafes were attended by ‘chatters’ and ‘checkers’ having the cafés rooted into their surrounding neighbourhoods, usually off the ‘virtual map’ since they did not bother to register on any of the online indexes of cybercafes. From one perspective we can note that the explosion of branded cappuccino café chains such as Starbucks and Caffe Nero have become a weak form of ‘scene’ across the UK in terms of being very ‘now’, very ‘in, in a way that opens them to one day being very ‘new millennium’ or 2000s one day and ‘out’ (a fate suffered by the first wave of cappuccino cafés that were associated with the Beat Scene and Swinging London in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s (Maddox 2003)). At the same time, as the reference to the Beat Scene reminds us, the new cappuccino cafés stage scenes as well being a scene themselves.

From a Latourian (2003) perspective on the visible life of cities we can note that scenes are at their most vibrant as their circulation is at its most intense. We find people leaving where they live, be it moving from one city to another, or simply changing to another

⁷ Douglas Coupland’s novel ‘microserfs’ is full of the kind of observability and analysis done by members of a corporation not unlike Microsoft in a place not unlike Seattle. A manager monitoring whose cars were still in the car park outside which offices at what late or early hours. Seeing the Head of X talking the assistant programmer for Y in a bar.

quarter, or even just commuting, to try and get involved in a scene. The scene itself shifts, sometimes from city to city (the Manchester dance scene dies and the rave scene emerges elsewhere), sometimes from venue to venue. The Seattle café scene, for instance, spread on the back of Starbucks and several other companies across North America and Northern Europe transforming itself as it did so and arguably losing touch with its Seattle and, even Milanese roots (Raffel 2003).

During the fieldwork for ‘the Cappuccino Community’ project I spent some time working in a café set up adjoining an international bank Merrill Lynch. For some time the bank had been redesigning its interior to, in various ways, dismantle the traditional space of the office, trying hot desking and several semi-open areas with a bar like set of high tables and high chairs. It seemed to me that the bank had realised there were limits on informalising its interior and that having a café share its buildings and encouraging its staff to have meetings there was an attempt to foster a scene. Business was moving back into the café scene, two hundred years later, reversing the shift away from the café made by Lloyds of London. I will expand in a moment on how leaving the office to go to the café is an occasion for helping do certain parts of the job.

What sort of work gets done in the café that doesn’t get done in the office?

There is an important distinction to be made between the many celebrations, examinations and investigations of the café from the perspective of the lone writer (be they a novelist, journalist or academic (and Blum is no exception here) and a team of workers from the same office going to a café together⁸. In an interview with ‘David’ who works for an international firm in the City of London provides a lovely account of how his firm uses its nearby cafés (a Starbucks, a Costa, a Caffé Nero and an independent):

-----**(Interview excerpt⁹, London, 2004)**

D: If you want to have a casual chat with somebody, or if you’re meeting people and you don’t want to go through all the rigmarole of bringing them into the office and putting them through all the security, you often just go and meet them at Starbucks.

Mid-morning or mid-afternoon when you don’t think the Starbucks will be particularly busy you nip down there for coffee and an informal meeting. So, generally informal meetings, not formal meetings, go on in Starbucks.

So you will go down, you might even take your notebook with you. You go in and sit down, you grab your coffee and you sit at one of the tables and you look around and you’ll see other people doing exactly the same thing. So it’s kind of a meeting room which is free effectively, other than the coffee.

⁸ In terms of the ways in which cafés are related to work there are still more ways of inhabiting them. Our study came across many examples of travelling salespeople who have meetings with clients and take out their laptops to show powerpoint presentations on them. Or of meetings between a photographer and advertiser where they switched back and forth between paper and laptop.

⁹ Interviews were one of several methodologies (e.g. participant-observation, workplace study, literary analysis and naturalistic video-recording) for gathering information for the ‘Cappuccino Community’ project.

The layout is important. Obviously it depends on the type of meeting, if they've got tables with four chairs round that's perfect really for a more formal meeting. Or alternatively you don't want to get into the couch situation unless it's a personnel thing or a one-on-one. Also there's the stools up against the window as well."

Q: You were telling me before that you had a theory about the tone of the meeting. If it were a confidential one you would go to the back?

D: Yeah that's probably true. Whoever's running the meeting will decide where you are going to sit and it gives you a big clue (laughs). Cause if you're sitting up at the window, you're probably blue-skying a bit. If it's the comfortable chairs it's going to be confidential and if it's the regular tables then it's just a straightforward business chat.

Q: And who gets to buy the round?

D: Yeah, generally it'll be the senior guy there who'll go up and he sets the agenda. So he'll choose where you're sitting. And then you'll all sit down. Then he'll go up, and you can go up with him, then you can tell from what he's ordering what kind of situation you're in for.

Q: You take visitors but also your own staff?

D: Yeah. It's good because it's just a change in scene which puts people at their ease, so you get more out of people and they can actually pay more attention. One of the things that our trainers always talk about is energy levels and how it's important during the working day to shake things up a little. It's quite easy for people to sit behind a desk and wait for five and even have their lunch at the computer and that's not particularly healthy or good for them or good for you.

Q: And do people take laptops down with them?

D: No, not laptops that would be too much. You just take a notepad. We might take a few bits of paper printed out and we all just pour over it and then take notes. That type of thing. We use it for trading meetings. A lot of the time it's about more out-of-the-box stuff. You're saying 'what are we going to do about this position here and what does everybody think.' I mean it's good for that. I would say it's more blue-sky meetings, or feedback meetings or personnel meetings. A little bit out of the daily meetings, the $X + Y = Z$. Rather than let's review this financial position or review this, it would be that, it would be let's sit back and think generally, 'what should we be doing?'

Nearby cafés, then, have become inextricably linked to the ways in which work is done in this London firm and by many others. They have become an extension of places where firms do business, as was suggested in the Merrill Lynch example. David formulates their purpose as providing a change of scene. The surprise here is perhaps that unlike myself and other lone workers (Brown and O'Hara 2003), employees of large firms do not take *not* take their PDAs and laptops when they are in Wi Fi enabled cafés. Going to the café, as a change in scene, is an opportunity to switch the computer off, get some fresh air and fresh ideas. Current corporate management training encourages managers to take their team 'outside' and cafés are one of the obvious places to go. Yet of course their very

obviousness is a sign of both their centrality to the situation and the lack of notice we now pay to their specificity, orderliness and uses.

In a curious way there are, for groups who want to have a meeting, less distraction and interruptions in the café than in the office. There are the minor disruptions of table-finding, ordering coffee and the interruptions from babies crying, police sirens, the table being cleared. There are, on the other hand, no consequential knocks at the door, secretaries summoning or email clients tweeting as fresh correspondence arrives. A laptop would be 'too much' since the emphasis is on the contrast to the office. With its multitude of lines of external communication the office has got too many incoming demands and tasks. The café though a public place is disconnected from the day-to-day busy-ness of business in the firm's office. It is, as he says in business parlance, a place for thinking out-of-the-box and blue-skying. A place for the members of the firm to speak about their work reflectively.



Photo 1: Office group in café

As David notes, cafés are used to set specific tones for a meeting by, as he says, the choice of seating and moreover by the selection of which sort of café in the first place for a meeting. Where choosing different ambiances for meeting rooms inside the firm's office to set tones for the discussions to follow would really be a pretentious or potentially alarming thing to do, the selection of a café allows such things to be done in a

more low key manner. In another part of the interview David noted how there was a particularly quiet café that was a fairly long walk out the back door of the office that would be used for particularly sensitive meetings where every word needed to be heard.

Boden's (1994) wonderful book on meetings 'the Business of Talk' developed some preliminary analysis of how the potentially mind-boggling complexity of multi-party conversation that forms business meetings is ordered using conversational devices such as next-speaker selection techniques, standardised openings and closings. Whoever occupies the position of 'chair' has certain obligations such as opening the meeting, initiating and closing each item on an agenda. While the endogenous features of formal meetings such as 'the chair', 'the minute secretary', 'agenda', 'items', 'reports', 'queries' all provide resources to get the work done in the meeting that should be done within practical time limits, they of course put limits on who is allowed to speak next. Under ideal conditions the meeting should also never devolve into a series of one-on-one conversations because at such a point its business can no longer be done. This raises problems since some matters ought to be handled one-to-one and Boden has familiar examples of how such conversations are tagged on at the end of meetings.

David notes that in the café the sofas provide tools for splitting up the group to have 'personnel' and potentially sensitive conversations (as he put it elsewhere 'I wouldn't want to put this in writing but...') It need not be anything so sensitive, it can simply be that who sits beside who compared to a board-room can re-arranged. Breaking down the multi-party situation can be done quite naturally such as when one person asks an other

or two others 'let me get you coffee' or equally the senior person asks does anyone want a coffee. In this way a senior figure who might otherwise end up permanently as the 'chair' during a meeting can escape having to address the whole team and just be part of a three-way or two-way conversation. Equally the conversational topics can range further off-topic than they would with an agenda. Junior figures who might never speak at a formal meeting find themselves sat next to the senior figure. It is of course not all happenstance, what David brings out is that a certain skilled purposefulness remains in these café visits since the etiquette is for the senior person to 'treat' everyone but in doing so to also give clues by their suggested drinks as to the tone of the meeting.



Photo 2: Sofa and one-to-one business

There are a bunch of business operations which also utilise cafés and restaurants, the classic is of course a sly 'hiring' meeting which is not done at either office. As Sacks (1992: 126-136) notes the mere presence of certain persons with other persons in a public place is a basis for characterising what they could be doing. Another 'personnel' task that cafés and restaurants are used for in the City of London is firing employees. Notionally it prevents employees from stealing company files or trashing data while clearing their desk. It may be tied to more subtle moves where the surrounding customers provide a form of protection during firing. An employee cannot turn to them and shout 'look what bastard is doing to us!' looking for support from persons as fellow employees, though they could of course toss a piping hot latte in the face of their firer.

When face-to-face interaction is prioritised by various persons critical of ICT's it is seen as somehow being about its 'warmth' or of its foundational relation to human communication. In other words, 'face-to-face' is the 'best' or the 'richest' form of communication. If we approach this another way and ask what kind of things are we morally judged for failing to do face-to-face, which may or may not lie in the richness of the interaction, then we return to the issue of hiring and firing, of offering a person position to work with you as a colleague or client and equally of severing that relationship. It is then that you might need to travel a long way on the basis of the thing that you have to do to someone, rather than because you believe in the superiority of face-to-face conversation.

((More? - Blum and the 'spot', relationship to place. Straying across other scenes. 'Changing' scenes.))

Concluding remarks

What I have tried to do here is note how developments in ubiquitous computing have allowed many more work related items to be transported into cafés than ever before. Branded espresso cafés have been booming in the USA, UK and elsewhere I noted some

of the trends that have been associated with this boom. General explanations such as time-space convergence were lightly critiqued via the internet café and its part in localising and embedding. The internet café itself was noted to be a 'scene' from the 1990s that in its 'cybervibe' is now almost dead, though it has been reinvented in interesting ways as a neighborhood resources for migrants, tourists and those without PC and modem access at home (Wakeform, Laegran).

Scenes were examined in terms of their relationship to parts of the ICT industry such as new media in SoMa (Pratt) and more analytically in terms of its theatricality, visibility, slight exclusiveness, its need for commitment and its passing away. As such the scene should not collapsed into either a marketplace, a place of 'rational' conversation (see also Philo and Laurier 2004), pure pretentiousness nor liberating between-ness (e.g. the 'third place'). Cafés have an interesting relationship to the scene, then, as being part of one at the moment and as ongoing hosts of various scenes over the last two hundred years. They are one of the key places, like Latour's/Pasteur's laboratory (Latour 1988 (orig. 1984)) is for the spread of facts, that allow for the circulation of scenes. They are thus stages where a community of practice is visible to itself and other communities.

Finally we began to re-examine the café as a change of scene for the international firm's office. Our interest in that section was on the café, to use a Sacksian idiom, as a device, which could be used to do various parts of business such as setting the tone, allowing a senior employee to have a one-on-one with a junior employee or to treat her employees or give them space to reflect on larger problems facing their community.

In contrast to the many accounts of private life in public that note the potential loneliness of the individual as a modern malaise, Blum notes that the being alone in places like cafés is not a loss but a part of the profit of privacy in public. He has a wonderful quote "As important as finding people you have things in common with is learning to live in pleasure alongside people you don't" (Gopnik 2000). What cafés and other gathering places of the mobile raise for us is also how the group together can show itself as a group in public and have the intimacy of its business discussed in the presence of other groups some of whom have nothing to do with business at all.

Acknowledgements

This paper arises out of empirical and conceptual material related to the 'Cappuccino Community: cafes and civic life in the contemporary city'. ESRC grant (R000239797). The anonymous interviewees and participants in the project. Chris Philo

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