

PUBLIC EATING, PUBLIC DRINKING: PLACES OF CONSUMPTION FROM EARLY MODERN TO POSTMODERN TIMES

Conference at the GHI, May 22–23, 2008. Conveners: Marc Forster (Connecticut College), Maren Möhring (University of Zurich/University of Cologne). Participants: Lars Amenda (Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte, Hamburg), Elizabeth Buettner (University of York), Simone Derix (University of Duisburg-Essen), Angelika Epple (University of Freiburg), Donna Gabaccia (University of Minnesota), Andrew P. Haley (University of Southern Mississippi), Beat Kümin (University of Warwick), Anke Ortlepp (GHI), Jeffrey M. Pilcher (University of Minnesota), Peter Scholliers (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Gerd Schwerhoff (Technical University, Dresden), Uwe Spiekermann (GHI), Ulrike Thoms (Institut für Geschichte der Medizin, Charité Berlin), Ann Tlusty (Bucknell University), Corinna Unger (GHI).

Drinking and dining out has long been neglected by sociological as well as historical research, but has been studied more thoroughly since the 1990s. During the last two decades, a quite extensive literature, not only on the history of food, but also on eating out, has evolved. What is still widely missing in this field of research is a long-term perspective, as well as international and interregional comparisons. The workshop “Public Eating, Public Drinking” brought together American and European scholars of early modern and modern history to discuss the phenomenon of drinking and eating out from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century.

The workshop focused on the spatial dimensions of places of consumption, with the participants’ papers ranging from discussions of early modern inns to the French-style restaurant of the nineteenth century to today’s ethnic restaurants. Taking the material, the social, and the imaginary aspects of these places into consideration, the papers demonstrated the value of a comparative approach in historical as well as regional terms. This perspective allows for comparisons of issues of furnishing and interior design, as well as an understanding of the images and discourses surrounding these places and their social functions. The various places of consumption, with their distinct histories, legal regulations, and economic constraints, functioned not only as providers of food and drink, but also as important meeting places and sites of social interaction. All of them included and excluded specific individuals and social groups, often along the lines of race, class, and gender. Therefore, processes of social closure were a recurring theme of the workshop.

The first panel, on early modern public houses in Germany, stressed the different social functions of village and city taverns. Marc Forster pointed out that in rural regions, members of all social classes and women as well as men frequented the taverns, whereas Ann Tlusty demonstrated that urban public houses were predominantly male preserves and populated, above all, by the middle classes. Both papers emphasized the importance of drinking together as a social ritual that could have severe consequences. Accepting someone else's tab implied reciprocation and meant that an agreement of some kind had been reached. Central in Forster's and Tlusty's papers was the question of the drinkers' honor and reputation. For women, drinking in village taverns did not necessarily imply that their sexual honor was called into question, at least not when they were accompanied by a male relative. Male honor, although sometimes including sexual trespassing as in cases of adultery, was mostly defined as a man's reliability, above all in economic terms. Not being allowed to visit public houses, as was the case with the poorest members of society, or being excluded from taverns as the result of repeated misbehavior, meant serious stigmatization and implied exclusion from important social and economic transactions for which the public houses were essential sites.

The taverns' significant position in early modern society was also addressed by Beat Kümmin, who concentrated on the visual evidence of these places of consumption. By differentiating the pictorial material on taverns and inns into *generic* representations with the purpose of identification, orientation, and promotion, and *symbolic* representations, comprising moral and political as well as religious symbolism, Kümmin revealed the complexity of visual evidence and also highlighted the importance of public houses as spatial orientation markers, as when they appeared on road atlases and maps. At a time with very limited street signs, these places structured the geography of early modern towns and villages and helped the traveler to find particular locations.

In his comment on the papers presented in the first session, Gerd Schwerhoff pointed out that not only rural or urban contexts shaped the public houses and their functions, but that regional differences, especially between Catholic and Protestant areas, were of utmost importance, too. Furthermore, he drew attention to the fact that the early modern public houses have almost exclusively been analyzed in respect to drinking, whereas food has hardly been addressed. In the discussion, it became apparent that this was partly the effect of the early modern source material that focuses more on (the regulation of) drinking than on eating; some substances, like beer, however, were considered both drink and, in a lower alcohol version, also as food.

Although drinking still forms an important aspect of eating out in modern times, all the following panels of the workshop on modern places of consumption focused mainly on food and eating, with the second section discussing the modern institution of the restaurant, arguably developed in Paris at the end of the eighteenth century. Peter Scholliers demonstrated how the model of the French (especially the Parisian) restaurant was adopted in Belgium in the nineteenth century. Labor migration of chefs, waiters, and waitresses, as well as kitchen personnel, was an important component of this culinary transfer. In his analysis of restaurant names and their allusions, Scholliers convincingly integrated the economic aspects of French cuisine's diffusion in Europe by pointing to the strategic choice of a particular restaurant name as an attempt at self-branding, as a way of finding or defining a new niche in the market.

Andrew Haley took a different approach to the history of restaurant dining by addressing the importance of children (and the family) as consumers. Children, who used to eat in separate rooms during the nineteenth century, were increasingly included in the dining experience and became a target group of their own in the course of the twentieth century. With their inclusion into the restaurant, children transformed these places and contributed to further differentiations among various types of restaurants, the ethnic restaurant being among the first places that became family restaurants. Furthermore, by analyzing children's cookbooks, Haley pointed to the link between restaurant dining and dining at home, between public and private eating (and cooking), and the significance of this link for a history of consumption.

In his comment, Uwe Spiekermann took a passionate stand for not neglecting the economic dimension of consumerism and sparked a discussion on the relation of cultural and economic history. Both approaches were seen as indispensable to any analysis of places of consumption, and the participants stressed the mutual interdependencies of economy and culture, as apparent, for instance, in Schollier's discussion of the gastronomic niches in Belgium. Economic studies, however, that do not take into account the cultural embeddedness of the phenomenon analyzed seemed to most participants of limited use for a history of (places of) consumption.

Dining at a nineteenth-century restaurant in Belgium meant spending quite some time enjoying the many courses of a French-style dinner, whereas other modern places of consumption, like the canteen and the *Automatenrestaurant*, offered a less expensive alternative to restaurant dining, and can be considered as prototypes for today's time-saving fast-food restaurants. The workshop's third panel, on rationalized eating places that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thus pointed to the fact that space and time are closely linked, for every

place of consumption not only has its own spatial, but also its own temporal order, and suggests a specific rhythm to having a drink or a meal. The history of the canteen, with its preset eating hours, is, as Ute Thoms demonstrated, closely linked to the disciplining of the worker and his or her body, the hygienic movement, as well as the nutrition sciences. Scientifically informed "rational" mass feeding, based on the concept of the body machine, with its measurable needs for caloric intake, did not, however, mean that all employees of a firm or a plant received the same amount and kind of food in a common lunchroom. The workers' canteen was a completely different, much more basic place than the white-collar workers' lunchroom, which in its rich decoration and furnishing resembled the contemporary restaurant. The aspect of standardization that became more and more important in the history of the canteen, leading to the introduction of the Gastro-Norm, a system of containers in fixed measures, in West Germany in 1964, is also a key feature of the so-called *Automatenrestaurant* discussed by Angelika Epple. She traces the invention of this type of self-service restaurant back to the 1891 *Bar automatique* that sold soda from automatic fountains at Montmartre and to the automatic buffet presented at the Berlin trade exhibition in 1896 in particular. This automatic buffet combined several vending machines behind a single counter and enabled the customer to see his or her dish before choosing and buying it. The dimension of immediate (visual) consumption as well as the potentially anonymous form of eating (alone) makes the *Automatenrestaurant* a modern place par excellence. It promised and, to a certain degree, in fact offered a public eating space for all social classes and men and women alike. At the same time, the unequal labor relations on which the working of this place was based were hidden from the eye of the customers.

The preparation, presentation, and delivery of food, which were defined in new ways by canteens and *Automatenrestaurants*, were of prime interest to another area of rationalized eating in the twentieth century. Dining in the air, the topic of Anke Ortlepp's paper, depended heavily on inventions in the field of food technology. Only with the introduction of aluminum cans in the late 1950s did carbonated drinks, which in glass bottles had been at risk of exploding with the drop of atmospheric pressure, become available on board. Other food items like sponge cake collapsed at high altitudes. United was the first airline that established its own in-flight kitchen in 1936 to experiment with the changing qualities of foods served in the air. While until the late 1960s the foodservice on board had clearly imitated the French restaurant, this model was only kept in first and business class afterwards. Social differentiation today means that customers in economy class are served less and less food, if they get anything to eat at all.

In her comment, Simone Derix stressed the common features of the three rationalized eating places under discussion and contextualized their emergence with the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and mass society. Derix suggested further considerations of the connections and inherent contradictions of the self-service imperative in the case of the *Automatenrestaurant* and the idea of social welfare accompanying the history of the canteen. The different ways of addressing the individual and/or the community at these two places of consumption might offer new insights into the history of modern techniques of the self and of regulating “the other.”

One of the recurrent themes of the workshop was the impact of culinary transfers, such as French cuisine in Belgium or on United Airlines flights, or the so-called ethnic cuisine in the United States and Europe, the topic of the last panel of the workshop. Lars Amenda gave an overview of the history of Chinese restaurants in London, Hamburg, and Rotterdam throughout the twentieth century, locating the boom of Chinese cuisine in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s. As with the other “foreign” cuisines discussed in this panel—Italian and Mexican cuisine in the United States (Donna R. Gabaccia and Jeffrey M. Pilcher), Italian cuisine in Germany (Maren Möhring), and Indian cuisine in the United Kingdom (Elizabeth Buettner)—Amenda stressed that the first Chinese restaurants mainly catered to compatriots at the beginning, then were visited also by native citizens of the host countries, often students and bohemians, and became mainstream only in the second half of the twentieth century. With the change of customers, the interior of the restaurants underwent significant transformations, meeting the expectations of the guests by using silken embroidered curtains and draperies, as well as miniature landscape settings. According to Amenda, the success of Chinese restaurants relied on the “exotic otherness” ascribed to Chinese people in particular.

Gabaccia and Pilcher took a comparative approach to ethnic cuisines in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. First, they analyzed the practices of selling and consuming Mexican and Italian foods in their countries of origin, and then pointed out the transformations they underwent after their arrival in the US. Italian pasta and pizza, consumed as street foods in Naples, quickly moved inside and became restaurant foods in Chicago and New York, whereas Mexican *tamales* stayed outside as snack foods in Los Angeles as well as in San Antonio. Factors influencing these particular outcomes were certainly the differences between immigrant and colonized minorities, resulting in different perceptions of Mexicans and Italians, but also structural constraints and historical contingency were of importance: Italians who came to North American cities found well-established structures of (immigrant)

marketing and consumers familiar with tourism to Italy, both supporting the popularization of Italian cuisine.

Likewise the success of Italian cuisine in postwar Germany was at least partly the result of Italy's popularity as a holiday destination. In her paper, Möhring discussed two places of consumption, the Italian ice-cream parlor and the hybrid *Pizzeria-Ristorante*. Sharing several characteristics, such as a predominantly Italian staff and the use of Italian products, the *gelateria* and the *Pizzeria-Ristorante* differ not only in respect to the foods they offer, but also in that they represent two distinct types of entrepreneurship and migration projects: temporary migration of trained ice-cream makers from the north of Italy versus southern Italian "guest-workers," who often decided to become self-employed in the catering business only after their arrival in Germany. In recent years, the latter became increasingly disapproved of, not only by many ice-cream makers, but also by groups of Italian restaurateurs, most of them professionally trained, who tried to distinguish their eating places from the *Pizzeria-Ristorante*, which was (and is) disparaged as inauthentic. The notions and the politics of authenticity as well as the question of who can claim a position of authority to define the legitimacy of a particular form of cuisine were also at stake in Buettner's presentation, which gave a concise account of the evolution of the "curry house stereotype" in postwar Britain, focusing on the material as well as the discursive dimension of this form of eatery. Those "Indian" restaurants (in fact mainly run by Bangladeshis) that were also patronized by whites had developed a specific repertoire of "Indian" signifiers by the 1980s, including flock wallpaper, that soon declined into cliché. The increasingly down-market image of the curry house offering cheap food until late at night, mostly prepared by autodidacts, has been countered by a growing number of largely London-based restaurateurs who recruit professional chefs from India and claim to offer (more) authentic food to "discerning" customers. The negotiations about the meanings and the status of ethnic foods are, as Buettner's paper convincingly demonstrated, always involved in the contemporary social and cultural struggles within multicultural societies, with ethnic food functioning as a vehicle for masking, as well as articulating, racism(s).

In her comment, Corinna Unger pointed to the role of the state for processes of transnationalization in the field of consumption, asking for a broader perspective on consumerism that also integrates socialist countries and their systems of food provisioning and dining cultures. Including non-American and non-European places of consumption more fully is certainly necessary to get a more nuanced picture of the phenomenon of drinking and eating out, and would also contribute to a deeper understanding of the global interrelatedness of the various places of consump-

tion. Foods and cuisines on the move—and, as all the papers suggested, they are almost always on the move—strongly affect the places where they are consumed; in a way, they transfer these locations and point to the various connections of every place of consumption with other places, synchronically and diachronically.

A selection of papers presented at the workshop will be published as a special issue of the interdisciplinary journal *Food & History*.

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