



Figure 1 / London Coffeehouse Scene, Early Eighteenth Century

Coffee Culture: A Comparative Study

Observations of the culture of gourmet coffee and communal space in Eugene, Oregon and how it compares to the historical identity of cafes in London.

Sarah Frey-Wyer

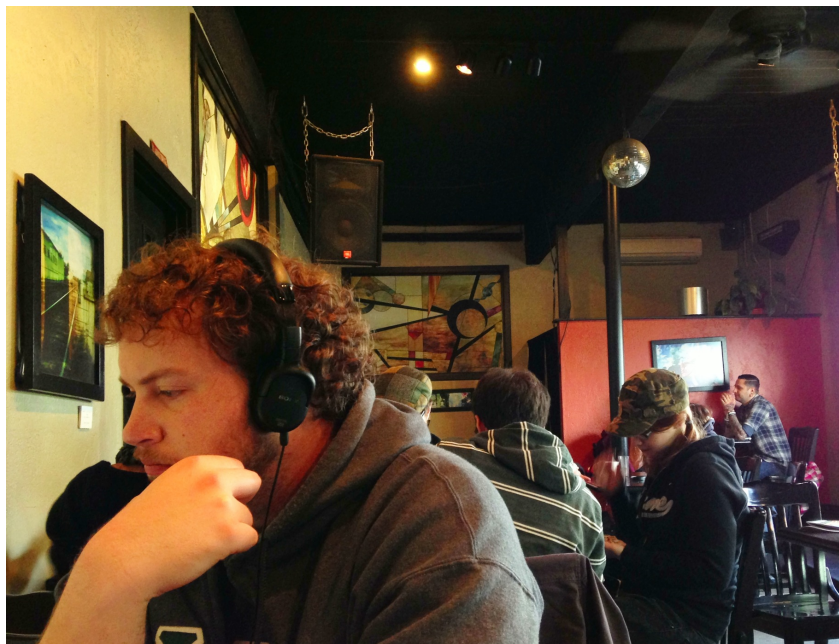
COFFEE CULTURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

SARAH FREY-WYER
University of Oregon

ABSTRACT

Focusing primarily on Eugene, Oregon, I have created an overview via participant observation of how people use the communal space within a coffeehouse and use the historic position of coffeehouses in London, England as a basis for comparison. How did people use the space of a coffeehouse in the 17th and 18th centuries in London, and how does that compare to how people use this “third place” (neither home nor work) in Eugene, Oregon today? This project also explores the evolution of coffee culture in the United States and how coffee has become both gourmet and a cultural commodity in the present-day, primarily considering the growth of Starbucks. Extensive research was done on coffeehouses in London spanning three centuries (from the mid-1500s onward). Research in Eugene was completed via participant observation, where I went to several local cafes and spent hours observing how people interacted within them. The outcome of this research shows that people make an effort to privatize space while they are in public, communal areas. With the backdrop of historic London’s coffeehouses, I compare the two environments and have found gaping differences in the function of cafes. This body of work has value because coffeehouses are a dominant “third space” in the world today, and how we use them and interact within them is an important facet of our cultural environment.

The soft screech of the steaming wand permeates even the quietest coffeehouse with white noise as it froths milk into foamy lattes and cappuccinos. Espresso shots gurgle into small cups, their mechanical release sounds timed at a perfect 22 seconds, sometimes exhaling longer



for that extra push required to brew a long pull. The espresso bar is a cacophony of metal and grinds and liquid bubbling, the smell of warm milk and roasted coffee. The space within cafes can be themed with dramatic difference from one side of Eugene, Oregon to the other, but the espresso bar will contain these same elements.

Figure 2 / At the Wandering Goat



Walking into the Wandering Goat Coffee Co., I am surprised to find a plethora of people sitting at pushed-together tables. Generally the farther away from campus I go, the less communal space is offered at cafes. Wandering Goat is no exception, with two and four-seater tables and a layout where the scrunching together of bodies and chairs is not really necessary to fit a full house. Some of the customers are typing away on their laptops or reading a newspaper, but about half the café is engaged in genial chatter. The atmosphere is encouraged by the music, which can vary at “the Goat” from angry metal to something akin to flamenco, depending on the mood of the barista. Six people surround one table where a well-used board game is being actively played, laughing and drinking coffee. The Goat offers top-notch coffee, roasted in the café’s backyard. Several mediums are available,

from espresso to French Press to pour-over coffee experiences. The versatility is part of what makes it a good coffeehouse, and the locally roasted beans are a big draw. After my first latte at the Goat, I can honestly say that their espresso is the best I have tried in Eugene, Oregon. This is saying something; I have tried a latte at almost every coffeehouse in this town.

The arrival scene is an ethnographic classic. It employs the brilliant tactic of reminding you that the ethnographer, too, is new to this environment, or once was. It also sets the scene for the observations that are about to unfold, the reactions that the ethnographer has to this arrival. But here I am, bandying this word about without defining it. According to the Anthropological Association of America’s website, ethnography “refers to the description of cultural systems or an aspect of culture based on fieldwork in which the investigator is immersed in the ongoing everyday activities of the designated community for the purpose of describing the social context, relationships and processes relevant to the topic under consideration.” Ethnographic models are varied, but the idea of participant observation is key to the process. Observing a culture, for example, while the ethnographer is participating in it. In the case of this project I have followed the structure of participant observation by going to coffeehouses in Eugene and becoming part of the coffee culture therein.

In this way, I have been researching coffee culture in Eugene, Oregon for three months. I began to notice, probably because of the hours I regularly spend in cafes, how people behave and interact in this specialized public environment. Taking these observations of space and comparing them to the function of the coffeehouse in historic London, where poets and ploughmen sat at communal tables beside earls and merchants, I hope to explore how this space has changed over time and how we use it now compared to how it was used then. Although this research focuses mainly on comparisons between coffee culture in London, England in the eighteenth century and how Starbucks has helped to create a coffee-centric public space in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I also include my ethnographic observations of several coffeehouses in Eugene, Oregon.

As coffeehouses are popular public spaces within the U.S., I believe this research is relevant to the way we experience social relations in everyday life. After conducting this research I have found that coffee culture is going through a period of revitalization in the United States. Coffeehouses are a part of the public sphere, a “third place” that is neither home nor work, and one that seemingly encourages communal interaction amongst a wide demographic. I have also found, however, that people are not generally amenable to interacting with strangers, even in sanctioned communal space. As globalization and the Information Age progress, fear of strangers permeates the global atmosphere. I believe that my research is a good example of this avoidance and seeming distrust of strangers, even within a community. The comparative study between London’s great coffeehouse period between the mid-1600-1800s will offer a lens through which we can explore the growth of coffee culture and gain insight into what coffee culture represents in our society today.

GRINDING THE RESEARCH

To begin with a description of coffee culture as a whole, we would have to go back to Ethiopia and the native species therein of *Coffea Arabica*, “of the sub-genus *Eucoffea* of the genus *Coffea* of the family Rubiaceae of the order Rubiales of the sub-class Sympetalae of the class Dicotyledonae of the sub-kingdom *Angiospermae* from the kingdom of Vegetables” (Wild 19). This far from simple bean has a complicated history throughout the world, leaving its mark on civilizations from the Middle East to Western Europe and the Americas. The history of the plant itself is ubiquitous but tenuous, from archaeological data found in the Fertile Crescent to the seventeenth century coffee empire of Arabia and the purloined cutting that the Frenchman Gabriel Mathieu de Clieu brought to the West Indies (Standage 147). After flourishing in the “lands of Islam sometime in the mid-fifteenth century,” (Hattox 11) coffee began its inescapable campaign on the rest of the world.

The history of coffee culture is broad, spanning continents and centuries. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus mainly on the great coffeehouses of London, England starting in the 1600s and ending with the American perception of coffeehouses now. My primary interest is in how people interact within the communal space of a coffeehouse, and how the common usages of these spaces differ in their function now as opposed to the historic record of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century London. When I began this project I was blissfully ignorant of how much information there is to note and record and of how inter-connected everything in coffee culture is, even spanning hundreds of years. There are dozens of questions that can be asked and much controversy that could be addressed. I am not attempting to broach the hot topics of Fair Trade or explain brewing methodology here. I am not focusing on the global realm of coffee culture, and my definition of coffee culture is not involved with “the right way to make coffee.” As a barista, I find that process to be entirely subjective.

Before I present my observational findings and the argument about coffee culture that I wish to make, it is necessary to provide a historic framework. In an effort to contextualize the importance of this research, I also will take you on a small journey across the blurry line that separates coffee from gourmet coffee, and historic coffeehouses from those we find today in Eugene, Oregon. I will then explore the relationships between a coffeehouse’s communal spaces and how people actually use it.

THE GREAT COFFEEHOUSES OF LONDON AND THEIR DOWNFALL

Tom Standage, in his book *The History of the World in 6 Glasses*, mentions that “modern cafes pale by comparison with their illustrious historical forebears.” The London coffeehouse was far more than a place to grab caffeine. It was a meeting place, a political forum, a post office, a mint, a newspaper and periodical publishing house, a lecture hall, an exchange, a bridge between social classes, an intellectual hotbed, and, perhaps least importantly, a place to get some coffee.

The first London coffeehouse is a historical matter still up for debate, but between varying accounts, it seems to have sprung up in the mid-1600s. This was important because the idea of a public space, which was by no means new, was revisited in Europe at this time. "Although there had existed a public sphere in classical Greece, it is not until seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, that along with the development of capitalism, it assumed a more distinctive form" (Stevenson 222). For many Londoners, the existence of a public sphere was a tantalizing opportunity for discussing political, social, and academic interests. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were roughly 2000 coffeehouses in London (Ukers 69).



Figure 3 / Map of London, 1673

Coffeeshouses served many public functions within London. Although women were not allowed within them (a rule unique to London—cafes in Paris and Vienna, for example, were not barred to women), cafes served as an equalizing space. No matter what your class, social or economic, you could venture into a café and sit next to someone from a completely different spectrum of position or wealth. Like a coat or a hat, you left your title at the door. “Even though he were in ragged coat and found himself seated between a belted earl and a gaitered bishop it made no difference; moreover he was able to engage them in conversation and know that he would be answered civilly” (Ellis 46). This openness to the varying echelons of society eventually spurred the coffeehouse’s replacement in London: the club. Over the years, concerns about who exactly was allowed to enter a café heightened as more “rabble” swarmed into the protective cultural niche of the coffeehouse. Since the only screening system for customers (other than that of being a woman) was determined on an unspoken agreement to adhere to a list of rules seemingly universal to all London coffee establishments, controls were weak. The rules were laid out thusly (Ellis 46):

THE RULES AND ORDERS OF THE COFFEEHOUSE

*Enter, Sirs, freely, but first, if you please,
Peruse our civil orders, which are these:*

*First, gentry, tradesmen, all are welcome hither,
 And may without affront sit down together:
 Pre-eminence of place none here should mind,
 But take the next fit seat that he can find:
 Nor need any, if finer persons come,
 Rise up to assigne to them his room;
 To limit men's expence, we think not fair,
 But let him forfeit twelve-pence that shall swear;
 He that shall any quarrel here begin,
 Shall give each man a dish t' atone the sin;
 And so shall he, whose compliments extend
 So far to drink in coffee to his friend;
 Let noise of loud disputes be quite forborne,
 No maudlin lovers here in corners mourn,
 But all be brisk and talk, but not too much,
 On sacred things, let none presume to touch.
 Nor profane Scripture, nor sawcily wrong
 Affairs of state with an irreverent tongue:
 Let mirth be innocent, and each man see
 That all his jests without reflection be;
 To keep the house more quiet and from blame,
 We banish hence cards, dice, and every game;
 Nor can allow of wagers, that exceed
 Five shillings, which oftentimes much trouble breed;
 Let all that's lost or forfeited be spent
 In such good liquor as the house doth vent.
 And customers endeavour, to their powers,
 For to observe still, seasonable hours.
 Lastly, let each man what he calls for pay,
 And so you're welcome to come every day.*



Figure 4 / City Plaque in London

"According to this perspective invitation, the coffeehouse was regarded as a social oasis, a place of peace and order devoid of hierarchy and conflict" (Gaudio 670). The rules certainly laid out how people were to treat one another within the communal atmosphere of the coffeehouse. While they

did foster discussions about literature and politics, provide exposure to knowledge for the uneducated, and try to enforce an environment of social equality, there was still a fear of "the other." People began to go to coffeehouses that specialized in their interests and published periodicals in agreement with their political or intellectual views. Jonathan's Coffeehouse marked the beginning of the London Exchange, for example. Coffeehouses were a forum for free speech unlike any previously known in London. The fight to

print newspapers and spread political information was tackled by the coffee-men and pursued as a right. The fight for free speech was fought and won in coffeehouses (Standage). Another common name for coffeehouses was “penny universities.” People would pay a penny fee upon entering the café, and be able to stay and learn about the politics and intellectual pursuits of the day. Learned men gave lectures on subjects from medicine to astronomy with coffee breaks in-between presenters. Literate persons would read the paper aloud to their illiterate neighbors, and affairs of business were also commonly handled within this environment. “Europe’s coffeehouses functioned as information exchanges for scientists, businessmen, writers, and politicians” (Standage 152). This public space was widely accepted as communal. Strangers would meet and chat, people with common interests would participate in this environment ripe with political concern and intellectual encouragement. “Coffeehouses were democratic theatres of judgment. The way you dressed, your quick-wittedness, even the way you held your spoon - all were assiduously monitored and discussed” (Green). The coffeehouse was a venue for public interaction in a way that has not been seen since.

Aytoun Ellis, in his book The Penny Universities, names three reasons for the decline of the London coffeehouse: “the coffee-man’s own folly...the evolution of the club...[and] the Government’s colonial policy.” The coffee-man’s folly and Government colonial policy are



Figure 5 / Orator in a London Coffee House, North Wind Picture Archives

complex issues. Briefly explained, coffeehouses began printing their own currency as a result of the scarcity of small change and causing political upheaval in London as meeting places for dissatisfied parties. The Government did not like this. The political influence and power that the coffeehouses held gradually waned as policies and power changed. Instead, I would like to spend my words explaining the second reason for the fall of the London coffeehouse: the club.

As coffeehouses struggled against Governmental regulations and growing competition with tea rooms and pleasure gardens¹, some turned to broadening their menus. Many coffeehouses

¹ Privately owned gardens opened to the public, where anyone could go to relax and get away from the grit of the city. The most famous of these was Vauxhill.

started adding beer and hard alcohol to their beverage list, hoping for a boost in profits and clientele. This resulted in rather unsavory customers, who came to coffeehouses to drink instead of engage in witty conversation. The rising amount of drunken abandon within the coffeehouses caused many coffee devotees to jump ship and go in search of another public outlet for intellectual and political activity.

The London Gentlemen's Club entered the public scene. Clubs were regulated by membership, so unwanted "rabble" could easily be kept out of them. Just as coffeehouses had become popular as venues catering to specific interests, clubs were also able to coax likeminded individuals to their doors. Clubs were often politically affiliated, so gentlemen of the same persuasions could meet together and find a welcome forum for their beliefs and interests. Clubs sprung up for any possible interest. At one point, London had a club for dog lovers, a club for hunters and one for lovers of the arts, among many others. With gentlemen's clubs, however, came a definite social class stratification. Many clubs had waiting lists, and if you were not a gentleman of some status, it was nigh impossible to gain membership.

The reasons for spending time in a coffeehouse were mostly social. The taste of coffee in one of these coffeehouses, according to Dr. Matthew Green in his recent article in *The Telegraph*, would have been utterly "unpalatable" today. Even then, it was constantly commented on as a rather disgusting libation. Although coffee is certainly an acquired taste, today we have many methods of making it sweeter or more milky and delicious. London's coffeehouses did not have lattes or mochas. It was beside the point that the drink actually taste good.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STARBUCKS

Here we come to a break in history, but a necessary one to understanding today's expectations of coffee. "By 1995 one specialty roaster had emerged as the definitive leader in the dynamic, fragmented market," begins Mark Pendergrast in his book *Uncommon Grounds*. Starbucks, started in 1971, originally began as a coffee roaster with a small storefront in Seattle. Nowhere near the corporate giant that they are today, Starbucks did not even break into the market of sweet espresso drinks, which they are so well known for now, until the early 1980s when Howard Schultz was hired as the new head of marketing. In 1983, Schultz made a trip to Italy that would determine the fate of Starbucks. All it took was a cappuccino in Milan and a café latte in nearby Verona to convince Schultz that Starbucks needed to change direction. "Why not take great Starbucks beans and brew such drinks? Why not create community gathering places like those in Italy?" Schultz thought (Pendergrast).

He brought this idea home to Seattle, where the founders of Starbucks were reticent to altering their mission as whole bean roasters. They had faith in Schultz, however, and allowed him to put a small espresso bar into one of their, at the time, six stores. It was so successful that Schultz was given the money to start Il Giornale, an Italian-style café that served espresso drinks. This part of Starbucks' story is where the names so familiar today—*tall, grande, venti*—originated in U.S. coffee culture.



Figure 6 / Vintage Chase & Sanborn Ad for Coffee, circa 1940s-1960s

In 1987 the founders of Starbucks wanted to sell. Schultz brought in investors for the \$3.8 million dollars needed to purchase the company, adjusting it to cultivate Starbucks beans for the purpose of espresso drinks and coffee bars. The café image became the goal that Schultz, only 34 at the time, was trying to generate success from. By 1991, Schultz had moved Starbucks into Los Angeles, where the store took off and thrust espresso drinks into the realm of public desire. Generating \$57 million dollars a year by 1991, Starbucks changed the face of the coffee industry in America.

Starbucks, circa 2011, is sitting at \$11.7 billion in revenues and over 17,000 stores worldwide.² It is often culturally denied its role in revitalizing coffee culture in America, and in some cases abroad, because it is viewed as a corporate mogul. Starbucks is important. Not only because it has risen

to occupy such success in the corporate and social world, but also because it has played a huge part in helping to create something that we now find permeating society: gourmet coffee culture.

On the heels of Starbucks' success has also come criticism. This is expected, and a necessary part of the Capitalistic world. How can you fight such a gigantic and far-reaching corporation as a small, growing business in the same field? You discredit it, rag on it, compare its products to mass-produced crap. Not to say that Starbucks is a glowing representation of coffee. As it is, I cannot find any Starbucks ads that date from before the 2000s. They simply are not there.

² <http://www.statisticbrain.com/starbucks-company-statistics/>

Knowing that Starbucks started in the 1971, I found this unsettling. Over 30 years of ads — erased. There are a plethora of ads for other coffee companies. Maxwells, Folgers, Nescafe, Chase & Sanborn, and others have a definite, paper-trail history. Starbucks controls, to a baffling level, the image of its history.

FROM COFFEE TO GOURMET COFFEE, AND WHAT ALL THIS HAS TO DO WITH EUGENE

I mentioned that Starbucks is important. The main reason that it has become such a big part of my research project, and consequently why the story of Starbucks needed to be explained, is because it helped to create gourmet coffee culture in a way that swung the coffee industry and its consumer base away from something else.

COFFEEHOUSE	YEAR OPENED
Full City Roasters	1990
The Daily Grind	1991*
AAA Hearth Café	1991*
Espresso Roma	1994
Perugino	2002
Wandering Goat Coffee Co.	2007, roaster since 2005
Vero	2008/2009*
Café du Hall	2011
Lillis Café	2004
The Beanery	2007, roaster since 1972

Table 1: Cafes and the years they opened in Eugene, OR. **Barista or manager was uncertain of the precise date.*

Eugene, Oregon is a very coffee friendly town. This is not surprising considering how nice a warm, steamy cup of coffee sounds on a cold, rainy day. Eugene has enough cold, rainy days to keep several coffee shops in business year-round. I began my observations by taking down “basic” data: café name, atmosphere (space), demographics, and the date it opened. This last one consistently surprised me. I could not, search though I might, discover a coffeehouse in Eugene that was older than 1990. Full City Roasters, with two locations in Eugene, is the oldest continuing coffee business in the city. On its heels we have two cafes on campus: The Daily Grind in the basement of the library and AAA Hearth Café in the Allied Arts &

Architecture building. The opening date for these cafes is 1991, although no one seems to be sure which is older. It is a topic of occasional and casual debate for the employed baristas. The popular Espresso Roma, located on 13th, the outskirts of campus territory, boasts an early opening of 1994.

Looking at Table 1, we can see that a number of the cafes have similar opening dates. We like to think of cafes and coffee culture as something that just is and has been, something that college students do and need. I certainly remember my own mother, who raised me while attending college, spending hours at cafes with her notes and cigarettes and giant cups of coffee. As a small child I feasted on croissants and knew her favorite Starbucks order: a venti caramel

macchiato. A matter of 15, 20 years ago, coffee culture was sweeping the nation. Popularized by Starbucks in the early to mid 1990s, coffeehouses went through a period of revitalization.

Roughly 20 years later, gourmet coffeehouses are still coming into their own. The resurgence brought about by Starbucks' wild success in the 1990s has redefined grabbing a cup of coffee. Cafes open at a steady rate, the business of coffee inspiring events such as the United States Barista Championship, where skilled baristas compete in a number of categories to prove their knowledge and the superiority of their techniques on a national level. There are cafes in Portland, Oregon, for example, that can justify charging \$9 for a cup of coffee prepared by a champion barista. Just as the importance of whole bean coffee was rising in the 1970s (the original mission of Starbucks), fair trade and locally roasted beans are rising in societal and cultural importance. Starbucks, once a pivotal name in the accrual of cultural capital (i.e. Starbucks drink versus a 7eleven coffee), has been losing steam in recent years. The recent scandal in the United Kingdom³ has brought Starbucks' image down as well.

Even larger coffee—affiliates, such as Dunkin' Donuts, have jumped on the bash-Starbucks bandwagon. (See

Figure 7). Still, as Stewart Lee Allen admits in his book *The Devil's Cup*, "I say this with a grimace—it goes against every grain in my body—but if I'd seen a Starbucks in the wastelands of Oklahoma my joy would have been equal to that of al-Shadhili's when Allah first revealed to him the secret of the coffee bean a thousand years ago."

This commodification of culture in the form of coffee is vital to following the beverage's history. I have said, many times over, that Starbucks is an important player in the coffee world. Perhaps their greatest contribution to coffee culture today was not, in fact, their impact on espresso drinks and gourmet coffee in the United States, but rather their devastating blow on instant coffee. While I was doing my research, I discovered a revival of coffee culture in the early 1990s, but not much in the way of lasting coffeehouses earlier in that century. Yet there was a definite allusion to the importance of coffee in everyday life and the consistent presence of the beverage. If not in coffeehouses, where were people obtaining and drinking it?



Figure 7 / Dunkin' Donuts Ad, 2012

³ Despite huge profits, Starbucks has been paying a very low corporate tax in the UK for many years. Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20624857>

tastier coffee!



—the *modern* coffee made especially to give you consistently better flavor than ground coffee!



All Coffee—nothing but Coffee!

new Nescafé

Figure 8 / Vintage Nescafé Ad

The answer, I found, was at home, although not usually in the coffee-pot way we might think. Having a home version of an espresso machine is expensive even today, and coffee pots and percolators were not cheap sixty years ago either. The more common option, popularized by World War II with rationing, was instant coffee. Especially trendy with soldiers, instant coffee met a high demand during the war and was perpetuated in the United States and Britain afterwards as a form of nostalgia. “Millions of soldiers and nurses returned with Proustian associations linking the taste of instant [coffee] with some of their most vivid life experiences” (Allen). By 1958 instant coffee made up one third of consumption in America, sweeping the nation in popularity. “Coffee became so integral to the U.S. war effort that it became known--and

is still known--as “a cup of Joe” named after the symbolic soldier “G.I. Joe” (Topik 82). Starbucks poked at the instant coffee empire by advocating and providing whole bean roast, which is seen as far more natural, and then Schultz flipped the industry altogether with his introduction of espresso drinks. This brought gourmet coffee to the United States and transformed the market.

A SURVEY OF COFFEEHOUSES IN EUGENE

Now that we have all the background data in place, I can give deeper context to my observations and findings. My particular interest in coffee culture is the idea of communal space—as explored in the historical overview of London coffeehouses—and how it is used and experienced in the cafes of Eugene. I went to several cafes over the course of the Winter 2013 term at the University of Oregon and observed the interactions of people within that space. Although my field notes contain observational data on 8 or 9 cafes, I will narrow this paper down to 4 specific places: AAA Hearth Café, Lillis Café, Vero, and Perugino. I also conducted three interviews with regulars at AAA Hearth Café and Lillis Café, where I work as a barista, and at Vero.

From my field notes and my general observations while working as a barista, I have found that people tend to enter coffeehouses, which are public domain, and immediately attempt to privatize their space. They claim tables and spread their work all over it, or set their things on

the empty chair beside them. The body language that people often use within a café space is very closed-off. They have created a sphere of private space within the public one, shutting out anything more than polite, noncommittal comments. I think that demographics are an unreliable judge of the character of Eugene's cafes, simply because Eugene is primarily a university town and thusly has a large population of college-aged individuals. Demographic-based research would therefore be skewed. With this in mind, I have created a division in my observations by labeling people as either "talkers" or "quiets." Talkers are at a coffeehouse to chat and socialize, generally with people they know or have arrived with. Quiets are primarily in a café space to read or study, keeping to themselves and toting a book or laptop.

I will begin my observational report by sharing my experience of space within each café. The idea of space is crucial for coffeehouses, as they are one of the world's many "third places," that



Figure 9 / AAA Hearth Cafe Interior Shot

is, not home and not work (or school, as the case may be.) Ray Oldenburg, in his wonderful book The Great Good Place, defines third place as "a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of

individuals beyond the realms of home and work.” Coffeehouses have filled this definition, or function, in the past and continue to do so in our present cultural environment. I will link my observations of Eugene’s cafes with communal space, and ultimately with this idea of third space.

AAA HEARTH CAFÉ is located on the University of Oregon campus, in the Allied Arts & Architecture building. It is one of the oldest cafes in Eugene, created somewhere around 1991 (no one, including the manager of the café outlets, seems to know exactly when it came to be). The espresso bar and register are located in a small space that used to be either a janitor’s closet or a men’s restroom. Two baristas work there at any given time, as three would crowd the space, so the bar where you order your drinks is essentially a window. The rest of the café space is set



Figure 10 / AAA Hearth Cafe Interior Shot

apart from it, with large bright wooden tables and big windows. There is only one table that is small enough to occupy a mere two people. The others all seat 6 or more, so this café is mainly a communal space. The floor is wooden, the walls and rafters painted in white. The result is a large room with a friendly atmosphere, where the baristas are usually louder than most of the people sitting in the café.

For the purpose of this project, I interviewed a regular, Annie. Annie, a young white female in her final year of college, shifted uneasily when I asked her how she would feel if a stranger sat down next to her in AAA Hearth. “Like if a man stood next to another man in a urinal situation,” she said. “Uncomfortable.” She confessed to having left the café when a woman sat near her at a communal table and was talking loudly on her cell phone. We chatted about coffeehouse space and how she liked to use it. Studying was her priority whenever she

entered a café, and if there was distracting loudness, she either opted for headphones or opted out of the café. I asked her if she felt like she had the right to a certain environment when she walked into a coffeehouse, and she answered “yes. One with personal space. Americans are very cold people; other countries don’t understand it as well. I just don’t like people being close to me.”

LILLIS CAFÉ is in one of the newer and more iconic buildings at the University of Oregon, the Lillis Business Complex. Opened in 2004 it is one of the biggest cafes on campus and gets a lot

of traffic. Windows and glass walls surround the space, letting light in, or pale gloom if the weather is normal. There are between 3 and 5 baristas there at any given time and more variety there (the addition of soda drinks and a great deal more syrup flavors) than at any of the other cafes in the vicinity. There are plenty of two and four-seater tables with couches and plush chairs making up the communal area, and the noise level is slightly louder here than in AAA Hearth, which is a mere 5-minute walk deeper into campus.



Figure 11 / Lillis Cafe, Interior Shot

My interview with Phillip⁴, a regular at Lillis, took place at one of the 4-chair tables. I asked him the same questions I had posed to Annie, emphasizing the scenario where a stranger comes over to share a table, invading the culturally acceptable creation of a privatized bubble. Phillip, a white male in his early 20s, had a completely different reaction than Annie's. He shrugged, tapping his feet, and said that it did not bother him at all. "As long as they have a respect for what I'm doing," he said with nonchalance, "then, sure, I don't mind if they're there. I'd probably just say 'hi' and then continue with what I'm doing." When I asked Phillip if he thought he had the right to a certain kind of environment within a café, his brow furrowed and he shook his head. "No, of course not. It's a public space." Phillip showed a surprising amount of situational awareness. In my observations of Lillis Café, I have noticed people chatting together on the couches amicably, but their attitude seems to change when they are working or studying at a table. One quiet woman was sitting at a table (4 chairs) with her work spread out. A man wanted to "make" his coffee (dress it with cream, sugar, etc.) There was no space on the bar so he set his cup on the edge of her table to work on it. This visibly unnerved her, as she glanced at his cup with troubled uncertainty several times, her foot twitching, and made larger gestures.

⁴ Name has been changed.



Figure 12 / Vero Espresso, Exterior Shot

VERO ESPRESSO is all about atmosphere, and it is also almost always busy. The café is located within an old Victorian-style yellow house. The downstairs floor has the espresso bar and registers and most of the seating. Upstairs is a room that can be reserved for large study groups or study parties⁵, but is not open to the general public. On sunny days the outside porch is covered with black metal furniture and filled with people. The furnishings inside are a little unusual, mixing antique Victorian chairs and tables with modern. If you thought about it you might realize how nonsequitor the styles are, but they make sense in this space. The main similarities tend to be in the color and tone of the furniture. Dark browns and blacks prevail, contrasted with deep mustard yellow and burnt red walls. There are two communal tables within the café floor

that seat from 6-8 people, a few tables

that seat 3-4 people, and several little two-seater tables in a row. The seating arrangement is sporadic and clustered, emphasizing a first-come-first-serve café experience. The actual café bar is in a separate space from the two large rooms of seating. It can be heard but is not in direct line of sight. I interviewed Billy⁶, a regular at Vero, and asked him what had turned into my most important question: did he feel like he was entitled to a certain kind of environment when he walked

into a café? He looked at me with some confusion before answering, “No. If you want a special kind of environment that’s just for you, then you don’t go to a café. That’s silly.” I asked him how he felt about someone sitting next to him, and he said that it didn’t matter as long as they weren’t in his face. “If they were really close to me, this close to me,” he bobbed his head towards me until it was a mere few inches away from mine. “Then I would say something. I would probably say, ‘[leave] off’ or something.” Vero, when it is crowded, often has people

Figure 13 / Vero Espresso, Interior Shot



⁵ For \$20 an hour.

⁶ Name has been changed.

sharing communal space. The café is usually quite evenly divided between people who are there to talk and socialize and those who are there to study or read quietly. One of the more interesting attempts at space sharing that I encountered took place in early afternoon and involved two women quietly reading at a communal table. The women were sitting with an empty chair between them, a comfortable and safe distance from one another, and doing their best to not acknowledge their mutual existence in the same space. They were doing well until two women with small children, unable to find their own table, approached the communal one and asked politely if they could share the table. One of the quiet women nodded her head emphatically and began immediately putting away all of her reading materials, voicing that of course they could share the table. She fled quickly. The other quiet woman stared, with open trepidation, at the small children for a number of minutes, but refused to open her mouth or move.

PERUGINO, located in downtown Eugene, has a bit of a blended environment. The manager told me that the café has been open for 11 years, which seems surprising considering how few



Figure 14 / Perugino Interior Shot

colleagues of mine know about its identity as a café. Perugino is also a wine and beer bar and sells Italian ceramics and local wines by the bottle. They have mostly two-seater tables but there are a couple of communal tables at opposite ends of the café. Italian ceramics line the walls, bottled wines occupy corners and shelves, and long tapestries hang along the brick walls. The

furniture is dark and modern with a few random plastic electric blue chairs thrown in for some dramatic contrast. The demographics are also different in this space; there are more middle-aged and older people in Perugino than in the cafes on campus, for example, although the explanation for that is probably quite simple. There are more students on campus, and so the demographic comparison hardly seems a fair one, but I thought it worth mentioning nonetheless. The tri-beverage focus of Perugino (coffee, wine, beer) is a unique feature in Eugene, but it does harken

back to the decline of coffeehouses in London. While they were decaying in social function, London coffeehouses started offering up alcohol to bring revenues up and attract more customers. Perugino has a certain charm, being nestled in the middle of a historic building in the heart of downtown. Light chatting is commonplace inside Perugino, with its ambient lighting and Billie Holiday tunes. Talkers dominate the space, but it is not raucous. A large communal table sits in almost a separate section of the café, surrounded by the Italian ceramics and bottled wine. While observing the café, I noticed that a quiet man was the sole occupant of the communal table. After a little while, a student came and joined him, asking if she could take a seat. He nodded graciously and they proceeded to ignore one another. A couple that had been holding up the line at the counter, trying several different wines in their indecision, joined the table without asking. They talked loudly, oblivious to their quiet tablemates. The lone man threw several piercing glares towards them, of which they were also oblivious.

CONCLUSION

Communal space exists in all of these cafes, and the way people use it varies. Unlike the days of the great London coffeehouses, people do not use the space to converse with strangers or band together for the great good of their community. They do not frequent cafes to begin or participate in an intellectual or political revolution together. Political discourse might take place but it is between people who know one another or who have come to the coffeehouse together. Study is a solitary or targeted pursuit. People who come to study do so alone or with friends. None of the people I interviewed had ever made a friend or met someone in a coffeehouse. I have seen people study side by side at communal tables, total strangers, who will not even look at one another. No attempt at communication is made for hours. We privatize space immediately, and we do it so completely that the world around us becomes blocked off. Walking into a coffeehouse is akin to waving at sociality, is it not? You are setting yourself up for at least one conversation, with the barista, but it seems to end there and once you have your drink all room for unfamiliar interaction is gone. You are not there to participate; you are there to make use of this space that you have purchased for the price of a beverage, or perhaps a croissant.

Coffeehouses in Eugene are prevalent. Some locations, like the Wandering Goat, will double their café space as a venue and have live music on a scheduled weekly basis. But most Eugene cafes are sedentary in their defined business. The taste of coffee has become important in our modern exploration of coffee culture, but inter-activity has fallen by the wayside. We enter into this public sphere then stop, afraid to breach the cultural gap of mutual distrust and disinterest long enough to learn something new about the person we are sitting, unwillingly, next to. The coffeehouse works as a third space in so many wonderful ways, but so often falls short of fostering community involvement. In the manner that London coffeehouses took matters of

political and intellectual interest and gave themselves up as breeding grounds for innovation and creation, Eugene's cafes are sorely lacking. How did our culture become so isolated? The individual is an important part of our popular culture, perhaps so much so that we can hardly see beyond ourselves. Even in public areas, we privatize our own immediate space, and when someone sits next to us in a café, many of us are visibly uncomfortable.

Coffee culture is indeed going through a period of revitalization. The third space of cafes is becoming important for students, as London coffeehouses did for academics. Coffee as a beverage is getting tastier, certainly, and we are finding creative ways to brew and blend it. Our access to good coffee and whole beans has never been better. Coffeehouses are springing up and claiming a cultural space in our cities and towns, creating a culture for friends who want somewhere to chat or students who need a place to work. The blue collar and white collar workers both stop by coffee shops for a morning, afternoon, or sometimes nighttime cup of something strong and perhaps sweet. Our choices are greater every day, our various and particular tastes are met by the evolving market of cafes and coffees.

Even though I am happy to laud the successful cultural third place that coffeehouses have carved into our daily lives, I wistfully think of London's great coffeehouses and the forums for enlightenment and change that they have fostered. I find myself questioning more than the culture of coffee when I feel socially incorrect turning to the person next to me in Wandering Goat and saying hello. These great opportunities for interacting with new people are wasted by the fear of others that our culture perpetuates. We have enormous access to a global realm of individuals but lack the gumption to greet them. Fear (and I call it fear because "lack of interest" is too much an excuse) of stepping out of our nuclei and possibly making a new acquaintance who doesn't come pre-credentialed by friends, family, school or work is overwhelming in our culture. There are, of course, places where this seemingly shocking occurrence is more acceptable and common, but I am speaking from my own research in Eugene, Oregon and the experiences I have had in coffeehouses elsewhere in the United States. I cannot claim an absolute. In our global reach we are able to communicate with others online, where a wall of anonymity protects us from the people we seek to interact with. In coffeehouses that wall is lifted, and we are left face-to-face with the strangers we will never seek to know.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Lamia Karim, for advising me as I worked on this project. Her help and support has pushed me into understanding the value of research and the importance of pursuing it in Anthropology. Without her guidance I would not have believed in the potential of my research ideas, or in pursuing a hopeful future in graduate school. Thanks should also go to my husband, Joseph Wyr, who was very supportive of my research interests and accompanied me to many cafes as I engaged in participant observation. Special thanks to the three people who allowed me to interview them for the purpose of this study.

Resources

Allen, Stewart Lee

1999 *The Devil's Cup: Coffee, the Driving Force in History*. New York: Soho.

Beers, David

2006 The Public Sphere and Online, Independent Journalism. Theme issue, "The Popular Media, Education, and Resistance/Les mass-média populaires, l'éducation et le résistance," *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation* 29(1):(109-130).

Ellis, Aytoun

1956 *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-houses*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Gaudio, Rudolf P.

2003 Coffeetalk: Starbucks™ and the Commercialization of Casual Conversation. *Language in Society* 32(5):(659-691).

Green, Matthew

2012 London Cafes: The Surprising History of London's Lost Coffeehouses. *The Telegraph*, March 20.

Hattox, Ralph S

1985 *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*. Seattle: Distributed by the University of Washington.

Manderson, Desmond and Sarah Turner

2006 Coffee House: Habits and Performance among Law Students. *Law & Social Inquiry* 31(3):(649-676).

National Coffee Association

N.d. NCA Annual Convention. Assessed 20 Mar. 2013.

Oldenburg, Ray

1989 *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*. New York: Paragon House.

Pendergast, Mark

1999 *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World*. New York: Basic.

SBDCNet

2012 Coffee Shop 2012. SBDCNet Clearing House, assessed 20 Mar. 2013.

Simon, Bryant

2009 Everything but the Coffee: Learning about America from Starbucks™. Berkeley: University of California.

Spencer, Stefanie

N.d. The History of Instant Coffee. INeedCoffee.com, assessed 20 Mar. 2013

Stevenson, Nick

1993-1994 Habermas, Mass Culture and the Future of the Public Sphere. Berkeley Journal of Sociology 38:(221-245).

Topik, Steven

2009 Coffee as a Social Drug. Theme issue, "Drugs in Motion: Mind-and-Body-Altering Substances in the World's Cultural Economy," Cultural Critique 71:(81-106).

Ukers, William H

1935 All about Coffee. New York: Tea & Coffee Trade Journal.

VendingMarketWatch

2011 Strong Future for Coffee Likely as Younger Generation's Consumption Rebounds. Assessed 20 Mar. 2013.

Wild, Anthony

2005 Coffee: A Dark History. New York: W.W. Norton.