

**Coffee and Wi-Fi: An ethnographic examination of the 'sociability' of people, objects and infrastructure in independent cafes**

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## Introduction

In the past decade, the United Kingdom has seen an increase of Wi-Fi access in public spaces with the Office for National Statistics reporting that 58 per cent of British adults accessed the Internet 'on the go' – that is accessing the Internet in non-work and non-home environments (Office for National Statistics, 2013). One category of public space that provides Wi-Fi access is cafes. This provision of Wi-Fi has seen café patrons bring their own digital devices such as laptops, smartphones and tablets into the café. Previous ethnographies and articles about cafes ranging from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Habermas, 1989) through the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Laurier et al, 2001. Wakeford, 2003) all pinpoint the café as a place of 'sociability', that is a place where egalitarian interaction and conversation takes place (Ellis, 2008: 158)

But how has the introduction of Wi-Fi and digital devices to the café environment changed this sense of sociability? Are patrons using digital devices in the café simply being sociable in the digital public sphere, rather than their immediate, physical public sphere (Habermas, 1989: 31-42)?

To examine these questions, I conducted a multimodal ethnography of an independent café in Manchester, United Kingdom in June and July 2013. My intention with this ethnography was to draw on Actor-Network theory and treat the café as an ecosystem of people (Laurier et al., 2001 and Wakeford, 2003), objects (Latour, 1992: 153-160) and infrastructure (Star, 1999: 379), all of which impact on the sociability of the space.

This dissertation explores the theories behind conducting qualitative research of people, objects and infrastructure. It then describes the methodologies and ethics of conducting a multimodal ethnography including observations, interviews and digital methods. It includes the technical elements required to conduct a digital ethnography alongside observations and interviews in the field.

And finally, the findings from the research will explain how the café is an ecosystem of people, objects and infrastructure that work together to impact the sense of 'sociability' in the café environment.

## Literature Review

### Origins of café sociability: Habermas and the 17<sup>th</sup> century coffee house

Café environments are said to have an inherent ‘sociability’ to them, that is a disposition of being a place to interact, discuss and socialise with others. They are ‘characterised most notably by their conversation’ (Ellis, 2008)

In understanding the café in terms of its place in society and of its implied sociability, we must first look to Habermas and his writing on the *Institutions of the Public Sphere* (1989: 31-43) for his description of coffee houses established in seventeenth century London.

Habermas details the establishment of coffee houses as ‘centers of criticism – literary at first, then also political – in which began to emerge, between aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals, a certain parity of the educated.’ (Habermas, 1989: 32) He cites the establishment of coffee houses and other meeting places such as salons as a bridging step between the private realms of family and society and; the public, yet inaccessible realms of the state and court. Habermas (1989: 30) asserts that coffee houses were a middle ground where men from different backgrounds and socio-economic statuses could meet and discuss literature, economics and politics on equal footing. According to Ellis (2008: 157), the hallmarks of sociability in an historical London coffee house were ‘egalitarianism, congeniality and conversation’.

By the early 1700s, London had 3000 coffee houses teeming with discussions (Habermas, 1989: 32). As Habermas explains (1989: 42), these coffee houses were places of vibrant discussion of articles and opinions published in periodical journals. The journals influenced discussions amongst the coffee house, so much so, a coffee house at the time included a letterbox where coffee house patrons could post their Letter to the Editor to be considered for publication.

Ellis (2008: 158) describes the coffee house of the early 1700s to be 'dominated by a long central table, around which the customers assembled. The men depicted in surviving images are shown drinking coffee, of course, but also smoking their pipes, reading news-sheets and books, writing in their notebooks and staring off into space'. Habermas notes that the coffee house had liminality in that it was a public sphere in a private space where 'individual people can come together in a space that is intimate and thus private, but also open, and thus public' (paraphrased by Ellis 2008: 161). The eighteenth century coffee house also functioned without rules; rather it had its own set of social norms that were learned by regular patrons. An ignorance of such unspoken customs, branded a patron as a newcomer or out-of-towner, opening them up to light-hearted mockery.

Although the coffee house culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries died out in Great Britain due to an increased trade focus with tea producing countries like India and China (Ellis, 1956), the ideas surrounding sociability and the public sphere, still remain relevant in examining cafes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With a resurgence of cafes in the United Kingdom due to the third wave or specialty coffee movement, it is important to explore whether the coffee house sociability has been retained in independent cafes. A report by consultancy firm Allegra Strategies stated that in December 2012 there were 5,633 independent cafes in compared to 5,225 branded outlets, that is, coffee chains such as Starbucks (The Times, 2013). Further, many of these independent cafes offer free Wi-Fi for their patrons. This means that patrons have the ability to bring their own digital devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphone to the café and work online from the café. One focus of my research will be exploring how the use of Wi-Fi and these digital devices has impacted on the sociability of independent cafes in present-day Britain.

#### Examining café sociability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Although it is important to include Habermas' view of seventeenth and eighteenth cafés as a view of the public sphere as it establishes the foundation of

our academic understanding of cafes, it is equally important to skip forward in time to examine recent academic work surrounding cafes in the United Kingdom. In comparison to Habermas' description of the part seventeenth century cafes played in society, work in modern cafes centre more on how actors regulate the café space and interact with it.

From an epistemological standpoint, I have chosen to look at Laurier, Whyte and Buckner's body of work in neighbourhood cafes in Scotland (2001: 195 - 223) and Wakeford's accounts of Internet cafes in South London's migrant communities (2003: 379 - 396) to examine some of the issues and observations uncovered in their work to consider in the development of methodologies. Laurier et al.'s work covers the formation of informal, unspoken rules in neighbourhood cafes (2001: 207 – 210). In addition, their work looks at how patrons gain the agency to become considered to be 'regulars' and how they exercise that agency. In contrast, Wakeford examines Internet cafes, where the main purpose is to access computing and connectivity. However, she examines both the social relationships formed within these independent Internet cafes and, the relationship the Internet cafes foster within their respective local communities.

These two pieces of work give some background of how modern cafes work and how patrons operate in public places where the Internet is accessed.

Laurier et al. (2001) conducted an observation of a neighbourhood café and noted the unspoken rules regulations of patrons entering the space and participating in the space. Laurier et al. describe how regulars gain their agency in the café by learning the unspoken rules and local knowledges over repeated visits. These rules and knowledges could include the process for ordering; their ability to bend the rules with their privileged 'regular' status; who the regulars and staff are along with some of their background details; key menu items; location of the toilets (2001: 219). These local knowledges give 'regulars' the agency to act with confidence in the space.



Laurier et al. note that table selection acts as an indication of how sociable a patron is likely to be in place. 'For customers who wish to remain solitary during potentially busy periods in the café, the two smaller 2-seater tables could be chosen in preference to the larger 4-seater tables since table sharing was less easy to accomplish at 2-seater tables.' (2001: 210)

Wakeford's study of two independent Internet cafes in London describes how the spaces presented themselves as 'places to access the Internet' and 'places of sociability' (2003: 388). She details how the Internet cafes use décor and signage to attract customers to come in and purchase Internet access. The listing of services on the café exterior and the placement of the payment area near the entrance reminds patrons of the key purpose the Internet café serves. Far from being an environment where patrons kept to themselves, Wakeford (2003: 390) describes a category of regular patrons as 'chatters', who would interact with staff and other patrons. Partially by design and partially due to the relative immovability of computing infrastructure at the time, the layout of the café did not afford patrons much privacy. Their screens were visible to staff and other patrons. It was noted that privacy was not a concern for most patrons, even though they were often carrying out personal activities on the computers.

In the decade since Wakeford's study we have seen greater portability in computing devices. This, combined with a proliferation of public Wi-Fi connectivity has seen a shift in how we access the Internet in public spaces. One category of public space to offer free Wi-Fi has been local neighbourhood cafes such as those described by Laurier et al. The modern independent café of 2013 combines the social norms of Laurier et al's café along with the connectivity to others afforded by Internet cafés. In order to gain a sense of this shift in dynamic in the café, I will observe people (both staff and patrons), objects (digital devices) and infrastructure (electricity and Wi-Fi). In order to understand how objects and infrastructure can be considered within ethnography, I will refer to Latour (1992) and Star (1999).

## Digital devices as actants

*We should not be afraid to view technology as an active agency in the social world* (Miller and Slater, 2000: 193)

On the surface, it may seem odd to use actor-network theory as both an epistemology and a methodology to frame research into the social life within cafes where both patrons and staff use digital devices. However, as Miller and Slater have noted above, we should not downplay or be fearful of technology's role in the social world. It is helpful to use actor-network theory's idea of human and non-human actants having equal value and influence to best understand how devices and infrastructure influence humans. To best convey the use of actor-network theory as an epistemology for the fieldwork, I will be primarily referring to Bruno Latour's "*Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts*" (in Bijker and Law, 1992: 151-175)

Latour (1992: 159 - 163) explains the role of non-humans in actor-network theory by using anthropomorphism as an analogy. He cites the example of a broken automatic door at his workplace to show that this non-human door does the job a human porter or doorman would do by ensuring the door was opened for someone and then shut once the person had entered or exited in order to keep out unwanted elements such as weather, animals or strangers.

Latour goes on to acknowledge that the tendency to anthropomorphise these non-human objects in such a way is controversial. It 'is considered by sociologists as a scandalous breach of natural barriers... this is only seen as a "projection," as they say, of a human behaviours onto a nonhuman, cold, technical object, one by nature impervious to any feeling.' (Latour, 1992: 159-160)

Writing from a technologist perspective, he defends his tendency to anthropomorphise technology because the etymology of the very word

anthropomorphise means 'that which has human shape'. In the process of carrying out my fieldwork and detailing my findings I will rely on anthropomorphisms and other similar analogical devices to describe café patrons' relationships with their technology within the café space so as to describe how they use their technology.

Latour's theory surrounding anthropomorphising technology asserts that a piece of technology can only find one other human role to take on. However, in my observations of digital device use in café environments, I found that these devices and their applications (ie. Programmes and software loaded onto these devices) allowed humans to use these devices as replacements for other analogous objects. In delivering my findings, I will address the some of the ways digital devices were used in such a way.

#### Examining infrastructure

When examining the use of digital devices in cafes, as we know from Latour's interpretation of actor-network theory, it's important to take notice of the non-human actants in the space. But what about the infrastructure that supports the use of digital devices? In the instance of looking at the café as a field, the main infrastructures that come to mind are electricity and Wi-Fi. How do we view this infrastructure?

Susan Leigh Star suggests we regard infrastructure as invisible, functional, yet vital:

*"People commonly envision infrastructure as a system of substrates – railroad lines, pipes and plumbing, electrical power plants, and wires. It is by definition invisible, part of the background for other kinds of work. It is ready-to-hand. This image holds up well for many purposes – turn on the faucet for a drink of water and you use a vast infrastructure of plumbing and water regulation without usually thinking much about it."*

- Star, 1999: 380

How does one incorporate invisible infrastructures such as electricity and Wi-Fi into ethnography? What is there to observe of its interaction with actants in the space? Star gives us a list of nine properties that define infrastructure. Two of which are highly relevant to the use of digital devices in cafes and will form the focus in observing the café.

The first property worth observing in a café setting is what Star calls 'Learned as part of membership', whereby 'strangers and outsiders encounter infrastructure as a target object to be learned about. New participants acquire a naturalized familiarity with its objects, as they become members.' (Star, 1999: 381) In the case of observing electricity and Wi-Fi infrastructure in the café, this involves observing how people initially find out about the existence of Wi-Fi in the café, how they find the password to the Wi-Fi and how they find sources within the café to charge their devices.

The second property to examine is when infrastructure 'becomes visible upon breakdown'. According to Star, this is when 'the normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks: the server is down, the bridge washes out, there is a power blackout. Even when there are back-up mechanisms or procedures, their existence further highlights the now-visible infrastructure.' (Star, 1999: 382) Star infers that the only time human actants notice the existence of the infrastructure is when it fails on them, rendering them unable to complete tasks. In the café environment, it will be interesting to observe if breakdown or forced absence of either electrical or Wi-Fi infrastructure causes patrons to leave the space or whether it acts as an intervention that forces and facilitates a sociable situation between patrons.

## Methodology

The methodology I have chosen to use for my study is multimodal ethnography, comprising of the following activities:

- Observation
- Interview
- Email interview
- Twitter ethnography and analysis

### Observation

From an ontological standpoint, it would have been near impossible to research digital device use in cafes without being in the field. This is due to the fact that I was researching how actors interact and work within a particular space.

In developing my observation plan, I took my cues from Gary Allen Fine's *Kitchens* (1986) and Eric Laurier's body of work in studying cafes. Fine's focus on restaurant staff prepared me for observing the café staff. Laurier's ethnographies of neighbourhood cafes in Scotland showed examples of how to observe the social conventions built up in cafes over time.

The Beanface<sup>1</sup> is a café situated in the Northern Quarter of Manchester, in the North-West of England. The Northern Quarter (also known as NQ or N4) is similar to East London's Shoreditch area (Wakeford, 2003: 383) as a former working class and industrial area, which has seen a concerted effort in urban regeneration, investment and gentrification since the mid 1990s due to long-term local government policies (Manchester City Council, 2003).

The Northern Quarter is close to the city centre of Manchester and is home to a fledging technology industry with a community of freelance technology developers, start-ups, and others in the creative industries.

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<sup>1</sup> The café used in this study has been anonymised along with its staff and patrons.

<sup>2</sup> Scraping is a technical term for automating the collection of data from web

According to Mosaic (a social profiling tool that gives each postcode an 'ideal type' of the local population based on census and non-census data), the postcode the café falls in is placed in the 'Bright Young Things' category that is typified by people who have the following traits:

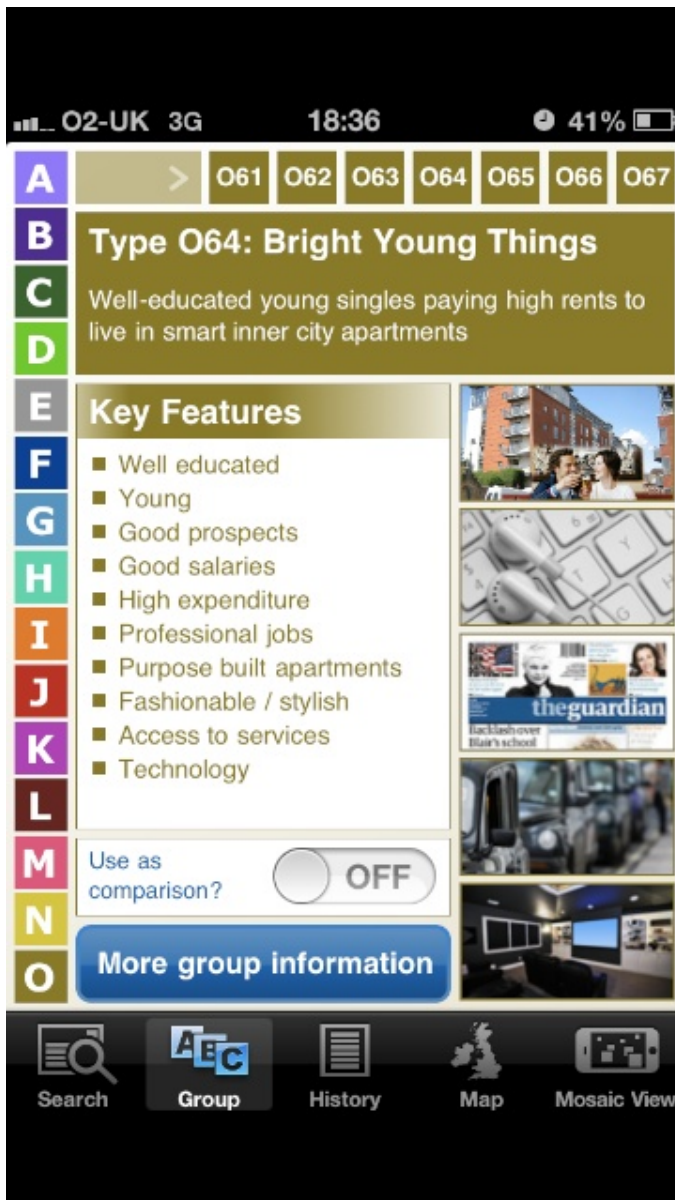


Figure 1: Screen capture of Mosaic profile for 'Bright Young Things (O64)' - the category that The Beanface's postcode (M4 1LA) falls into. (Experian. Accessed 12 July 2013)

It is worth noting, though that most people I interviewed were reluctant to confirm this 'ideal type', they were rather opposed to the idea of stereotyping the community.

The Northern Quarter likens itself to a village and the café shows that with regulars and owners discussing the goings on the area. While I was a participant observer in the café, the main topics were urban regeneration, green spaces and cycling around Greater Manchester. The café tends to be emblematic of the area with trendy hipster staff and owners, freelance developers and creative workers on laptops and modern art from local artists on the walls.

The café is part of the third wave coffee movement, which considers coffee to be an artisanal product, where attention must be paid to creating a high-quality product for consumers. The café prides itself on using coffee from small batch roasters that know the provenance and taste profile of the beans.

### **Why was this chosen as the field?**

The decision to choose this café and this area as a field was due to a few factors:

#### **Access to the field**

The ability to gain access was the main factor at play in choosing this particular café. I had previously been a regular patron at The Beanface when I resided in Greater Manchester in 2011. I came to be on first name terms with the café owners and through that relationship I knew they previously had people observe the café for market research and competitor research. Based on my prior knowledge of the café, I knew the owners and patrons would be receptive to the idea of my research and they would have an opinion on the research subject. Although I had become a semi-regular patron at a few cafes in London (where I was living whilst carrying out this research), I did not feel that I had to the agency to approach any of these cafes and seek access for research purposes. This perceived lack of agency was due to the fact that I had not built the same rapport with the staff at these cafes. By being a regular at The Beanface throughout 2011, I had rapport within the café and a network that regularly patronised the café. This gave me credibility as someone who had knowledge about third wave coffee varieties. This last point gave me special standing within the café social

structure by affording me status with the café owners who would regularly ask for my opinion of their coffee or their new brew methods.

### **Prior knowledge of the activities within the field**

The second factor in choosing The Beanface was prior knowledge of patrons' digital device use in the space. In 2011, I had connected with freelance workers and creative workers who used the café as a de facto workspace. A number of these workers became my friends and I knew they were still using the café in much the same fashion. Although the café does not advertise their Wi-Fi on any exterior signage, up until recently, they did mention their free Wi-Fi on their Twitter user description.

### **Layout of the field**

The third factor was my knowledge of The Beanface's layout. Because I had spent so much time in the café, I felt I could rely on my knowledge of the café layout to plan my observations. I knew the better vantage points to observe from and I knew where amenities such as power points were so I could predict where to direct my observation. Other cafes had layouts that were not as conducive to observation. For example, a cafe I had considered was long and narrow with a serving area halfway into the café, effectively blocking off any observation on the opposite side of the cafe.

My intention was always to conduct this research as a participant observer. I would be another patron of The Beanface, working on my MacBook while observing those I saw around me. Ontologically, I knew it would be easier to observe as a patron, going through the same experience of walking through the door, going through the process of ordering food and beverages, working on projects and striking up conversations with those around me.

I went for a covert /overt approach, where Sam and Suzy, The Beanface's owners gave me permission to be there, observing the goings on of the café. I was also honest and overt about my observation and research with the patrons I engaged



with. From an ontological position, this was to my advantage because when I was open with others about my research and observation, they were more likely to express an opinion about either my methodology or about the subject of digital device use in cafes. These interactions fed back into my field notes.

I originally wrote in my ethics form that I would produce a sign to place by the register, notifying patrons that they would be observed. However, by placing a sign there, it could deter some patrons from sitting in the café and purchasing coffee, in favour of going to a place where they presumed they would not be observed. This decision to observe completely overtly in that way could have been detrimental to the business. For this reason, it could have also been a sticking point in gaining access to The Beanface.

Regarding the ethical dilemma of covertly observing those I did not engage with in conversation, Frances, a patron of The Beanface explains her take on observation in public places:

*'You go to a café and you expect to be watched. I do it all the time.'*

- Field notes, 28 June 2013.

It should be noted that one patron does not in any sense speak for each and every other patron who may or may not have been observed during the course of fieldwork. However, I did not receive any negative remarks or requests from patrons to be excluded from observations or field notes.

### Interviews (face-to-face)

From an ontological perspective, I included interviews in my methodology to balance out and confirm the observation component of the research.

The bulk of my fieldwork would consist of observing people using their digital devices in The Beanface. However, by conducting only observations, the findings would be clouded by only what I perceived to have viewed. By conducting interviews, I could confirm what I had observed and ask further questions about how and why people within the cafe used their devices in the space.

I chose to conduct the interviews at the end of the fieldwork so I could formulate questions based on events and habits while observing café patrons.

Based on these observations, the questions in interviews included:

- What digital devices do you use in the café?
- Why do you use them?
- What do you need to have to ensure that your devices work in the café?
- What would happen if you forgot to bring an object such as your laptop charger with you?
- What are you doing when using your digital device(s) in the café?
- Why do you do those tasks in the café, as opposed to another space such as your home or office?
- Why do you choose this particular café to spend time in?
- Would you spend time here if there were no Wi-Fi?
- How do you make it known that you would prefer not to be disturbed while working in the café?
- How can you tell if someone does not want to be disturbed while working in the café?

The purpose of these questions were to test a few hypotheses:

- Café patrons came along specifically prepared to work
- Café patrons arrived at the café mindful of specific tasks they wanted to achieve. Further, there were specific tasks they would undertake only in the café.

- Café patrons had an allegiance to the café not only because there was provision of Wi-Fi and electricity, but because there was adequate provision of coffee and food, along with an atmosphere conducive to work.
- There are certain non-verbal cues that café patrons use to notify others that they would prefer not to be disturbed.

These questions address the research question elements of sociability in the café and, digital device use through the lens of actor-network theory.

### Methodology – email interviews

An unexpected methodology that I incorporated into my research was email interviewing. Going into the field, I presumed that all of my interviews would be conducted in person, at a conversational pace. And this held true when interviewing patrons, they were amenable to parting with their time to discuss any aspect of how they work in cafes. For patrons, interruptions are expected. They are in The Beanface to work at a slower pace and the noise and distractions are a contingency of this. But pinning down The Beanface owners to talk was a struggle.

While cafes portray a sense of calm, leisure, and down time to patrons, the opposite is true for those working in The Beanface. Sam and Suzy, The Beanface owners were always dashing around the space – to the counter to serve a patron, sideways to the espresso machine to make their drink, the across the café to the table where the patrons had situated themselves after ordering, and then picking up dirty dishes and wiping down tables once the patrons had left the café. Outside of the workflow of tending to the customers, café workers were going to the storeroom to get more supplies, sitting at the table and stamping takeaway cups with The Beanface logo, taking deliveries from suppliers. They rarely sat down to have a break. Sam was often evasive in sitting down and having an interview. He simply had no space in his workflow to

entertain the thought of sitting down with me for 30 minutes to discuss their use of Twitter in fine detail. 'Send us an email with your questions and we'll answer them for you on Monday, we're not in the café, but it's our email day,' he relented.

Epistemologically, an email interview did not seem to be the best option. Along the lines of Hine's discussion of email interviews, the asynchronous nature of email meant that while I gained a verbatim, accurate account of Sam and Suzy's opinions of digital device use in their café, what I lost was far greater (Kivits, J., in Hine, 2005: 35-49). A face-to-face interview produces a richer form of data, full of body language, nuances of speech and unexpected paths to different insights. In this virtual form of interview I lost the nuance of Sam and Suzy's opinions because I could not observe their reaction and non-verbal response to my questions. In this sense, email interviews are more akin to surveys. In addition to using other digital methods such as Twitter analysis means, I may have been prone to placing the email data alongside the twitter data, rather than with the other interview and observational data.

However, I managed to have informal conversations with The Beanface owners that were relevant to the subject matter that made it into my field notes. The email interview I conducted was lacklustre with one-line answers. But these answers confirmed the assumptions I'd written into the field notes. From an epistemological standpoint, I was disappointed with the necessity to conduct an email interview with some key actors in the field. I felt this gave them less of a voice in the research than interviewed patrons.

The email interview questions for Sam and Suzy were slightly different to the questions asked of The Beanface patrons because of the different roles and responsibilities they had as actants in the café. Sam and Suzy founded the café in 2010 and had made decisions about the aesthetic, amenities and social norms of the café. I wanted to ask questions that would uncover their rationale behind

these decisions. I also wanted to know more about their use of Twitter. I asked questions such as:

- Why did you decide to provide free Wi-Fi?
- What types of people use the Wi-Fi?
- How long do people spend in The Beanface on digital devices?
- Would you ever consider turning off the Wi-Fi? Why?
- Why do you use Twitter?

By asking these questions, I wanted to test the following hypotheses:

- Providing free Wi-Fi was business decision.
- In providing free Wi-Fi they knew they would get a certain type of clientele.
- Sam and Suzy used Twitter to expand the café space outside of the shopfront and into the digital space.

These questions worked to gain insight into the research problems of sociability in the café space and how digital device use impacted it.

### Twitter ethnography and analysis

The decision to conduct an ethnography of The Beanface's interactions and mentions on Twitter came about from considering actor-network theory and the café.

My prior knowledge of The Beanface included knowledge of their use of Twitter. In fact, my first encounter with The Beanface was in February 2011, when I wrote a tweet bemoaning Manchester's lack of good coffee. They reached out to me on Twitter and claimed that their coffee would fill the void. From then I was a regular patron of the café for seven months until I left Manchester.

Based on my knowledge of actor-network theory, I believe that The Beanface uses their Twitter account as more than just a marketing tool. My hypothesis is that they use their Twitter account as a digital expansion of The Beanface. That is, The Beanface is both a physical space with a shopfront, where people can come in and talk about coffee and consume; and it is also a digital space where people can engage with the café about the coffee, food and the community.

I wanted to test this hypothesis by scraping<sup>2</sup> tweets that mention the café across a one month period to see what The Beanface were talking about and what other Twitter users were saying about them. From an epistemological standpoint, the only way to test this hypothesis was to observe The Beanface's Twitter mentions over a substantial amount of time to see if their Twitter account really was an extension of the café.

I chose to use ScaperWiki's Search for Tweets tool to make this happen. There is more detail about the decision in the Technical Specifications section. In brief, I chose ScaperWiki to collect tweets because it accumulated tweets over time and returned the data as an online spread sheet or a downloadable .csv or .xls file.

### **Ethics**

The ethics surrounding scraping Twitter is murky. All tweets belonging to public accounts can be scraped. All tweets belonging to private accounts are unable to be scraped unless that user has given you access to view their tweets. The set-up of public / private accounts presumes that those who have opted to have their account as public have also given their permission to have their tweets used in the public domain, whether that be news outlets syndicating their tweets within

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<sup>2</sup> Scraping is a technical term for automating the collection of data from web page or social media. There is more detail about this in the technical specification section.

a news story (using tools such as Storify), or researchers collecting them, analysing them and quoting them.

However, when speaking to Sam at The Beanface about this part of my methodology, he showed some concern about scraping and analysing tweets. He was worried that the scrape would show up spam and abusive tweets that may reflect poorly on the café. I reassured him that if there were any, they would be acknowledged and treated as such. I reiterated that the café would be anonymised in the course of writing this research.

It is also important to note that in order to scrape Twitter, the researcher is already set up as a participant-observer (Murthy, 2008: 840). The researcher needs to be a participant on Twitter in order to gain access to tweets via the API (application programming interface). The researcher must supply the API with their credentials in the form of their username and password to gain access. Their ratio of participation to observation may vary: they could have an account solely to lurk in the space and not contribute tweets or, they could be an active Twitter user that posts many times across a day. In any case, the system of accessing Twitter via the API sets up the researcher as a participant-observer regardless. The researcher can choose how active or passive they would prefer to be as a participant-observer.

I am an active Twitter user and I only have a personal Twitter account. I used the credentials to access Twitter's API and scrape tweets. As a moderate Twitter user, I have tweeted 2,915 times since September 2008. As a researcher, this sets me up as a more active participant-observer.

In scraping mentions of The Beanface on Twitter, I wanted to find out who was interacting with them and what they were saying. I wanted to see whether the activity surrounding The Beanface was one-sided, marketing tweets or whether the café was engaging in or initiating conversations with other Twitter users,

much like the café owners may have with customers, suppliers or friends in the physical space.

To analyse this activity, I would need to categorise each of the tweets I had collected based on who was talking to whom and what they were talking about, and in some instances, what they were showing one another by attaching media such as images and videos. These categories included:

- Suppliers and local businesses
- Customers
- Coffee industry
- The Beanface
- Customers retweeted by the café
- Last fm (a top 3 ranking of songs recently played in the café)
- Retweets of tweets from The Beanface
- Spam tweets
- Suppliers and businesses retweeted by the café.



## Technical specifications

The technical component of this project supports the digital ethnography portion of the methodology.

The digital ethnography element comprises of a scrape of Tweets mentioning The Beanface. In the beginning stages of planning and executing my digital methodology, a common way to scrape Twitter for tweets would be to create a script in the programming language Python that could be execute using Terminal to harvest the Tweets and export them to a .csv file.

However, in June 2013, Twitter upgraded to a newer version of their API (application programming interface) and changed the way people could use it. This meant that the way you could previously access Twitter became more difficult. See Appendix 1 for the original Python script.

The code I had prepared no longer works in Python because:

- The API has changed from version 1 to version 1.1. This means that the above code would not have worked because Twitter had depreciated version 1 in June 2013.
- The authentication process for those wanting to scrape Twitter had changed to OAuth. Someone wanting to scrape Twitter would need to sign up with the platform as a developer and get an OAuth ID. In short, this made the process using Python and Terminal much lengthier.

At the same time as the changes to the Twitter API happened, the scraping code sharing website, ScaperWiki changed their offerings to shift away from sharing code, to become a web-based scraper. Users needed to enter their Twitter username and password to allow ScaperWiki to authenticate the API on their behalf. This allows users without technical expertise to scrape Twitter with little back end development or coding expertise.

ScraperWiki then returns a spreadsheet of tweets matching the search terms available for download. The API only allows access to 450 tweets per 15 minutes, which would cause problems if you were scraping a high volume search term such as a breaking news story at its height. The volume of tweets you could harvest would depend on how often your search term is used. Once you have entered your search term, ScraperWiki collects tweets posted from the week prior to the search commencing (because the API only allows access to a week's worth of tweets) and then accumulates tweets to the table as it makes queries over time.

Within the spreadsheet of search results, I also received metadata for the following fields:

- **ID string** – this is the unique ID given to a tweet. It would also be used to create a URL for this individual tweet. Eg. 353444867491381249
- **Tweet URL** – This is the tweet's unique URL.
- **Created at** – This is the timestamp for the tweet's creation. Eg. 2013-07-06 09:26:37+00:00
- **Text** – This is the text held within the tweet.
- **Language** – This tells us which language the user has set as the language they primarily use on Twitter. Eg. En (English)
- **RTs** – How many times the tweet has been resent by other Twitter users.
- **Screen Name** – This is the username of the person who sent the tweet.
- **In response to** – The username of a Twitter user the tweet is in response to (if they are responding to someone).
- **In reply to status ID** – if a user is replying to a tweet, the ID string is listed here. Although, in my experience, this column of data did not match any ID strings.
- **User mention** – a Twitter user mentioned within a tweet (if they are mentioning someone in their tweet) Eg. Derekperrin

- **Query** – The term you are using to find tweets. Eg. TheBeanface
- **Latitude** – Latitude coordinates of the Twitter user. (Only a small percentage of Twitter users have opted in to list this) Eg. 51.30759698
- **Longitude** – Longitude coordinates of the Twitter user. (only a small percentage of Twitter users have opted in to list this) Eg. -0.07768363
- **URL** – If the Twitter user decides to link to other content in their tweet, a URL is listed.
- **Media** – If a Twitter user attaches an image or video to their image, a URL to this content is listed.
- **Hashtag** – A Twitter user can include a hashtag in their tweet to indicate a subject or event they are talking about in their tweet. Using a hashtag allows other Twitter users to search by this term and see what has been said about the subject by other users Eg. Imissmanchester

ScraperWiki also generates basic visualisations of tweets such as:

- Pie charts of percentages of retweets,
- A collage of images and media included in tweets
- A listing of the most mentioned usernames in tweets.
- A tag cloud of commonly used words within tweets.
- Language used by users mentioning the search term.

Although those visualisations gave a clean snapshot of the tweets and the users tweeting about The Beanface, I wanted to categorise the tweets based on the content discussed within them. I downloaded this data as a .csv folder and added a column in the spreadsheet in order to categorise the tweets.

## **Findings**

During this study I spent ten days spread across six weeks observing and interviewing patrons in The Beanface. In addition to this, I collected 414 tweets mentioning the café across the space of a month. In comparison to previous studies of cafes and Internet cafes, the findings reflect a tangled relationship between people, devices and infrastructure in a Wi-Fi enabled café.

To present these findings I will spend time focusing on each element – digital devices, infrastructure and people. However, as we know from Actor-Network Theory, each element carries equal gravity and it is difficult to separate out from one another. As a result, there will be crossover in each section.

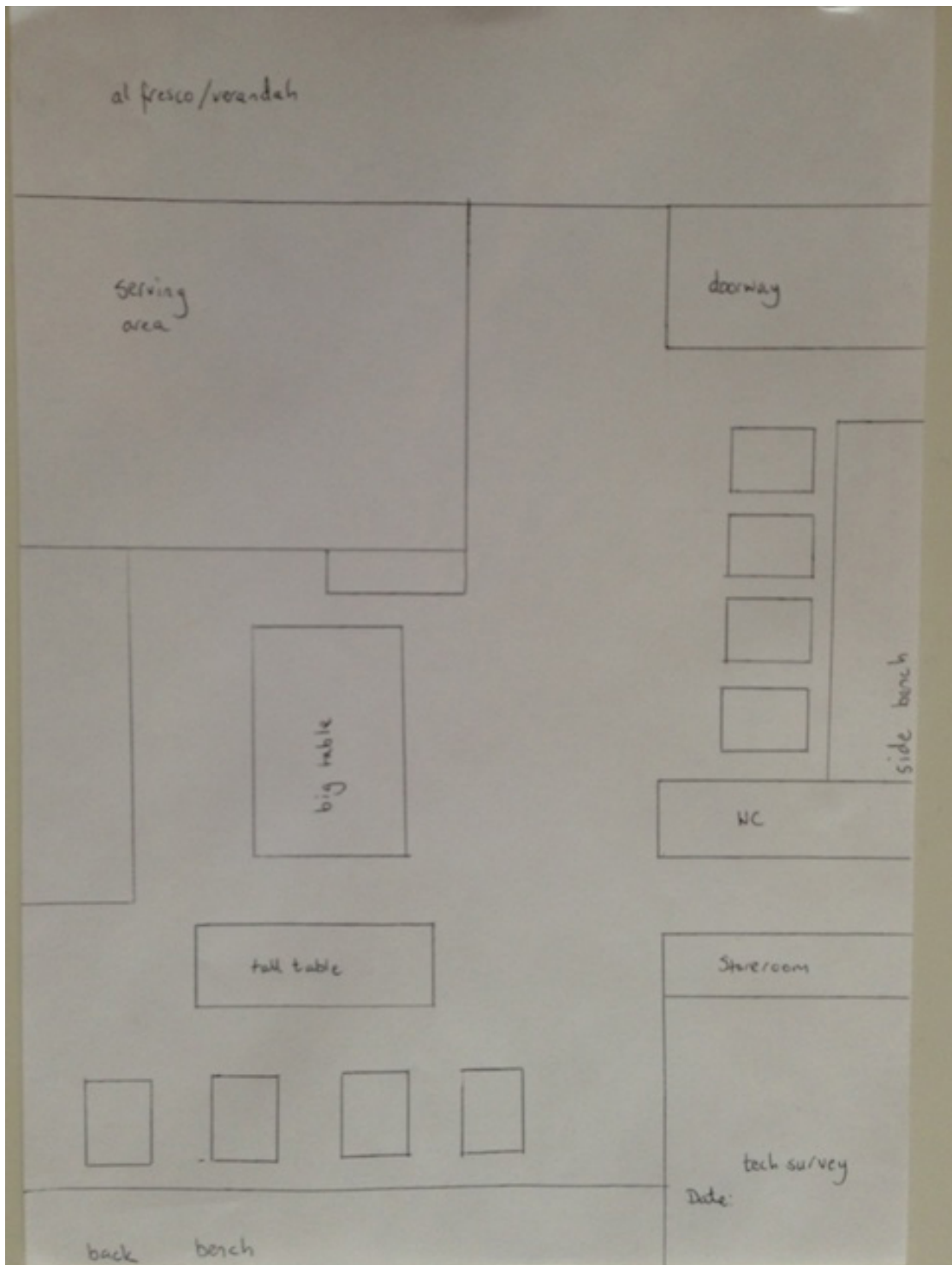


Figure 2: Layout map of The Beanface (June 2013)

### Digital devices

Much like Wakeford's (2003: 390) observation that Internet café users fell into the categories of 'Checkers' and 'Chatters'. I observed that those using digital

devices in cafes fell into rough categories of ‘Workers bees’ and ‘Social butterflies’. Worker bees tended to be those sitting at two seater tables around the perimeter. As indicated in Laurier et al. (2001: 210), this choice in sitting alone tends to display a desire to be left alone to pressing matters on their laptops, tablets or smartphones. Social butterflies, in comparison, chose to sit at the communal big table with other patrons using digital devices, echoing Ellis’ (2008: 158) description of seventeenth century coffee house patrons . Often the social butterflies were regulars to The Beanface and would strike up conversations with Sam and Suzy when the café was not busy. By sitting at the big table, it was expected that a conversation would be interrupted or initiated without invitation from others. On two occasions there were duos of freelance developers and creative working side by side or directly opposite one another at the big table. They often switched between working, talking, socialising, eating and drinking.

*‘Two [developers] are talking about the jobs market, JavaScript, and many other topics that are part and parcel of being a freelancer in Manchester. The two freelancers next to me keep their MacBooks shut or partially shut during their conversation, but then when they get animated and want to illustrate a point, they open their MacBook, pull up what they want to show and place their MacBook on top of the other. Once the conversation passes that on-screen artefact, the MacBook is shut and placed to the side.’*

- *Field notes. 12 July 2013.*

For the social butterflies, their devices act to facilitate both work and conversation in ways that would have previously not been possible had there not been Wi-Fi available. If we were to lend Latour’s automatic door analogy to digital devices in cafes, we can see the devices being appropriated for a number of different functions, both social and anti-social. While I observed many different actions worthy of analogy, there were a few examples of digital device appropriation in The Beanface that stood out.

## 1. Digital devices act as a photographic memory allow me to show and not just tell

*It's a quiet morning in the café. It's only half full with people working mostly on their own. I saw Sam (the café owner) mention their attempts at the cold brew coffee method<sup>3</sup> on Twitter. We started talking about cold brew and they wanted to know when I'd had it, where I'd had it, etc. I remembered that I take photographs of coffee almost a little too religiously and that I would probably have some photographs of the coffee we were talking about from when I was living in Australia.*

*'Give us all the photos you have... interiors (of cafes) too, we can't afford to go to Australia (to do competitor research on other cafes)' says Suzy (another café owner). I email Sam my photographs from Australia. After viewing the photos of Australian cold brews taken in early 2012, Sam and Suzy make their first ever cold brew coffee with sparkling water and give it to me to taste test. I'm dead chuffed and I promptly take a photo of it and send it to my friend in Australia. I'm overthinking ANT (Actor-Network Theory), kind of marvelling at the fact that I'm connecting them to a time and place they've never been to by extension of my phone, the cloud, my laptop, my email account and eventually, their computer. Somehow it feels very circular.*

– Field notes 28 June 2013

In this reflexive observation from the field, we are given an example of fluidly using a network of devices and infrastructure to act as both memory and messenger on behalf of people. In the scenario described above, I was given the opportunity to show the café owners how to make and present a new coffee

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<sup>3</sup> This is a method of making coffee whereby water is very slowly dripped over and through single origin coffee grounds over the course of six hours to produce a concentrated coffee that brings out flavours that are fresh and fruity as opposed to the bitter taste coffee drinkers often get with espresso (coffee machine) coffees.

brewing method. If I didn't have my smartphone and my laptop on hand, I would have to resort to recalling the coffee I had consumed almost 18 months prior and describing the taste, and the presentation of the coffee. But by taking a digital photograph of a coffee 18 months ago on a different device (all of my photographic media is synced to the cloud) I could recall that memory and share it visually and verbally with someone who was not there when the coffee was made via my laptop. In this situation, a series of digital actants worked on my behalf to pull up supporting evidence of having had this particular type of coffee in this particular way.

## **2. Digital devices as a 'do not disturb' sign – blocking out those around me**

*'The only table of interest is two parents with a daughter in her late teens. The parents are silent, the daughter has her phone in front of her face, held up with two hands, as if to shield her from engaging with her parents.'*

– Field notes. 29 June 2013.

Headphones and smartphones are two devices commonly used in cafes by patrons to wall themselves off from interruption by other patrons and staff. Both provide physical cues to show others they do not intend to engage with others. In the observation above, the teenage daughter is using her smartphone as intended – for communicating with others who are not physically present in her space. However by holding the phone in front of her face, she is communicating with others who are not physically present in her space to the exclusion of those who are. If this family were in another setting such as their home, the smartphone could have been used only as intended and the teenager could have used a door to shut her parents out. Because she doesn't have the luxury of personal space in the café, she has used her smartphone both as a communication device and as a door to shut her parents out of her immediate environment.



Throughout interviews with café patrons I asked them how they would normally indicate that they would prefer not to be disrupted. They responded that they would usually have headphones in or alternatively; they would rely on their vacant gaze at the screen to show that they were concentrating heavily on the task at hand. When asked how they would normally gauge their ability to disrupt another patron, they said:

*Ben: "It depends how 'in the zone' they look."*

*Interviewer: "What does 'in the zone' look like?"*

*Ben: "With the kind of, thousand-mile stare into the screen, um, it depends. I mean or..."*

*Lionel: "Headphones."*

*Ben: "Headphones. Yes. Headphones are the key, you're absolutely right, headphones. Perhaps if someone's wearing headphones, you don't mess with them... this has become standard even in formal workplaces, when I've been working on site with clients if you've got your headphones on, you don't talk to them."*

- Ben and Lionel, Beanface patrons and freelance developers.

Interview. 15 July 2013.

When I decided to approach café patrons for a discussion about their digital device habits, I had to judge just how much they wanted to be left to their own devices. If they had headphones in, I did not disturb them – I assumed that while they were physically present in the space, they did not want to participate in the space. If they did not have headphones in, but were working silently on their own, I would often hesitantly approach them. For the most part they were not surprised that a stranger would talk to them in a cafe and when we broached the subject of using digital devices in cafes, they had an opinion of the subject either positive or negative. Alternatively, they simply related their experiences of working in cafes to me.

In connecting these observations to Actor-Network Theory, we could understand that patrons who are engrossed in their devices are more of an extension of the machine than they are a part of the physical café environment.

### **Digital devices as loudspeakers – extending the café out of the shopfront and into the Twitter stream**

The Beanface are moderate users of micro blogging platform Twitter in conjunction with photograph and video sharing platform Instagram<sup>4</sup>. They have a single page website that has been ‘under construction’ for two to three years and they have a Facebook page that has been set up but never used. They do not advertise in print or broadcast media and rely on word of mouth – either verbally or digitally – to get the word out about the café.

When I asked Sam why they chose to primarily use Twitter he gave an answer that hinted to the utilitarian nature of the platform:

*“150 characters can be written ‘quite’ quickly once or twice a day - in between emptying the washing machine, dosing a shot & ordering the milk”*

- Sam, Beanface owner. Email interview. 31 July 2013.

Sam’s response places Twitter (via an old MacBook they also use for doing accounts, emailing and as a music device for the café) as another device amongst the washing machine and the espresso machine that ensure the smooth running of a day at The Beanface. Twitter is a quick way for them to check who has spoken about the café and in turn, extend the borders of the café into the digital by posting pictures of coffee, food and Beanface staff.

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<sup>4</sup> Instagram allows the user to share photographs and video on their platform. In addition to this, users can also share Instagram images on other social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook. The Beanface often choose to share Instagram photographs and videos via Twitter.

When asked about who they primarily communicate with on Twitter, he identified 'past, present and future friends [of The Beanface]'.

Over the course of a month, I used ScaperWiki to collect 414 tweets that mentioned The Beanface. After conducting some content analysis of the tweets, I found that there was more tweets about the café from patrons rather than tweets originating from the café.

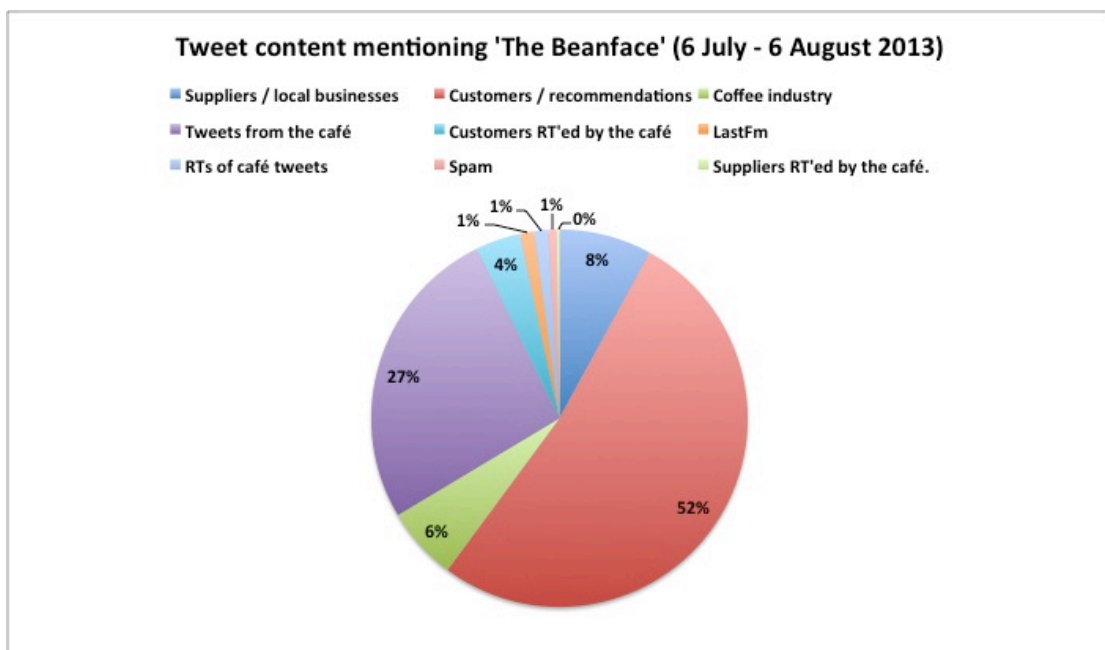


Figure 3: Pie chart showing types of tweets mentioning The Beanface. (Based on 414 tweets collected between 6 July and 6 August 2013).

Many of these tweets from patrons included recommendations to others to visit the café, pictures of coffee purchased at The Beanface and responses to tweets from The Beanface. One example of this was when The Beanface tweeted about an upcoming coffee cupping session<sup>5</sup> and asked for suggestions for times to hold future sessions.

<sup>5</sup> A coffee cupping session is much like a wine tasting session where people sample different types of coffee to determine their flavor profile.

*"The cupping has begun." – The Beanface (with picture below)*



*"Out of interest what day/time works best for people if we were to do more cupping events? I know mid morning on a school day isn't ideal." The Beanface*

*"@thebeanface first think before work or just after. (pre 9 or post 5:30) or weekend" – Patron1*

*"@thebeanface ps: wtf is a cupping?" – Patron1*

The Beanface's use of Twitter with the inclusion of an Instagram image extends the boundaries of the café from the physical to the digital by allowing their Twitter patrons to see what's going on in the café and ask questions about the event almost as it happens. The ease with which patrons converse with The Beanface both in person and on Twitter shows the perceived lack of barriers between the physical Beanface and the digital Beanface.

In addition to the 52 per cent of patrons who tweeted about The Beanface, there were an additional 8 per cent of tweets that came from the local Northern Quarter business community. This indicates that patrons and other local businesses would prefer to use Twitter identify with The Beanface to affiliate themselves with the space.

Twitter is an application that can only be accessed with digital devices such as a smartphone, laptop or tablet. As such, Sam and Suzy have in effect created a

digital version of their café where patrons to this digital Beanface can expect to have similar conversations about coffee, food and the local community.

By using Twitter as a major form of communicating with their patrons and the local community, on a digital-only platform, Sam and Suzy are giving additional agency to digital device use in the café.

### **Infrastructure**

At The Beanface, there were two types of infrastructure at play when examining digital device use: electricity and Wi-Fi. Two of Star's properties of observing infrastructure (1999: 381-2) are epistemologically relevant to researching in a cafe.

The first property of infrastructure is that it is 'learned as part of membership.' The only way a newcomer to The Beanface could see that the café provided free Wi-Fi was to make an educated guess based on seeing other patrons using laptops and tablets. A newcomer to The Beanface is easily recognised when they ask Sam, Suzy or one of the other members of staff for the Wi-Fi password. The staff then explain the process of connecting to the Wi-Fi which requires the following steps:

- Select the 'Polka Spots' network from the listed networks.
- Open your web browser and let the 'Polka Spots' login page load.
- Enter the password.
- If you have entered the correct password a message will appear saying, 'You are logged in, happy days.'

Going through the process of asking for the Wi-Fi password means that newcomer has acquired some of the local knowledge mentioned by Laurier et al. (2001: 219) and The Beanface staff can also expect the patron to potentially

spend more time in space compared to patrons consuming only food and/or drink

An additional piece of infrastructure knowledge that is learned as part of membership of The Beanface is knowledge of the electricity sources. Regulars who bring and use their devices to The Beanface know where the power points are and which of them are easiest to access and will cause the least disruption to other patrons. Access to power points at The Beanface is notoriously difficult as the following field notes will attest.

*'A guy on the back bench pulls the (high-backed) bench away from the wall to plug in his charger (located beneath the bench). I didn't have the heart to tell him it would be easier if got on his hands and knees.'*

- *Field notes. 14 June 2013.*

*'I've had to plug my Macbook in to charge. There is one of the owner's bikes in front of the power point. I plug my Macbook in very gingerly, not wanting to knock the bike over.'*

- *Field notes. 14 June 2013.*

There are five power points available for patrons of The Beanface, with each of the power points having two sockets. Only two of the power points are immediately visible – one is partially concealed behind the bike and another is on the wall behind the big communal table – the others are underneath long, wooden pew-like benches that line the side and back walls of The Beanface, consisting of two-seater tables. As mentioned in the field notes, a patron would have to get on their hands and knees to find these power points. Although the visible power points are often used simply because they can be seen, they are problematic because the cables plugged into the power points are often in places of foot traffic and therefore, potentially dangerous for other patrons. Those who have learned about the locations of power points as part of gaining membership to the group of 'regulars' at The Beanface will have found their preferred place to

sit that is close to power points, or if they do not mind where they sit, they will know where is best to sit as a 'social butterfly' or as a 'worker bee' but still have access to a nearby power point.

The second property of infrastructure is that it 'becomes visible upon breakdown' (Star: 1999: 382). While observing at The Beanface, I has seen an instance where the electricity, while it wasn't broken, was inaccessible to many patrons for reasons beyond their control: the weather.

My observations of The Beanface happened over the summer of 2013, which saw a heatwave across a fortnight in July while I was in the field. The Beanface doesn't have much in the way of ventilation, nor does it have any air conditioning. The heat coming from the espresso machine, added to the heat that had accumulated over the heatwave made the interior of the café unbearable to sit in. The Beanface staff overcame this problem by moving tables and chairs onto the outside veranda area.

The heat was not a problem for patrons without digital devices but it soon became a problem for 'worker bees' Ben and Lionel who were using their devices outside.

*'Ben and Lionel are both smokers so it's not unusual that they work outside. Although pretty soon the power supply proves to be a problem. "I wish I could just drill a hole through this window and plug in," says Ben, pointing at an overloaded power board inside the café, in the serving area. Ben's MacBook runs out of power and we all end up sitting inside at the big table, despite the heat.'*

- Field notes 15 July 2013.

A migration inside to the heat of the café signified infrastructure's importance for 'worker bees' in The Beanface's ecosystem. For worker bees, their priority was to have a digital device that worked over their own perceived comfort. In the

case of The Beanface, electricity is an infrastructural element that is only noticed when it is needed and more importantly, when it is needed but inaccessible.

When interviewed via email, Sam mentioned that the Wi-Fi 'turns itself off' from time to time. Although this did not happen while I was in The Beanface as a participant-observer, there have been times when I was there as a patron where the 'Polka spots network' was not working. True to Star's (1999: 381) property of infrastructure being learned as part of membership, there is a second Wi-Fi network in The Beanface that is for café staff. The 'Sam and Suzy' network works when 'Polka Spots' does not. However, knowledge and access to this network is dependent on a patron having acquired certain local knowledges. Because the network is in the owners' names, the patron needs to be on first name terms with Sam and Suzy in order to know that the additional network is part of The Beanface. In addition to this, Sam or Suzy need to give you the password to their network. I asked Sam about the circumstances under which he would give out the details to this secret network, he said, 'When we know them.' This means that there needs to be added levels of trust on the part of the café owners and agency on the part of the patrons to gain this additional level of membership in the café.

In the course of an interview, Ben brings up the subject of this additional network.

*Ben: 'One of the perks of being a regular customer here is that I have access to the 'secret Wi-Fi'.*

*Interviewer: 'Me too.'*

*Lionel: 'You two have just blown my mind, literally. Secret Wi-Fi?'*

*Ben: 'The secret Wi-Fi.'*

*Lionel: 'I've been here just using normal person Wi-Fi like some kind of animal?'*

*Ben: 'It's shit isn't it?'*

- *Ben and Lionel, interview 15 July 2013.*



By mentioning the secret network to Lionel, Ben has displayed his superior agency and affinity with the café and with Sam and Suzy. He also goes on to explain how he came to gain access to the network:

*Researcher: 'Did you start using that when the public Wi-Fi was down one day?'*

*Ben: 'Pretty much. Yeah, I think Sam probably said, "Alright, go on, here's the password," entirely so that I'd stay in, have more coffee and work longer.'*

- *Ben, interview 15 July 2013.*

Gaining access to the secret Wi-Fi network at The Beanface is considered amongst regulars to be one of the hallmarks of agency with the café staff. This is one of the strongest examples of infrastructure playing an important role in the 'sociability' of The Beanface.

## **People**

The final element of The Beanface's ecosystem I examined was people. As already discussed, people interact with digital devices and infrastructure in the café space, on a conscious or unconscious level. As we have seen, people's ability or willingness to interact with others in the café is shaped by their digital devices and the infrastructure that supports its use. But in order for this to happen The Beanface's owners had to decide to provide the infrastructure to support the use of digital devices. When I asked Sam why he decided to open The Beanface with free Wi-Fi he said, "because that's what you do in a cafe - read a book, surf the net," and that although there are independent cafes who choose not to provide Wi-Fi, "it's an interesting thing to do - I'm not against it - it's a different model."

These responses suggest that Sam and Suzy have created The Beanface as a place to attract those who spend time in cafes reading or using the Internet. This is what they perceive to be normal behavior in a café, or at least, in their café. And it is important to acknowledge that it is *their* café – in that *they* have shaped

it as somewhere for people who want to drink coffee and relax by the way they have fitted out the space, the food and drink they serve and the way they have asserted The Beanface as a digital space on Twitter. However, they acknowledge that some patrons use their free Wi-Fi in ways that contradict their desires for the space:

*“People who only want to use the wireless and don't care about us as a business probably hate it when we get busy as other people are invading their office space and so they leave to go somewhere with less people! Some are freeloaders...some people are working but also like The Beanface/coffee/cafe culture, some are working and couldn't care less about The Beanface / coffee / cafe culture...some are working and might not really be into The Beanface / coffee / cafe culture, they might just like the VIBE.... some regulars who are working buy far too many drinks to sit and work in The Beanface for a few hours!”*

- Sam, Email interview, 31 July 2013.

Ben, who has been a regular patron of The Beanface since it opened, has a more complex idea of why he spends his time there:

*‘I don't work here every day although sometimes I'll go through periods of working here, kind of, you know several days a week. But it's a mixture of the fact that there is good coffee, which is very, very important to me, but it's a bit of a community-ish place for local folks so there's, you know, a mixture of interesting people that I can come in and talk to in moments when I'm not working. There's, you know, it's quite well used by other people in the technology and creative sectors so it's quite good for casual networking. I like the staff, you know, I like the various kind of slightly random bits of art that turn up on the walls. It's very near where I live. It doesn't cost anything apart from the price of coffee, although that soon mounts up.’*

- Ben, Beanface patron. Interview, 15 July 2013.

Ben works from The Beanface at least once a week and explained that it was sometimes difficult to gauge how long your welcome lasts in a café and how much a patron should spend on food and drink to make up for the time spent there

*'I feel reasonably free to sit there as long as I like, however, I do feel some kind of guilt in terms of thinking I should pay my coffee tax and keep myself topped up with... you know pay for my seat as it were.'*

- Ben, Interview 15 July 2013.

Ben also mentioned that 'coffee tax' or the purchasing drinks and food to feel less guilty about staying in The Beanface for a long period of time becomes expensive. He has started to use an alternate co-working space that runs on a subscription fee basis to do the bulk of his work without having to navigate that guilt.

Murray is an independent management consultant who works primarily from home and uses The Beanface as place to complete small amounts of work in between client meetings when he is in town. However, he does not use the Wi-Fi infrastructure in the café as he owns all Mac devices to which he can tether Internet access via his 3G signal. Murray says he saves up some of the tasks that require creativity (such as client emails and blog posts) for the café because the atmosphere is conducive to that kind of work.

*'I find it easier to be more creative and get some things done in a fairly busy environment like this than I do in my nice quiet office at home... Perhaps it's a function of the time, when I'm at home, by nature I've got a day free... whereas I'm in a coffee shop I have anything between 20 minutes to two hours and I'm probably more focused about exactly what work I'm going to do in that timeslot. And I do, I find that in an*

*environment like this there's people going everywhere, we can hear traffic noise, music, people but I find it easy to focus.'*  
*-Murray, interview, 15 July 2013.*

Murray's comment on the noise and activity within the café indicates that he requires the sociability of the café around him to provide background noise and an environment that helps him complete his work. It shows that he requires his digital devices and the sociability and other people of The Beanface rather than the infrastructure provided to get his work done. Murray's tendency to reserve his creative tasks for the café supports the idea that he uses the space to become the creative person he desires himself to be (Miller and Slater, 2000, p.85)

## Conclusion

By researching the impact of digital device use on the sociability of independent cafes, I had to take into account different facets of the café and how they worked for or against one another to create a sense of sociability.

In carrying out a multimodal ethnography of the people, objects and infrastructure of The Beanface, I found four key findings:

- Sociability was still evident with digital devices allowing patrons to punctuate their conversations with others using artefacts found the devices.
- Alternatively, others used their digital devices and other objects such as headphones to indicate to others their unwillingness to participate in and contribute to the social life of the café.
- Some patrons went to the café to complete tasks because the ambience caused by the sociability was conducive to their work. The café also afforded them the ability to self-actualise their creative side by being with other like-minded people.
- By focussing on The Beanface's Twitter and Instagram accounts, I also noted that the café extended its boundaries and its notion of sociability to a set of online patrons who interacted with the café, much like patrons would interact in the flesh.

In addition, by observing the café's infrastructure I showed that patrons and staff unknowingly viewed access to infrastructure as a part of gaining local knowledges of The Beanface and therefore becoming more accepted in the community and showing off the relationship between regular customer and staff by gaining preferential access to Wi-Fi. These observations add to Laurier et al.'s list of local knowledges gained by regulars in pre-Wi-Fi cafes (2001: 210).

Finally, by choosing to install Wi-Fi networks in a café, the owners have chosen to use that infrastructure to design the space as a place for fine coffee and food as well as a place to linger and spend some time working or socialising.

In answer to the research question, from my observations of The Beanface, the sense of sociability of cafes has not diminished due to digital device use, in fact to the contrary, people still patronise cafes precisely for the sociability. However, the devices themselves and the infrastructure that supports their connection to the Internet and the wider world outside the café has changed some of the knowledges surrounding sociability in the café. All three elements – people, objects and infrastructure work together to create, preserve and shift a sense of sociability in the café environment. From carrying out this research, I have found that a sense of sociability is not restricted singularly to Habermas' (1989) tales of debate in 17<sup>th</sup> Century London coffee houses. Rather by viewing sociability as a side effect of being in the café environment, more in line with Callon's explanation of Actor-Network Theory with ecosystem of fisherman and scallops in St Bruic Bay (1986: 196-233) we can assert that the café is indeed a 'place of sociability' but that this sociability depends on how people, objects and infrastructure are interacting with one another at any given time.

Given the changes in how we have seen and used cafés over the centuries and how we have used the internet and digital devices over the past decade, I am certain that I am only capturing the a snapshot of independent café life in 2013. By incorporating Actor-Network Theory and the examination of infrastructure, objects and social media in cafes, I have presented a new take on cafés as a 'place of sociability' guided by devices and infrastructure.

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## Appendix 1

Python code previously used to scrape Twitter before the July 2013 changes to the Twitter API and authorization process.

```
import twitter, json, operator, csv

searchApi = twitter.Twitter(domain="search.twitter.com")
query = "beanface"

for i in range(1,2):
    print i
    response = searchApi.search(q=query, rpp=100,page=i)
    items = response['results']
    print len(items)
    for item in items:

        tweet = json.loads(json.dumps(item))
        geo = tweet['geo']
        created_at = tweet['created_at']

    print tweet, created_at
```

## **Appendix 2**

Research blog

Further documentation of the research process can be found on the blog

– Coffee and Wi-Fi at <http://coffeandWi-Fi.net>

## **Appendix 3**

Twitter data

A .csv spreadsheet with the data collected from the ScraperWiki collection can be found in the Documentation section of the Coffee and Wi-Fi blog: <http://coffeandWi-Fi.net/documentation/>

The password to gain access to this section is: flatwhite

## **Appendix 4**

Informed consent form template

A copy of the informed consent form can be found in the Documentation section of the Coffee and Wi-Fi blog:

<http://coffeandWi-Fi.net/documentation/>

The password to gain access to this section is: flatwhite.

The informed consent form was modified from the York Sociology Department informed consent form template, with thanks.

## **Appendix 5**

Interview audio and field notes

Interview audio is available in .mp3 format on request

Field notes are also available on request.