

Café Society, Aksel Tjora and Graham Scambler, Eds. 2014, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 208 pages, £60 (Hardback), ISBN: 978—137-27592-9.

‘One of the most important achievements of the intellect is to gain an understanding and appreciation of the other human beings who share our environment’ (Oldenburg, 2014: 14).

Café Society, edited by sociologists Aksel Tjora and Graham Scambler, provides a fantastic introduction to different facets of research into the café as a living organic socio-cultural institution in modern society. The volume includes contributions from scholars across the social sciences including sociology, business studies, geography, and anthropology in order to increase understanding of the café in contemporary society. The editors have brought together a selection of contributions which explore the importance of cafés in the modern urban landscape, and highlight the varied perspectives that can be drawn from different disciplines. The locations covered include Austria, Australia, Georgia, Norway, UK and the USA, to name a few. The volume is a pleasure to read as the authors take you into their cities of study, exploring a facet of modern society used by many, but examined by few.

The book is comprised of an introduction by the editors and ten chapters. The introduction argues that the café, seen everywhere in modern urban societies, is an important social space. The editors draw on the work of Ray Oldenburg (also an author in this volume) and the concept of ‘third places’ (Oldenburg, 1999). According to Oldenburg, the first place is represented by the home, the second place represented by work and third places are anchors of community life where people routinely meet: often establishments that serve food and drink, of which cafés are one example. The work in this volume widens the debate about the importance of third places in the 21st century.

The editors of *Café Society* acknowledge that this is a first stab at trying to facilitate a contemporary approach to the study of the contemporary café. It is designed to reflect a series of empirical trends, including: the rise in commercially viable cafés in contemporary western societies; a growing potential for cafés to serve as ‘third places’; the ready accessibility of cafés; cafés as sites for sociability; spaces for networking and as an enabling sector of society. The remainder of the book then moves through contributions from different scholars and a range of perspectives on different elements of café society, although there is no strategic order, and can easily be read as standalone vignettes of the caffeine fuelled world.

In chapter one, Ray Oldenburg provides a narrative setting for the book by considering the functions that a café performs, and argues that the need for

face-to-face interaction in modern society has never been greater, and the café provides a social space for this. In chapter two, Bodil Stenseth provides a cultural history of a café in the Majorstuen district of Oslo, an area of gentrification. The author argues that 'cafés constitute the very heart of urbanism today' (p.24), and that cafés have taken over some traditional functions of the family. Paul Manning then builds on the work of Alfred Polgar (1926) and the theory of 'café central' to explore the theory of 'café peripheral.' Graham Scambler then charts the changes to cafés in London in chapter four before presenting a typology of cafés, including transport, specialist, incidental, store, book store and chain cafés. He then moves on to explore the reasons why people use them, including: for refuge; to get a caffeine fix; for work; entertainment; refueling, or a mixture of several of these. Importantly he makes the case for research on the use of cafés, and their potential for representing an enabling sector of society.

In chapter five, Henriksen, Skjølsvold and Gronning use empirical cases to explore the different types of café users in Norway, and the multiple functions of a café. They state that 'observed from a distance the café can appear as an autonomous organism; a gooey flow of bodies operating in structured pattern, together constituting 'the café' (p.87) – and as social scientists they are interesting in this goo.

Aksel Tjora, the author of chapter six, uses an ethnomethodological approach to explore the notion of 'communal awareness' using evidence from four cafés across three countries, the café is more than a meeting place. In chapter seven, Eric Laurier provides a change in focus to the role and experience of the barista, often overlooked in studies of café spaces. The author takes an ethnomethodological perspective to explore the knowledge and skills that are needed to produce the perfect espresso, and the challenges that baristas face. In chapter eight Hampton and Gupta explore the issues of public Wi-Fi and the implications of access to Wi-Fi on sociability in cafés, drawing on exploration of four cafés in the USA to distinguish between 'true mobiles' where Wi-Fi coffee shops are used as a location for work, and 'placemakers' where copresent sociability remained the primary aim of the Wi-Fi café user.

In chapter nine Erling Holm considers the impact of design and construction of cafés as a social space using findings from three cafés in Oslo, Norway. Finally, in chapter ten, Walters and Broom provide some reflections on café culture in Australia commenting on the production of both cosmopolitan and communitarian third places.

As the editors note in their introduction, the chapters are both heterogeneous and complementary. This is not a concise volume that provides an ordered

account of the different aspects of cafés in modern western societies. However, if you are looking for a series of vignettes of urban sociology, urban history and urban geography exploring the different actors, processes and concepts that have arisen out of the study of cafés, and their users, then this book is a revelation. The chapters in this book are heterogeneous in that they take different approaches to the topic, use different methods, explore different places and different issues, and here lie its strengths. Indeed, the strength of this book is its ability to show how a range of scholars have attempted to explore the concept of café society. Moreover, it is rare that an academic edited volume provides practical advice about habits that take place in one's life. Chapter seven does just this with its advice about how to create the perfect espresso.

The countries represented in the book very much reflect the western experience of café culture and do not provide much discussion of the importance of cafés in other areas of the world. While there are many interesting observations to be made about café cultures in western societies there are also interesting developments about the use of cafés in the Middle East, China, Japan to name a few. Domestic consumption of coffee in exporting countries is rapidly growing – Brazil for example is one of the world's largest exporting countries but also one of the world's largest consumers, a pattern that is also being experienced in Indonesia, Ethiopia, India, Venezuela and Vietnam. Coffee consumption in emerging markets has increased considerably and is expected to be a significant source of growth in world consumption over the next few years (ICO, 2014). It would be interesting in the future to consider a more balanced global approach to the different 'café societies' that are emerging.

As White (2012) explores in *Coffee Life in Japan*, the café is a unique kind of social space, highlighting the desire of customers to be 'private in public' providing precious respite from family and work life. While coffee may not be an obvious market in Southeast Asia because of a strong drinking tea culture, Costa Coffee (one of the leading chain cafés in the UK) aims to have 700 outlets in the region by 2017, and it already has 300 (Grant, 2014). There is more to be said about the expansion of these large café chains into cities which already have a café culture, but a different café culture to those of the home markets of the large companies.

Café Society is a well-edited book with high-quality contributions based on research from a variety of disciplines, and places, using different methodologies. This range allows the reader to gain a broad sense about why understanding the role of cafés in modern society is important for broader society, communities and individuals. Written in a lively and accessible style

most each chapter is peppered with rich empirical material which helps bring the experiences of the researcher to life. *Café Society* is not only suitable for the academic audience who are interested in the use of cafés in urban spaces, but anyone interested in the role cafés play in society.

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