



Chapter 2: Sharing Resources in Places We Move Through

Where many old technologies inherently forced people together in factories, office buildings, schools, and libraries, new ones tempt them to stay apart, working for organizations without working in one, joining schools or libraries without going to one.

—John Seely Brown & Paul Duguid, 2000, p. xix

Washington Examiner senior political analyst Michael Barone (2014) used “The Disconnected Generation” as the moniker of choice to describe U.S. adults born after 1980. To call millennials disconnected might seem strange, given the intense connectedness of many North American young people through social platforms and mobile technologies. However, Barone was summarizing the results of a Pew Research Report that focused on how the under-35 crowd is largely “unattached,” tending away from organized religion, political groups, and even marriage. Barone associated this lack of connection with declining “social trust,” citing well-known sociologist Robert Putnam’s (2000) research depicting the shifting social fabric of the Western world. Building on this foundation, Barone argued that “the picture we get from the Pew numbers is of a largely disconnected generation, in touch with self-selected peers and distrustful of others” (para. 16).

The questions that Barone and others raised about community life and neighborhood connectedness resonate with those that Putnam posed nearly twenty years ago about the decline of local communities. Many scholars have long been worried about the degradation of places that nurture community life. When Putnam worried that Americans were “Bowling Alone,” he lamented not only a loss of interaction among communities but also of places that support that interaction. Putnam did not believe that social places were completely disappearing. Instead, places where neighbors rubbed shoulders were changing. Public spaces, those shared noncommercial locations open to all members of a local community, were becoming replaced with places organized most explicitly to invite homogeneous consumer desire or to be moved through rather than dwelled in (e.g., see the concept of “omnitopia” [Wood, 2009]). In Putnam’s terms, Americans were literally and

figuratively reaching for fast food on the go over longer-term nourishment in places where they were likely to spend longer periods of time (2000). McDonald's replaced the neighborhood café, and the drive-thru window offered sustenance. As the epigraph from John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid (2000) suggested, technologies such as the car worked hand-in-hand with other cultural and economic dynamics to support people's tendencies to avoid community or organizational spaces, or opt for the privacy of their own homes over shared interactions.

While the "great, good places" of Ray Oldenburg's (1999) community life may be difficult to find today, readers and writers who use networked mobile technologies frequently turn to the social locations that he called third places—locations outside homes and offices—to access shared resources. To better understand some of the relationships among networked mobile device use and shared places, this chapter begins a conversation about how composing with laptops takes place in the *commons*. In discussions of economics and/or natural resources, the term commons typically describes a collection of shared community resources available for use that are not owned or controlled by a private entity. In common usage, many of us might be familiar with the "tragedy of the commons," a well-known economics concept used to describe how resources shared through open access by a community are likely to be depleted without long-term regard for maintenance and sustainability. However, the term also is used frequently in library and information sciences in concert with the idea of an "information commons," defined as an integrated place where people from all identities and backgrounds access resources such as learning guidance, technical support, hardware and software, physical space, and a cultural environments needed to achieve learning goals (Bailey & Tierney, 2002) or a "learning commons," which positions these integrated resources more explicitly toward learning as an outcome (Mirtz, 2009). In either sense, I will suggest that we think through how social potential and commons places intersect with mobile device literacies, given the widespread sense that community places and shared resources are disappearing due to privatization, globalization, and changes in technologies.

In this chapter, I examine the commons as a kind of place that shapes and is shaped by the embodied practice of composing with mobile networked devices. If we understand the places we move through as more than degradations of traditional community rootedness, what might we learn about the social environments that gather mobile people and technologies? What role do mobile interactions play in community places? What opportunities and challenges do they pose for composing that may differ from places that are perceived to be less flexible (i.e., classrooms, dorms)? Toward answering these questions, I examine how composers who use laptops in shared spaces often

rely on shared resources that come from places maintained by and inhabited by others; however, the resources available in shared places we move through generally are not free for the taking. This creates a tension in which the commons is often perceived as flexible, customizable, or “blank” when it is highly situated and positioned. More closely examining how people use and discuss shared social places reveals challenges not only for local community organizing and civic efforts but also for academic and workplace collaborations.

Third Places and Their Roles in Invention and Community

Places meant to be moved through have long been important to how rhetorical scholars understand processes of generating new ideas and participating in community life. Historically, sites that gather mobile people and allow transient dwellers to enter them temporarily have been described as “third places” by sociological literature that discusses the importance of community locations that ground a domain of acquaintances (Oldenburg 1999). Most famously, third places such as the coffeehouses of eighteenth-century England were associated with rhetorical and humanistic theory because they were understood to support the critical, rational dialogue that grounds political social action. Jurgen Habermas (1989) in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, for instance, identified the coffeehouse as a material foundation for newly developing late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British publics, places where private individuals began coordinating in ways that radically shifted the possibilities for political agency. For literary critic Terry Eagleton (1984), the act of speaking in coffeehouses was considered unruly and threatened to break down power hierarchies, even if what was said was subject to norms of the occasion. As he put it, “the speech act itself, the enunciation as opposed to the enonce, figures in its very form an equality, autonomy and reciprocity at odds with its class-bound content” (1984, pp. 14-15). Coffee shops provided a space that facilitated a transition from an atomized society of private individuals to a “relatively cohesive body whose deliberations may assume the form of a powerful political force” (Eagleton, 1984, p. 9). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986) also associated the rise of the coffeehouse with the development of print journalism, the birth of literary criticism, and the developing agency and self-fashioning of a late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century middle class.

Importantly, within public sphere theory, coffeehouses were positioned as foundations for two kinds of mediated social experiences. The first of these relates directly to literacy: coffeehouses were understood to be important because they facilitated the sharing of original print materials and a culture of reading. They were positioned as places for the exchange of texts that in-

roduced ideas to a newly formed reading public. Second, coffeehouses were positioned as important for facilitating oral discussion; they were places that enabled the rational/critical discussion central to dissecting those print materials when people met together publicly. Habermas thus described coffeehouses as “centers of criticism—literary at first, then also political” that were populated and enacted by a new “parity of the educated” (1989, p. 32). Importantly, Habermas portrayed the coffeehouse as beyond government control, a place where people could meet strategically and intentionally as a result of their own motivations and desires. Although feminists and historians have critiqued this reading on various grounds,⁴ this collective memory of an accessible site for conversation and community organizing maintains a strong resonance, even while other theorists and historians have suggested that early British coffeehouses were sites for policing class-related manners and conducting business transactions, as well (Cowan, 2005).

Like social places of today that offer space for mobile travelers to gather, Habermas’ ideal coffeehouse implied an openness and accessibility that meant it could be inhabited by different people over time. However, in Habermas’ telling, the place was defined more by collective identity than by individual desire. The idealized coffeehouse of Habermas’ theory was defined less by the individual than the collective: where conversations together were more important than individual transformations of place. In other words, within this theory individuals did not assign meaning to the coffeehouse so much as the coffeehouse assigned meaning to individuals by locating them inside a collective mobilized through persistent discursive exchange. Within public sphere theory, the coffeehouse has been positioned as a foundation where pamphlets such as the *Spectator* in eighteenth-century Britain created a persistent pattern of circulation, discussion, and response. Warner (2002) feared this sense of publicness would be lost as political dialogue adapted to the rhythms of online publication and circulation.

It is no wonder then that such places have long been understood as important to theories of civic action, as well as to the important role of literacy for supporting and sustaining relations among educated peers. For example, when Oldenburg described coffeehouses as one of the neighborhood “third places” of communities, he emphasized how they created accessible “neutral ground” where individual differences could be leveled in favor of identifications formed around shared issues of concern (1999). Literacy, as well, was

4 For an introduction to feminist critiques of public sphere theory, see Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib’s contributions to Craig Calhoun’s *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992). Historians such as Brian Cowan have also argued, contrary to Habermas, that coffeehouses were more often spaces for social control and the manipulation of manners than for uncontrolled rational dialogue (2005).

understood to establish these identifications, as patrons read about and then shared news, opinions, and perspectives. As I have already suggested, these historically important communicative contexts have been understood to be under threat as a result to changes in the arrangement and ownership of space, as well as the changing expectations and values of the people who move through them. Relating these issues to civic and community rhetorics, Nancy Welch (2008) described the vast movement to privatize public space, through assigning it corporate control or altering human behaviors in ways that hide or isolate once-shared identifications.

In line with the shift away from shared places as community centers, the people I talked with during my study emphasized individual goals when using shared social places for composing, rather than understanding their time there to be related to overt participation in community or civic life. For example, the stories in Chapter 1 from Kathryn, Ed, and Rebecca illustrate a sense that laptop users often position shared social places as places to be used for an individual's unique desires. How then should we describe these places as related to the literacy practices associated with networked mobile device use, and how might these characteristics differ from traditional public spaces?

Places We Move Through

One answer to the previous question about the transformation of public space has been offered by theorists who focus on how shared places can no longer be understood as "localities" but instead illustrate (and serve the needs of) increasing globalization. Anthropologist Marc Augé (1995), for example, posited that if anthropology had historically depended on the idea that cultures or communities were bound in particular places, this notion was dissolving with the "excess of space" that accompanied global interactions, exchanges, and movements. When what had once been understood to be distant was suddenly perceived as local and when cultural contact with those far spread suddenly seemed inevitable, local places ceased to mean what they once had. In this "supermodern" world, time, space, and identity were increasingly homogeneous and defined by mass commercialization. Augé's theories intersected with problematics of space theorized by critical and feminist geographers (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). In addition, Augé's theory echoed David Harvey's concept of time-space compression, in which the history of capitalism could be read through a lens in which time appeared to speed up as telecommunications and travel technologies shrank the distance between spaces. For Paul Virilio (1986), this compression was associated with acceleration that stripped away time for critical inquiry and contemplation (Kimme Hea, 2009).

Augé referred to the new category of locations unique to this situation as “non-places,” focusing on their use and social impact:

[T]he word “non-place” designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces. Although the two sets of relations overlap to a large extent, and in any case officially (individuals travel, make purchases, relax), they are still not confused with one another; for non-places mediate whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality. (1995, p. 94)

Non-places for Augé, that is, could be identified not only by their intended purpose but also by the way of being in relation to others that they established. These places invited disconnection rather than assembling social collectives.

Augé's prologue to *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995) used the example of a traveler's experience to explore and develop the solitary experience of passing through places where individuals momentarily dwelled. Within this domain, institutional and organizational texts were used to maintain efficiency and regulate movement, rather than to enrich community understanding or provoke debate. In the airports and train stations that Augé described, it was less likely that people were reading newspapers that created a sense of collective relations to be discussed and debated among them. It was more likely that they were reading institutional texts that ensured that they effectively minded their individual pathways, moving in ways that facilitated their ability to reach another place (Augé, 1995). Thus people who found themselves together in airports, train stations, or malls often lacked a shared history or groundedness. They were thus likely to see themselves as on more individualized trajectories, each longing to be “a world in himself,” where literacy was important for maintaining that perceived autonomy. Virilio (2012) further developed the temporal ramifications of shrinking geographical distances. He wrote, “what we are now seeing, after the topographic and geometric effraction of distances, is the anachronistic effraction of the time intervals required for effective knowledge and well as memory of the facts” (2012, p. 4). Our traditional means of perception and understanding are no longer equipped to deal with the speed at which both we and information can circulate.

As a result, the mall, the interstate system, and the airport terminal were more or less similar across geographical regions in highly developed Western

places (Dickinson, 2002; Ellis, 2002; Wood 2009) and supported reading and writing texts that facilitated movement even as they gathered mobile people and devices. Today's coffeehouse is often understood to be functioning in a similarly individualized fashion. If Habermas' ideal coffeehouse epitomized a built environment that embodied the public sphere, the megachain Starbucks has often been invoked to illustrate the contemporary non-place. Although Starbucks cited the idea of third place in its description of its mission and purpose (2020, "Company Information"), in an interview with historian Bryant Simon, Oldenburg (2009) "scoffed" at the idea that Starbucks franchises could be described as third places in the sense he had intended the term. "It's an imitation," Oldenburg asserted. He continued by stating that Starbucks could not "achieve the kind of connections I had in mind" (2009, pp. 249-250).⁵ Literary historian Markman Ellis (2002), known for his four-volume collection of historical materials referencing coffeehouses in the long eighteenth century, took a similar view of what social connection was possible in the contemporary coffeehouse, again using Starbucks as his exemplar. Ellis described "Starbucks sociability" as most related to a poster displaying the words "Taste, comfort, relax" that he observed on the wall of a Starbucks still under construction (2002). "In the sociability of Starbucks," Ellis wrote, "an atomized society finds a convenient representation of the city of individuals. This sociability is not collective and public but is rather about being alone together, about fragmenting public discourse into non-organized entities, about consuming rather than debating" (2002, n.p.). Although Sherry Turkle (2011) would later associate being "alone together" with the use of technologies, Ellis emphasized how this social state emerged from the social and economic arrangements of the place: changes that epitomized the difference between a coffeehouse that created a collective and one that stood to support individual trajectories.

Shared Social Places and/as the Commons

The kinds of places that Habermas described may be difficult to find in the twenty-first century, if they ever existed. The "great, good places" of neighborhood life that united communities have changed along with shifting technologies and economic arrangements. However, there is also reason to think that generalized critiques of shared social places likely overlook various neighborhood locations that seed arguments and serve as a grounding for both collective identities and neighborhoods. For example, Julie Lindquist's (2002)

5 While Oldenburg has denied that Starbucks can be a third place, Simon discusses how Starbucks owner Howard Schultz extensively used the theory of third place in creating the design and plans for this coffee chain.

A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar discussed the role of a bar called The Smokehouse where discussion of politics, alcohol, and everyday life performed and constructed complex relations among those who spend time there. Many of us are lucky enough to have places like the Smokehouse in our neighborhoods, even if we do not understand them to hold positions as lofty or idealized as the historical coffeehouse.

Furthermore, recent research on the use and uptake of shared social places also suggests that worries about the isolating nature of shared space have been overstated. One strain of this scholarship is theoretical. The mobilities turn in social science scholarship has questioned the tendency to nostalgize localities and community rootedness. Tim Creswell (2006), for instance, described how a sedentarist metaphysics positions mobility as an inherent threat to the authenticity of local place—a dysfunction likely to result in the loss of tradition or community. A nomadic metaphysics, by contrast, celebrates fluidities and flows as potentially subversive responses to structuring forces, often romantically celebrating movement without attention to how mobilities are experienced differentially. The sedentarist metaphysics echoes through critiques from scholars such as Oldenburg and Ellis, who position movements away from localities as departures from rooted, rational foundations. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that people are less socially isolated in shared social places today than 30 years ago, and that women in particular are more likely than ever to be present and interacting in public spaces (Hampton et al., 2015).

Communication and information theorists studying the relationship between technology use and sociability also question whether threats to public space have been overstated. This research traces a long history of worries about collectivity that emerge during moments of technological change. These worries surface, for instance, in collective responses to technologies such as books, televisions, portable boom boxes, and Walkmans (Gergen, 2002; Hampton & Gupta, 2008; Meyrowitz, 1985). While cultural critiques associating global capitalism with the homogenization of public space remain compelling (Dickinson, 2002; Ellis, 2002; Wood, 2009), rhetoric and communication scholars have traced how individuals and groups collectively annotate and transform shared places through online social software applications (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012; Diehl et al., 2008; Frith, 2015; Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011; Rice, 2012; Varnelis & Friedburg, 2008), experiencing the world in hybrid spaces where contact is mediated both electronically and in person. Online applications support forms of connection that may not bound the same kinds of geographically rooted communities associated with public sphere theory but do create relationships and the potential for networked information exchange among neighbors and co-inhabitants. As the tools that

enable collaborative learning and work in online places are often available online, the importance of offline places for gathering has not disappeared. However, these places take on different roles for workers, learners, neighbors, and community members seeking differently mediated social interactions as well as solitude and unofficial productivity monitoring.

The term “public space” no longer quite fits to describe many shared social locations where networked mobile technologies are used as a primary writing media, given the emphasis on individual needs and desires over and above collective interests. However, positioning these shared places as a commons emphasizes their roles as domains where people access shared materials that participate in their work, learning, and engagement with others. This function of social places as domains of shared materials might not be obvious at first. In Starbucks, we may not borrow newspapers or magazines or other historically significant shared literacy materials. However, we are likely to borrow the free Wi-Fi connection, the surface of a tabletop, and the values and attitudes that enable literacy work to take place. In the most overt cases, places such as the Gone Wired Café or the Technology Commons become temporary destinations for work particularly because they contribute relevant materials to literacy practices. For example, Johndan Johnson-Eilola’s (2005) *Datacloud* describes how both students and symbolic-analytic workers construct personalized workspaces combining physical spatial infrastructures (e.g., surfaces such as whiteboards, desks, chairs, etc.) that they access with online interfaces to create layered, multiply mediated settings where they sample, juxtapose, and transform information. Such constructions frequently make use of resources available in coffeehouses, coworking facilities, or libraries. These resources range from technologies and archived texts that enable device functionality to arrangements of built environments, values, and people that enable interpersonal social support.

Composers who write with networked mobile technologies also frequently and simultaneously make use of shared online domains that enable access to materials that participate in literacy. Social media sites, bulletin boards, Wikipedia: these sites have in common that people navigate to and from them temporarily in order to access shared information that participates in their composing. Readers and writers often position the places they move through in this way: as collections of materials rather than as homes for communities. In so doing, users compose documents but they also simultaneously participate in and co-construct multiple social environment through their user-generated participation. This includes complicated and potentially troubling participations: for example, the passive data collected, used, and manipulated whenever composers interact in social media or log in to a Starbucks Wi-Fi connection.

To bring this conversation to a more concrete place, the chapter now turns to the two sites in which I researched transient literacies to reflect on how we might read both as a commons for networked mobile composing. Both sites were more complex than either Habermas' traditional collective sociability associated with the coffeehouse or Ellis' atomized "Starbucks sociability." Across their functions as community centers and workspaces for academics and professionals, both places emphasized flexibility through multiple zones and changed as people accessed and maneuvered toward materials that supported a range of literacy needs.

The Great Good Non-Place

Located on a central avenue in a city that had once been in the center of the US automobile industry, Gone Wired was part of a broader rebuilding and rebranding that could be seen throughout the East Side of Lansing, Michigan. That central avenue was Michigan Avenue, which divided the city and moved travelers in a direct route from the state government district in Downtown Lansing to the large research university in neighboring East Lansing. Along this route, a large teaching hospital was positioned between these centers of academia and state government. This highly traveled thoroughfare collected and supported the movement of individuals affiliated with the area's academic, health-care, and government sectors—people likely to be transient in their relationships to the city and state. The research participants lived in this neighborhood (the East Side), which put the café in close proximity to their homes.

Gone Wired, however, had positioned itself to *feel local*, defining itself against the corporate coffee scene that Ellis described or that rhetorician Greg Dickinson (2002) evoked in his material rhetorical analysis of a Colorado Starbucks. Echoing Augé, Dickinson noted how Starbucks' generic corporate text, combined with the sights, sounds, and materials that come with experiencing coffee beans transformed into sippable lattes and mochas, enforced an aesthetic that made globalization local and comfortable, while covering over material contexts and practices that supported the brand. Gone Wired had, by contrast, encouraged its materiality to be developed as an ongoing, community-produced endeavor. Instead of seeing generic advertisements for products in the café, patrons who entered Gone Wired through its glass entry doors encountered announcements for community reading groups or local music acts. The bulletin board along the back entryway and the floor-to-ceiling columns near the cash register were tacked and stapled with notices for community meetup groups, musicians, and artists—many of whom hobnobbed there during free time. The newspaper available near the bar was the "City Pulse,"

Lansing's "alternative weekly newspaper." Gone Wired served coffee roasted by a local roaster and distributor, whose plant had been releasing the smell of roasted coffee beans into Lansing's downtown district since the 1930s. Gone Wired never hid its history as a place built over the remnants of another former small business on the Ave. The foosball table and glass cabinet counter visible on the first floor reminded patrons of the building's previous life as an outdoor sporting goods shop. Patrons commonly propped bicycles against the unused counter and storage area in the front entryway. It was far from a controlled aesthetic.



Figure 2.1. The front entrance of the Gone Wired Café.



Figure 2.2. The Gone Wired Café as viewed from the upper level.

Although Gone Wired resisted a corporate coffee ambiance, perusing its use on any given day revealed literacy practices that differed from either the historical sketches of face-to-face conversations among citizens in Habermas' coffeehouse or the scenes of isolation in Augé's conception of non-place. Gone Wired negotiated a middle space as a community site that invited locals to read the local news and drop by to talk local politics. However, it also served as a composing workspace for those who wanted to pass through without much interaction. This was true not only for graduate and professional students who attended local colleges and universities, law schools, and medical schools, but also for state government employees, attorneys, and local businesspeople. As in many other gathering places (including Starbucks!), it was not uncommon to see community groups drafting out plans to organize a volunteer drive or locals dropping in to say hello to the barista and scope out the local paper. This activity happened simultaneously as others entered the café explicitly to get personal or professional work done, laptop after laptop often lining the upstairs space. The fact that Gone Wired was so local in the ways I have previously described makes it even more interesting that many research participants referred to it as "blank" or "clean space," a tabula rasa on which to write their own needs and desires. The place in many ways worked as hard as it could to counter this notion of its own positioning. Permanent fixtures—such as the burgundy, cream, and green-tiled fountain holding an aging, metal sculpture in its reservoir—reminded patrons to view it as a

unique, local place. And yet individual desires were key to many of its dwellers, who focused on what it offered as an escape from more socially saturated places in their lives.

A Resource “Epicenter”

The Technology Commons differed in substantial ways from the Gone Wired Café, but even its name emphasized how it positioned itself as a commons providing resources and bringing people together. As much as the Technology Commons hoped to be a gathering place that synthesized a community, it also emphasized the importance of its community’s diversity, which was evident in the design features that attempted to support students’ individual information management practices. The website described it this way:

UCF’s old computer center has been transformed into a welcoming, convenient place for all students. The Technology Commons is an epicenter for students to gather, communicate, interact, study and receive technical support. A state-of-the-art facility open to all of UCF, providing the resources for students and staff alike to find, assemble, and synthesize the information needed to tackle numerous diverse tasks. The individual areas of the computer center buildings amalgamate to form a diverse, thriving, technical community at the heart of UCF.

The description implied that the Technology Commons could fulfill two needs at the same time: to exist as an “epicenter” where the community could meet and to provide the resources students needed to “find, assemble, and synthesize the information needed to tackle numerous diverse tasks.” Importantly, the Technology Commons would attempt to achieve its mission by “providing the resources” that would be put to use by students and staff and would do so by creating “individual areas” that could be taken up for different uses.

To provide more context, the Technology Commons opened its doors in January 2012 and was located on the most frequently traveled pedestrian pathway at the University of Central Florida (UCF), a large, metropolitan research university of over 60,000 students. University campuses, whether by design or as a result of use, can be seen through student eyes as collections of linked places inhabited temporarily before moving elsewhere. At UCF, this dynamic of interconnected dwelling places was shaped by its large student population. Campus social places were saturated with people during the busiest hours of the day and were never completely deserted. In buildings where classes

were conducted, students transformed hallways into study zones, sitting on the floor in front of open textbooks. Against this backdrop, UCF had recently invested in renovating or constructing several new, flexible campus locations for temporary study, gathering, and information access. For example, when I arrived at UCF in the fall of 2011, the entry floor of its John C. Hitt Library had recently been renovated from a traditional “stacks” setup and print repository into a knowledge commons built on a “Commons 2.0” model of library space design (Bilandzic & Foth, 2014). The new knowledge commons featured a coffee shop, mixed-use seating, and portable white boards that could serve both as inscription surfaces and barriers to interaction (Allen 2011). UCF also operated several computer labs dotted across its 1,415-acre main campus, including in highly frequented locations such as the Student Union, as well as places local to particular majors such as in the Business Administration building. The campus also featured two flexible study sites called “All Knight Study,” which were available to students at all hours, after many computer labs ended normal operating times.

Prior to remodeling, the Technology Commons had played a role in this broader campus spatial organization by providing students with access to technologies and resources without a dual focus on gathering. Called “Computer Center 1 and 2,” the building had been a large traditional computer lab, lining rows of black computers against gray carpets and white walls. The new Technology Commons by contrast emphasized diversity and flexibility by combining a series of contrasting arrangements that suggested diverse forms of social interaction. These zones corresponded with different technologies, lighting, and materials and stretched across the two buildings joined by an outdoor walkway and patio. Both instantiations of the place had gathered mobile students traveling across campus and provided them with resources, but design choices in the new built environment had a different rhetorical impact on the movement and positioning of mobile bodies. The remodeling emphasized students’ ability to choose—and, to some degree, manipulate—their immediate material surrounds, rather than occupying a predetermined set of relations among bodies, furniture, and devices structured through bolted-down materials and technologies. Students were confronted by choices about what resources to use amid the following multiple zones that the space assembled.

The BYOT Lab, Coffee Shop, and Technology Product Center

Figure 2.2 shows the Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) lab, which included a small coffee shop, a technology product center (a technology store), and modular-style café furniture. One side of the BYOT lab included cushioned

chairs with printed upholstery, often arranged to face a large flat-screen display at the far end of the room. Students used the BYOT lab for everything from coursework to playing video games on the PlayStation to eating lunch. The right side included café-style tables for two that could be pushed together to accommodate larger groups. Students often brought in or purchased food and used this area simultaneously for eating, socializing, and studying.



Figure 2.3. The Technology Commons BYOT laboratory.

The Collaboration Lab, Tech Repair Desk, and Transitional Space

Students accessed the Collaboration Lab by passing from the BYOT lab through a hallway with a tech-repair desk, storage for charging mobile devices, recycling centers, and vending machines containing small study items (headphones, blue books for test taking, etc.). As Figure 2.4 shows, the Collaboration Lab featured pod-style desktop computers arranged with rolling desk chairs. Groups often huddled together around one desktop computer for collaborative projects, and individual students moved chairs to empty desks to work alone while sitting near friends or strangers using desktop computers. In addition, the Collaboration Lab housed glass-walled private rooms designed for group work and specialized technology needs (e.g., an audio- and video-recording studio).



Figure 2.4. Technology Commons collaboration laboratory.

The PC Lab, Cubby, and Meeting Spaces

Both the BYOT lab and Collaboration Lab opened onto an outdoor patio space, which was usable almost year-round in Orlando's climate. Across the patio was the second building in the Technology Commons, which housed a large conference-room space and a standard computer lab with traditional rows of desktop computers. While arranged more traditionally, this laboratory was busy with students, many of whom used headphones to create privacy. The transitional hallway that led from the front door included a small "cubby" area with sofa-style seating, a large central table, and a flat-screen panel from which students could project from laptops.

Given this design for flexibility, it is hardly surprising that students' uses for the Technology Commons spanned domains (i.e., personal, school, extra-curricular), technologies, subject areas, and reasons for interpersonal gathering. In the interviews I conducted, students frequently discussed their use of the Technology Commons by positioning it as one of several competing campus social spaces, which they used strategically for different reasons. In other words, the Technology Commons' position in spatial and social campus networks was associated with particular uses and challenges. The ongoing use of the Technology Commons for convenience and social interaction, in turn,

shaped the activities, attention, and social arrangements cultivated there. Specifically, the Technology Commons was often positioned as a place to complete study tasks that could be accomplished while purposefully splitting attention or “hanging out” with others. This was in part because the Technology Commons was bustling with activity. It was loud, bright, and dynamic. For example, business major Max described how the Technology Commons was a perfect location for conducting “low-level research” for finance classes while socializing. By “low-level research” in this case, he described running an investment simulator and monitoring the ongoing performance of his simulated choices over the course of a few hours. Students like Max often worked on tasks that did not require full attention in the Technology Commons, which enabled them to be with friends at the same time. However, individuals and groups often found themselves in the Tech Commons for more sustained composing work as well.

The Cost of Composing with the Mobile Commons

The Technology Commons and Gone Wired were different kinds of places. They were built as a result of different funding models, and they evidenced different trends in space design and retrofitting. However, the environments were similar with respect to how they foregrounded individual freedom and choice in how their built environments would be navigated and used. Both places had been designed for flexibility and configurability and offered patrons a range of possible materials to support tasks they encountered. What was less clear was whether users of these places possessed capacity, access, or time needed to effectively mobilize the available resources. Furthermore, both locations required that users possess technologies and other social support that would transform empty surfaces into fully functioning learning or literacy ecologies. While the Technology Commons provided some remaining desktop computers, the majority of its zones offered tables on which to place laptops. While the Gone Wired Café did not purport to offer learning or information management support, the commons still emphasized flexibility across its multiple zones: a “living room style” seating area, booths, and tables.

In places that serve as a commons but not always as “public space,” the flexibility to organize one’s own learning practices comes with costs, in at least two senses. Although these places offer flexible resources designed to appeal to many needs and desires, it is generally necessary to invest in food or drink in order to occupy space in a coffeehouse, and it is difficult to miss the consumer goods that line the Technology Commons walls (see Ryan Moeller [2004] regarding the consumer impulses of wireless technologies).

This is not to mention how costs for constructing and maintaining University places funnel back to taxpayers and/or students. In other ways the cost of using these commons spaces was more hidden: the usefulness of shared places for composing depended upon factors that varied for individuals: their social embeddedness, their habits of time use and attention, and their material and social access to technologies and discourses. This cost for entry meant that some potential users were more likely to have the opportunity to participate in the commons than others. Recognizing the “cost” associated with taking up shared materials is crucial for understanding the challenges of composing in flexible commons spaces. How are students and professionals negotiating these costs and where do they run into roadblocks and challenges in assembling the resources needed for composing?

In order to reflect on the complexities of positioning shared social spaces as locations for networked mobile composing, the chapter discusses two cases of extended writing projects, one of a professional writer in the Gone Wired Café and the other from a group of student writers in the Technology Commons. These cases focus on the costs of taking up shared resources, positioning these relative to participants’ perceptions of the spaces in which they collaborated.

Dave’s Story

Let’s begin with Dave, who is a research participant I’ve discussed at length.⁶ Dave was a professional rather than a student; however, his story is relevant to the challenges and costs of transient literacies. A technology consultant who writes, teaches, and lends advice to a number of different academic, community, and nonprofit organizations, Dave used the Gone Wired Café for many aspects of his job, including his personal/professional blog. Dave was also a new father with a partner who worked outside the home. Not surprisingly, the birth of his daughter had significantly altered many parts of his life, including assigning him the new identity of stay-at-home dad. As a self-employed contractor and full-time father, he lacked an official organizational workspace, and working at home was filled with crawling and crying challenges: “My house is busy with the baby. So really the only time I really can sit is if I negotiate some time with my wife . . . or when they go to bed.” The Gone Wired Café had been a central work location for Dave long before this most recent

6 I have written about Dave’s case previously focused on the role of social media in building capacity for his professional writing identity and career (i.e., Pigg 2014a). Here I write about Dave again, but emphasize different details from my interviews with him in order to develop a different theme from our conversation: the difficulties that transient literacies present for navigating the commons as hybrid space, given individual desires for its use.

shift in his personal and professional identity. When I asked Dave about why he first started coming to Gone Wired, he mentioned his laptop, the Wi-Fi connection, and his work, which had taken a winding path across several local organizations in the past several years.

Dave positioned the café as a place for private time. Although he was preparing to “meet with one other group” later that day to discuss an ongoing project, he emphasized Gone Wired was a place for time and space alone. When he discussed the need for a private workplace, he stressed that finding personal time as an independent contractor in which to focus on work was an issue with which he was currently struggling. As he put it, “I just have no space and time for myself, and I really . . . when I’m here, I just really want to be left alone, you know? And not chitchat, you know? I don’t have any time for myself unless I make it.” He used the café on Fridays “mostly to write or to catch up on things” alone with his laptop, external hard drive, and mobile phone. He contrasted how the café offered different affective associations than that of his home. While his home was familiar, he felt confined there, adding that he was “kind of stuck in the house a little bit more. And more comfortable there too, but it still takes me longer to write if I’m there. If I have to write a blog there, it will take me a lot more time.”

Finding alone time was tricky in Gone Wired, however, because Dave was well established in professional networks of the city as well as in the social networks of the coffeehouse. While Kim and Ed, for example, were able to find privacy upstairs in Gone Wired away from the in-and-out traffic of local patrons, Dave found the upstairs space uncomfortable because of the temperature. Sitting downstairs, Dave found it almost impossible not to run into people he knew from prior work and community organizing efforts. This posed problems for Gone Wired’s capacity to support the privacy Dave craved when he worked outside the home. He was increasingly ambivalent about spending time there. As he put it, “Because I’m not here a lot, if people see me, they tend to just come over and think they can talk to me. So I’m getting where I want to go hide when I’m here.” Hiding for Dave meant working in a small meeting room that was typically not visible to patrons entering through the café’s front door. He described how the pressure to complete tasks during the hours he had available was leading him to feel agitated, both with others and himself. As he described, “I think I am putting more pressure on myself to get more done, and I think it’s made [my outlook on working here] a little more negative.” He described how when heading home on Fridays after a day in Gone Wired, he nearly always felt that he did not accomplish enough and transferred that attitude to the rest of his life. Relying totally on mobile workspace to support his career, he could never easily leave his frustration at the office.

Charlotte, Owen, and Gabriel's Stories

The second case example is a writing group involving three students named Charlotte, Owen, and Gabriel. These three senior management majors had been assigned to work together on a large-scale writing assignment, a business plan, that required extensive research and invention over a semester. While members of the group were relatively close in age, the one woman and three men had different racial and socioeconomic status and experiences, as well as different prior and current life experiences. The business plan writers were collaborating as a direct result of an assignment that required them to become a team, rather than because of their own motivation to do so. Their course met face-to-face one night a week, and each meeting represented a process deadline toward completing the business plan. Working to meet this weekly deadline, the group had the opportunity to set the terms of their collaboration and their composing process.

When Charlotte, Owen, and Gabriel's group started working together on their business plan, at least some of them had a rather idyllic conception of how the collaboration should unfold. Owen, for instance, described the plan that he and fellow group member Charlotte had imagined for the collaboration at the beginning of the semester. As he put it, he and Charlotte had "heard glorious stories of groups where everyone comes in on Saturday, you're in the library in one of the cubby areas . . . with five computers for about eight hours and all just knock out the work, the assignment right there. Everyone's right there. Just reach around and touch someone." Thinking back on this original vision as he approached the end of the semester, Owen reflected, "We'd envisioned that for this group. That hasn't worked out."

During the hour-long work session I observed during the last week of January, three group members were huddled around a high-top table with one laptop in the BYOT lounge of the Technology Commons working on the market analysis section of their business plan. Their goal for the day was to combine four individual contributions that had been composed prior to their meeting into one coherent draft of the market analysis. If possible, they also hoped to align their finished product with two example texts they had received from the instructor: one printed in the book and another successful version the instructor had provided from a previous course session. This meeting in the Technology Commons was the closest they would come all semester to the rosy vision of collaboration Owen and Charlotte had imagined. Even on this most successful day, however, not all group members could carve out five or six hours from their schedules to be in the same place at the same time to complete the plan. Owen and Gabriel were available earliest at around eleven in the morning and met in the Business Administration building computer lab—

where both of them typically completed coursework. They worked together on the early portions of the market analysis until Gabriel needed to leave to attend a class. When Charlotte arrived on campus a few hours later, she texted Owen and suggested he meet her at the Technology Commons because of the power outlets, coffee, and large tables. Owen agreed, though he and Gabriel both stressed later that the Technology Commons is not a place they would typically work—both had visited only once or twice before. Their fourth collaborator did not respond to text and email messages inviting him to join the group's work session, though he had contributed writing toward the project. The group eventually did finish a draft of their market analysis section before the course deadline and submitted it for their instructor's review.

The Costs of Freedom and Challenges of Flexibility

Using laptops is often associated with flexibility, in ways that are illustrated by both the cases that I just described. When Dave left the confines of his home and had childcare for his daughter, he felt a freedom to conduct his work in ways less constrained by the needs of others. He could compose where and when he wanted. The business plan group experienced a similar freedom and flexibility in their writing assignment: though they needed to complete a particular task, they enjoyed the freedom of organizing its completion based on their personal desires. Though Dave and the business plan writers both enjoyed freedom, they needed resources to transform their flexibility into a tangible composing process.

Let me begin to illustrate by discussing Dave in more detail. For Dave, the flexibility offered by freelance work enabled him to be a primary child-care provider in his household but simultaneously replaced the stability offered by affiliation with a singular firm with the necessity of organizing contract positions across organizations in a way that allowed for the development of emergent opportunities over time (Pigg, 2014a). Dave is not unique in this way. According to some, “flexibility is the *modus operandi*” of global capitalism (Garsten, 2008, p. 14), which means that individuals must be prepared to adapt and shift their career goals continually in response to potential opportunities. This adaptiveness involved ongoing watchfulness and the cultivation of “negotiation” and “agility” in creating, maintaining, and reorganizing alliances (Spinuzzi, 2007). As I have argued before (Pigg 2014a), flexibility in a career like Dave's requires him to cultivate a relationship to a range of online social media sites that were not provided to him by an employer but instead were his responsibility to assemble. However, the same was true for his physical workspace, creating the need to continually construct hybrid space that effectively layered the affordances of online and physical materials.

For Dave as for many others, this flexibility and construction of space revolved around his use of a laptop computer for everyday work. Dave's laptop was a portal to the online resources he used to insure the possibility for future action (i.e., more jobs in the future), but also required a built environment that served to anchor a *production setting* for his work. The places that served a function as his resource commons were unlikely to be tailored to the particular needs that he brought to them, however. Twitter was not a perfect medium for establishing his professional identity, and Gone Wired was not a perfect production setting for his work. Dave was frustrated with the café's flexibility. The fact that Gone Wired served not only as a workplace but also as a community hangout meant that he was often faced with people who did not share his need for privacy. Through no fault of theirs, Dave experienced their presence as a distraction because it did not align with his personal goals for the production setting.

Recall that Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder emphasized that a central problem of infrastructure uptake is that collections of resources designed to be taken up by many different people will always struggle with the space between what is generally available and what is specifically needed. In their terms, "it is impossible to have 'universal niches'; one person's standard is in fact another's chaos" (1996, p. 112). In Dave's case, Gone Wired's status as a production setting for professional work had begun to feel like "chaos," even though the café functioned well for people like Ed and Kathryn, whom I discussed earlier. The flexibility offered by the built environment of the café came with a cost: it would be used in multiple and diverse ways and might only effectively serve one's goals for a time. Dave's time for Gone Wired seemed to be running out. This issue affects students as well as professionals. In the same way that professionals define and orchestrate workplaces and workflow routines, students with laptop computers gain responsibility for cultivating their end of the bargain to organize their "workflows." These choices require students to work with and assemble resources associated with values and materials embedded in their immediate physical locations, the disciplinary cultures of their coursework, and their personal routines and habits.

In a similar way, the key benefit of the Technology Commons for Charlotte, Owen, and Gabriel was its flexibility: it accommodated their seating, power, and noise needs, which enabled them to discuss their project out loud without interrupting others. Its café tables were well suited to group discussion, rather than dispersing them across a row of computers side-by-side. However, the presence of useful materials did not stop the group from struggling to effectively combine them with personal repertoires. When I first approached the group, there were stacks of paper, flailing arms, cans of energy drinks, and stress-relief toys sitting on the café table where the group huddled. Charlotte

began in front of the Dell laptop, which was connected to the Wi-Fi network and plugged into a power outlet behind them. She read aloud contributions that the group members had composed prior to their meeting, taking feedback from Owen and Gabriel and making changes to the official text as they debated vision, ideas, and phrasing details. Things had become tense as it was around three in the afternoon and the deadline for their section was at the beginning of their course at six. During this process, Owen and Gabriel cracked jokes, discussed mixed martial arts, and ultimately annoyed Charlotte to the point that she turned her laptop toward Owen and asked him to take over the central composing role.

It was not a design flaw in Technology Commons that made the group struggle: they had scheduled their work near the deadline and created a stressful situation for completing their assignment on that night. However, what I want to emphasize is that the group was generally unprepared to collaborate well with the materials in the space, even if they were somewhat cognizant of the need to plan and carefully orchestrate a collaboration among humans. I have already emphasized that most of the group preferred working face-to-face with one another in a way that simultaneously involved composing separately in a division of labor model and having immediate access to one another's feedback and interaction. However, they did not ultimately use this process, in part because the Technology Commons did not help them achieve this kind of social arrangement. Looking back on their composing session in the Technology Commons that day, Gabriel laughed, "We haven't really met [in person] since because we weren't really productive. I'm sure you could tell by the tape—we weren't really productive." Charlotte, herself, explained: "We agreed not to meet [face-to-face] anymore just because we don't get anything done. Not that we don't get along well, we do, as people but as a . . . like a work . . . a working group? No. We can't." In place of a face-to-face meeting, Charlotte took responsibility for centralizing interpersonal coordination via a different kind of commons: a Facebook group, which provided options for both synchronous and asynchronous communication and which all group members seemed to find more convenient. With Facebook creating an archive and online gathering place for conversations and materials, group members planned ad hoc face-to-face meetings when necessary by contacting each other through the page. Importantly, as the group delegated project coordination to Facebook, they divided the labor of the project differently. Instead of working to generate text together, they allowed one team member to work more or less independently on each week's contribution and rotated this responsibility among the group. Not surprisingly, all group members did not contribute evenly. Mediated through Facebook, they enacted a full division-of-labor model and collaborated in ways that prioritized their indi-

vidual convenience. Though the Technology Commons offered flexible space for organizing the deliberative approach to collaboration that most of them preferred, their ability to mobilize the materials came at a cost: of knowledge, time, and access that they were not able or willing, in this case, to pay.

The Conflicts of Individual Desires and Routines

There's a related challenge at the heart of both Dave and the business plan writers' stories: the individual needs and motives writers bring into commons spaces often create problems when they attempt to align them with the material possibilities afforded by socially rich gathering spaces. I have already suggested, for instance, that the highly individual needs Dave brought with him to Gone Wired were at odds with how the café functioned as a community hub. When the social atmosphere of the place required him to make small talk with his neighbors rather than focusing on writing or editing, he experienced intense frustration. The business writers' experience produced an interesting parallel: Dave increasingly found himself interested in seeking out online commons for shared resources rather than working where others could access him face-to-face. If Dave frequently spent time "hiding" in the café, he worked to make himself as visible as possible across online spaces and valued contributing to the online commons above conversations in the built, physical one. To give an example, Dave recently had been invited to deliver a short TED-style talk at a popular local conference. Interestingly, Dave was excited about this opportunity because it would develop his online visibility to his dispersed network, rather than because it would better establish an identity in the local community. He said, half jokingly, "I'm doing it more so I can get it on video," which he knew would be circulated on YouTube and could be linked to his blogs and social media accounts.

His needs for professional identity construction were so specialized, so individualized, that reaching out to garner contacts for future work was more likely successful in the crowd-assembling online commons of YouTube than the community-assembling local commons of the neighborhood meeting space. His central focus, then, was on what the physical commons offered him in terms of resources to be used in connecting through online media to communities dispersed geographically. He was not even particularly interested in the online commons associated with his local region because it did not effectively support his career goals. For instance, Dave described how Twitter was not useful for cultivating local connections because Twitter users often posted personal details ("I don't care that you had a date tonight. Okay? That's for Facebook. Do it on Facebook"). Dave perceived the personal, local, friendship-based identity and relationship building that happened on social

media outlets to be connected with a local young professional ethos that was less interesting to him than geographically distributed affinity networks connected to his personal and professional needs and development. The online commons offered something that the local commons could not.

In Charlotte, Owen, and Gabriel's case, the challenges of individual needs, materials, and assumptions worked hand-in-hand with the costs of freedom in that each group member brought conflicting perceptions and materials to the physical commons. Each member not only had disparate writing styles and uneven access to technologies but also different philosophies about how, when, and where collaborations should be accomplished. As with any collaboration, the group found itself in a situation where these individual trajectories needed to be bridged through negotiations to set an agenda and work plan for the group. However, the group seemed to believe that the flexibility of the commons itself would overcome their differences: that the very act of being face-to-face together in a location that offered technical materials that could aid in completing the task would outweigh the disparate goals that the group had for the business plan. Before returning to this central problem, let me further outline how individual experiences and goals created problems for the business plan group in mobilizing resources available in the Technology Commons.

Uneven Access to Mobile Devices

First, uneven access to mobile was a central issue that created challenges for the group, and that its members experienced in an immediate way during the composing moments I observed and in a more pervasive sense beyond that group writing project. For example, when the group worked together in the BYOT zone, they used one laptop computer, which was one group member's personal device. As a result of using one member's personal device to complete the task, not all group members had equal access to see the screen, or control what happened on it. This created a difficult power dynamic, enabling one group member (Charlotte at the beginning of the session) to feel as if she were taking on a larger share of the workload—and other members of the group to feel as if their input could not be heard or to become distracted and fill time with other interactions. Beyond this composing moment, the uneven adoption of mobile devices (including both phones and laptops) among the group created confusion and tension while coordinating group planning. Charlotte, a self-described “constant texter,” was the only student in the group who frequently checked her phone. The constant presence of a smartphone was not shared among the group, and neither was access to a personal laptop that was easy to transport. While Charlotte chalked this up to generational

differences (she was between 5 and 12 years younger than her teammates), she was also aware of how socioeconomic privilege influenced device use and ownership. Speaking about her group, she mentioned, “What I’ve noticed with them is none of them really have a good laptop.” She continued, “I’m lucky enough for my parents to pay for my school [and] my dad provided me with a good laptop.” Gabriel noted that his laptop had been an issue for his mobility. While he did have a laptop, he described it as “a little heavier,” which made it inconvenient for carrying from his job to his internship to his three classes. In addition, he had recently “cracked the screen,” and as a result he explained that “now I’ve been using the computer labs a lot more.”

Owen, the third group member, emphasized this uneven access when describing how working together with personal devices only worked well when every group member had access to one, and when the group could draw on a social composing program (e.g., Google Docs) displayed on a common screen for making individual efforts visible to all. Owen believed that, to effectively write the business plan, group members should work both collaboratively and individually at the same time. This would allow all group members in Owen’s words to be “researching separate things” at the same time while contributing to a master document. Notably, this was not a situation easily enacted in the section of the Technology Commons that they had chosen for their work, where no large, master screen was available. It was, however, precisely what the Technology Commons was designed to enable with its flat panel displays and café style tables—except that the students either had not chosen this set-up or had not arrived in time to secure this section of the commons or one of the private collaboration rooms.

Different Expectations about what Productive Writing looks like with Mobile Devices

In addition to the differences that uneven material access created for mobilizing the commons, Owen, Charlotte, and Gabriel struggled to effectively carry out team writing because their expectations about time and productivity were in conflict. These conflicts involved different expectations among group members about what mediations constitute productive time use, as well as conflicts when their own expectations about productivity conflicted with the realities of working with co-present people. While Owen and Charlotte both were committed deeply to arrangements that included all members together in a face-to-face gathering space, other group members either had a difficult time making this arrangement work or understood time spent working face-to-face on a classroom assignment to be a waste of time. For example, Owen recounted how the tension that had begun mounting during the work session

I observed became explosive during the following week's face-to-face writing meeting: "We were sitting across from each other at computer screens, so we were looking over computer screens at each other, and [another group member⁷] was really resistant and kind of really rude." He explained, "He was pretty against the [idea of] everyone getting together and do the same project all at once. He thought it was a big waste of time." While Gabriel was more "low key" (in Charlotte's words) than the student who actively resisted co-present group meetings, he too had issues with spending so much time together in one place. Reflecting back on the hours spent in the Technology Commons, he laughed and said, "Oh, that was horrible." For him, the issue was explicitly related to all that he was trying to fit into the current semester, which was making it nearly impossible for him to engage in a five-to six-hour meeting with his group members. He explained that during the "first month of school, I was a little more free, but then I accepted an internship." This internship was layered on top of a job, at which he worked fifteen to twenty hours per week, and two additional senior-level courses. As all his peers acknowledged, Gabriel did his best to align with the group consensus about when and how to divide the labor of the group and when to meet in person. And yet he was not continually available for touching base. From an outside perspective, it is not surprising that other group members at times felt that his work was rushed, given his schedule and the resulting reality that he generally completed assignments during short breaks between scheduled work or classes.

Expectations about how face-to-face time should be spent were also not shared among group members, and this created further challenges. For example, Charlotte's preferred approach to revision was to follow the models given by the instructor sentence by sentence and line by line, bringing the structure and form of their draft material into alignment with the market analyses their instructor had provided. Since they were working on her laptop, she spent most of the session typing while comparing their initial drafts with the two available models. Owen, for one, found this approach of beginning with models to be limiting because it overdetermined what was possible for them to say. From his point of view, sticking so closely to models was not in the generative spirit of what the assignment called for: they were supposed to be inventing a business and learning to be creative entrepreneurial thinkers, after all, not filling in a template. While Owen often brought up philosophical issues related to their business plan during the work session I observed, Charlotte reflected later that she often interpreted his interjections as slowing down the process: smart ideas, but not appropriate for discussion in the few hours before the

7 This group member was not present during the face-to-face meeting that I observed and was not a participant in the research.

deadline. The pace of working face to face was also slowed down by inevitable social detours, mostly involving small talk not directly related to the task. The group members clearly liked each other socially and enjoyed spending time together, and some members were more comfortable than others with including social niceties during their meeting. Social interactions unrelated to the content created ways for the group to resolve some of the increasing stress, but while the group giggled and bantered easily, their time spent joking also removed them from the immediate task, which bothered Charlotte in particular and Gabriel to some degree (not to mention the member who did not attend the meeting and later asserted that face-to-face meetings were time wasters). Both the social conversations and Owen's creative impulses were interpreted by some group members as inappropriate uses of time, given the duration they had left themselves for composing the draft before the deadline. Although she remained good natured during the work session, Charlotte later described feeling an urge to constantly manage the direction of the conversation to keep it on task.

When I asked Charlotte how she would describe her role in the collaboration, she said that she felt like the team manager. Referring to another team member, she remarked, "I was trying to focus him, but at the same time I know that I don't have any real control over him, you know what I mean?" She elaborated that she felt like she was the team member who "want[ed] to get it done," while he was the team member who thinks, "I have all these great ideas" and wants to talk about them. Notably, Charlotte also perceived the role of overseeing the group's written online coordination to be a gendered task, and she remarked that women were often assumed to be responsible for this work within team projects in her major.

Conclusion: Collaborating with the Places We Move Through

As I stated earlier, the challenges that Dave and the business writing group faced were not caused by the designs of the Technology Commons or the Gone Wired Café. Certainly, the business writing group lacked a focused approach for organizing collaboration (e.g., Rebecca Burnett, L. Andrew Cooper, and Candice Welhausen's [2013] seven-term heuristic). And Dave was facing challenges in locating a workspace and interacting with locals that stemmed from unique personal needs that would never be wholly in line with what a neighborhood hangout could offer him. What I want to emphasize, however, is the lack of preparation or perceived options writers seemed to have for how to effectively collaborate in the hybrid space of the commons, particularly when their individual habits for orienting to space and materials had to be-

come temporarily aligned with conflicting habits from other people. While shared social places provided resources that aided teamwork and interaction, neither technology nor social places alone led to stronger or better teams or more fruitful collaborative endeavors. People need strategies for how to work with and among both people and materials in the contemporary commons.

Information commons research bears out the point, for example, that the presence of a built environment designed for collaboration is not in itself enough to initiate interpersonal encounters within those places, particularly among strangers or around particular learning tasks. Users of social commons spaces or labs have positioned those places as “cool, hip space[s] with computers” in ways that downplay the potential they offer for collaboration and collective gathering (Mirtz, 2010, p. 248). Or, as Mark Bilandzic and Marcus Foth (2014) suggested, a physical environment designed for collaboration may not explicitly communicate its purpose to users, who often perceive the built environment in light of their own desires rather than for the potential it offers. That’s worth saying again: users of shared social places often perceive a place in terms of their own desires rather than in terms of the potential that it offers. As hybrid space layered becomes a new norm for public places (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011), librarians and learning center directors are beginning to invest in a range of ambient social media, signage, and connections among online and offline resources to help create lower barriers to collaboration among peers and increase the chances that students will connect with resources and library staff.

This is important as research has shown that people spend time in shared spaces for reasons that range from focused collaboration to serendipitous encounters to the experience of working alone among others (Crook & Mitchell, 2012). Bilandzic and Foth describe five archetypes of users of flexible social space: (1) coworkers who want to be away from distraction; (2) the “what can I do here” person, who happens upon a space but does not intuitively understand its purpose; (3) the “doesn’t care” user who comes for particular technological resources but is not particularly interested in meeting others; (4) the “learning freak,” who is interested in interacting because she wants to learn; and (5) the “I wanna share” user who has expertise in very particular domains and would like to meet with others to discuss these particular interests only (2014). These diversities of interest and spatial uptake layer with the differences that emerge from experiences and perceptions about space that come from users’ race, class, sexuality, gender, and ability.

Looking forward, the biggest challenge for the interactivity of social gathering places is not the lack of contact experienced within them. With a move from public space to commons space as a controlling metaphor for how socially rich gathering places support composing practice, working through

how shared places intersect with individual goals requires new ways of thinking, acting, coordinating, and assembling for which many participants in this study were unprepared. If the commons is to remain fruitful, individuals will need to see shared social places not only in terms of their own interests but in dialogue with a stewardship that places their own needs and interests in dialogue with others', aware of differential access to materials as well as diverse viewpoints about time and productively. The following chapter builds on this theme of individuation in order to offer a framework for more closely analyzing how users of networked mobile technologies take up resources of the commons in everyday practice.