

Part I

Introduction



Dining out

Eating away from home used to be considered exceptional. Normality meant eating at home, with other family and household members. Scholarly and popular literature about the social aspects of eating begins from meals at home and their supposed capacity to enhance family relationships (Murcott, 1983; Douglas, 1984; DeVault, 1991; Mennell, 1992; Valentine, 1999; Sobal, 2000; Bugge and Almås, 2006; Fischler, 2011; Phull et al., 2015; Yates and Warde, 2018). Probably the majority of meals in the last 100 years have been consumed within the household. However, much eating takes place away from home. Dining out, or eating a main meal away from home, is now a symbolically significant popular activity which provides a complementary source of food and companionship. This book examines dining out both as customers in commercial venues and as guests of friends and non-resident kin.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA, 2014) reported that one meal in six was eaten away from home in Britain in 2014, an estimate covering all types of eating events away from home, including breakfasts, light lunches during working hours, and other small occasions, as well as the consumption of main meals. Various studies indicate that considerable amounts of money and time are devoted to eating out (Warde, 2004; Cheng et al., 2007; Warde et al., 2007; Lhuissier, 2014). There are many options, including a meal at work, fish and chips on the street corner, a picnic, a school dinner, a snack in a roadside diner or sandwiches taken to work, as well as a substantial meal in a restaurant (Finkelstein, 1989; Warde and Martens, 1995; Jacobs and Scholliers, 2003; Finkelstein, 2013). The alternative sites conjure up images of different events and occasions, some fleeting, others special. Burnett (2004: 320), in the pre-eminent historical account of England, contends that, despite popular impressions to the contrary, the number of events may not be much different now from what it was in the late nineteenth century. Then, having

employment at a distance from home was the main contributory cause; people who most frequently purchased cooked food away from home in the nineteenth century were the labouring poor, such as farm labourers and manual workers in the city (Murcott, 2018: 59–60). However, as Burnett (2004: 320) acknowledges, the form of eating out changed significantly in the second half of the twentieth century. Previously being primarily a necessary substitute for an inability to obtain a meal in a family home, dining out became, for the majority of the population, a positive preference as a recreational activity offering pleasure as well as refreshment. Eating out is a popular and heterogeneous activity.

Research on food concentrates more on its production and sale than on its final consumption. Within the domain of consumption more attention is devoted to hunger, poverty and nutritional deficiency than to the symbolic and aesthetic aspects of eating. Nevertheless, scholars in food studies, building on work in anthropology, sociology and mass communications, have increasingly documented the symbolic significance of eating (Albala et al., 2017). Such endeavours include investigation of various aspects of eating away from home. Situations of commercial provision where the buyer has maximum discretion attract the most attention, among which, street food, the burger bar, cafes and restaurants provide the most inspiration because they appear most emphatically to express personal and individual taste. Yet many alternative sources of provision exist. A very large industrial and institutional sector of the catering trade delivers meals in hospitals, schools, prisons and factories. Domestic hospitality is a source of meals for guests who live under a different roof (Julier, 2013a). Charities are also, sadly, providing an increasing number of meals, and their constituent ingredients for home consumption, for the needy and the destitute, as another form of communal provision (Garthwaite, 2016; Lambie-Mumford, 2017). Nevertheless, the retail commercial sector is the most eye-catching feature of provision of food away from home in the early twenty-first century as much for its cultural and symbolic significance as for the sustenance it provides.

Restaurants, and other equivalents such as cafes, pubs and hotel dining rooms which offer table service, attract most attention. They typically deliver substantial meals and define ritual procedures, where culinary content and social contexts are of considerable symbolic significance. Upmarket places which serve elaborate dinners are subject to research on their personnel, increasingly the chef, their social setting and their gastronomic features (Mennell, 1985; Ferguson, 2004; Warde, 2009; Lane, 2014; Pearlman, 2013; Leschziner, 2015; Lane, 2018). The picnic, the hotel breakfast, the dinner party, the barbecue and the street bench are studied much less. Places serving foreign or ‘ethnic’ cuisine have

attracted perhaps even more attention because of what they say about changing tastes and migrant populations (Driver, 1983; Heldke, 2003; Buettner, 2008; Panayi, 2008; Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Ray, 2016; Oleschuk, 2017; Warde et al., 2019).

Despite now being very common, dining out in a restaurant or cafe is still regarded with some suspicion. People view it positively when they themselves are engaged in the activity but may have reservations about its role in the feeding of others! What is imagined as wrong with eating out which renders it morally ambivalent? First, the kitchen door marks a separation between the backstage conditions (Whyte, 1949; Goffman, 1959; Gabriel, 1988; Fine, 1996) and frontstage display, perhaps considered disingenuous by diners worried they may be getting more than they bargained for (Crang, 1994; Murcott, 2018: 56–59). Many restaurants have been redesigned with open kitchens, possibly to demystify the backstage social world, and to heighten the sense that restaurant is theatre. A second objection might be its fundamental challenge to the ideal of the family meal, the widely held view that dinner is best eaten at home with other members of the elementary family. A moral and practical issue, which has rumbled on inconclusively since the mid-nineteenth century, it could be thought to be especially threatened by the incursion of commercial provision, replacing domestic food preparation and meals eaten together by members of the family household (Murcott, 1997; Jackson, 2009). Inevitably each meal taken away from home eliminates an opportunity to cook. Some think that cooking is good for its own sake, but many more have a morally loaded premonition that it is a matter of resorting to a convenient alternative which defaults on responsibility and is an encouragement to laziness, for it is often contended that home-made food is of better quality than any alternative. This view is bolstered by contentions that eating out has adverse effects on health. Certainly it is less easy to calculate the nutritional value of a meal prepared in a commercial kitchen than one assembled at home. Eating out is also thought to encourage people to suspend any principles of constraint over what might be consumed on a special occasion. This arouses a related suspicion that dining out is extravagant and that people enjoy themselves too much. A Protestant revulsion against hedonistic excess is not uncommon, and since dining out has long been associated with drinking alcohol, the recrimination intensifies. Undeserved pleasure, expense, and the relinquishing of responsibility and control are maybe even more reprehensible than merely avoiding hard work. There is also some general public suspicion about the intrusion of the market into everyday life. People are very used to buying items and services which they would previously have obtained in other ways but they may

nevertheless feel some disquiet about it. Against most of these reservations it might be objected that eating out is relatively infrequent even in the richest of western societies such that the anticipated negative consequences are exaggerated. Nevertheless, if the trend were towards ever more events away from home then the primary role of the domestic meal might eventually be fatally compromised. Perhaps ambivalence should not be surprising given a much wider tension in the contemporary treatment of food, its being both pleasurable and a source of great anxiety. Arguably, the anxieties have excessively detained scholars, and even more so policy-makers, to the neglect of the appreciation of the satisfactions and pleasures of eating out.

The activity of eating out inspires many reasons for sociological interest. How people judge themselves and others in their everyday behaviour is a guide to shared norms, and social standing is well revealed in the study of morally ambivalent practices. The apparent disjuncture between much media representation of the activity and how it is experienced by consumers is an endless source of fascination. The mutual effects of the different forms of provision and the substitution between forms potentially reconfigure the ways in which societies eat. The pattern of domestic meals, which Grignon (1993) argued is primarily determined by the obligations of employment and the organisation of the household, is subject to the compounding effects of the greater use of alternative means of provision. Eating in restaurants means exposure in public spaces, involving personal performance and social interaction, during which observation may lead to judgement.

Increased spending on eating in commercial settings reopens questions about commodification as a master process in the development of capitalist societies. The restaurant is interesting because it could be represented as the apogee of consumer choice, a paradigm of the process of individualisation which social theorists propose is a consequence of changes in western societies after the 1960s (Bauman, 1988; Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). It is no longer necessary to eat the same food as other people at the table, each restaurant offers many items and there are many types of restaurant. Whims and desires can be satisfied, and opportunities arise to eat unfamiliar foods as the growing availability of dishes and customs associated with foreign cuisines becomes a strongly marked option (Ascher, 2005). The parallel development of a global 'consumer culture' is an ongoing matter of controversy, associated with propping up the ideology of consumer sovereignty and consumer choice. Said to be Britain's most popular leisure pursuit after watching television, the significance of dining out for life and lifestyles is considerable. As an object of enthusiasm for some, and as a

common leisure pursuit, much can be gleaned about cultural practice, cultural capital and cultural priorities. What, for instance, does eating out eliminate from the diary, and indeed what does it accompany? In addition, it is open to examination as an instance of social differentiation, of inequalities between classes, men and women, young and old, the staple concern of sociology.

In sum, eating out is a very common and popular recreation, a significant contributor to diet and eating, an instance of commodification and changing modes of provision, and an activity with considerable cultural and symbolic significance. It also throws light on key debates in cultural sociology in the twenty-first century, providing a means to test and elaborate theories of globalisation, cultural omnivorousness, cultural intermediation and aestheticisation. So why would sociologists not study it?

Scholarly interest has risen in parallel with public interest which is reflected in media coverage and popular commentary. Yet eating out is still not a very popular sociological topic. The extent to which buying meals out in restaurants, hotels and cafes has become increasingly common over the last fifty years in Europe and North America has been documented (Kjaernes, 2001; Jacobs and Scholliers, 2003; Levenstein, 2003; Cheng et al., 2007; Holm et al., 2012; Díaz-Méndez and García-Espejo, 2014; Cabiedes-Miragaya, 2017; Díaz-Méndez and García-Espejo, 2017; Díaz-Méndez and Van den Broek, 2017; Gronow and Holm, 2019). In the process, commercial options have multiplied enormously, driven by forces of globalisation, commodification and aestheticisation (Warde, 2016). Venues have diversified, specialising in provision for different types of occasion and serving a wide range of foods and cuisines, rendering the market increasingly large and varied (Finkelstein, 1989; Wood, 1995; Warde et al., 1999; Warde and Martens, 2000; Scholliers, 2001; Berris and Sutton, 2007; Johnston and Baumann, 2010; Julier, 2013b; Díaz-Méndez and García-Espejo, 2014; Ray, 2016; Paddock et al., 2017). Recent studies across Europe and the US have told us about upmarket restaurants and their celebrity chefs (Rao et al., 2003; Lane, 2011; Lane, 2014; Leschziner, 2015). There is also literature on fast foods (Leidner, 1993; Watson, 1997). We know about what is cooked and sold in restaurants and cafes across the globe, arising from a particular interest in the significance of the spread of commercial enterprises purveying different national, ethnic and regional cuisines and their connection with processes of migration (Mintz, 1997; Jacobs and Scholliers, 2003; Wilk, 2006; Berris and Sutton, 2007; Panayi, 2008; Ray, 2016).

Research focusing specifically on the act of consumption is, by contrast, relatively limited. There is more research on provision than consumption. A minor interest in food connoisseurs has developed recently

(Ascher, 2005; Johnston and Baumann, 2010; Warde et al., 2019) and somewhat dated literature exists on the more basic experiences of eating out in Europe and the US (Finkelstein, 1989; Wood, 1995; Warde and Martens, 2000; Warde, 2016). About domestic hospitality we know even less. Apart from Julier's (2013a) full-length study of North America, little else deals with entertaining (Warde and Martens, 2000; Mellor et al., 2010). Our account aims to advance understanding of the experiences of domestic guests and restaurant customers.

Dining out in England

This book is a second episode in an analysis of continuity and change in the practice of dining out in England. It results from a re-study of eating events which occur away from home. It was not originally intended that the initial investigation carried out in 1995 and reported in the book *Eating Out: Social Differentiation, Consumption and Pleasure* (Warde and Martens, 2000) would be repeated. However, when an opportunity arose to carry out a follow-up project it was grasped because it offered exciting possibilities to examine processes of change in a disciplined sociological fashion. The first study, based on qualitative household interviews and a survey in three English cities, was pioneering insofar as there was no systematic research on eating out from the point of view of consumption and consumers. Instruments were designed which allowed the exploration of an increasingly common but obscure set of activities with a view to understanding what people were doing, and thought they were doing, when they ate food away from home. The focus was explicitly on main meals eaten either on commercial premises or as a guest of friends or non-resident kin. Of the many different types of events where food is eaten outside of the home, we focused on the most elaborate and symbolically significant. When questioning people, two terms, 'main meal' and 'eating out', were used to direct attention to substantial, costly, extended and planned events. In retrospect it might have been more appropriate to refer to the focal activity as 'dining out'. However, that probably would not have had sufficient resonance in the general population; Britons tend to say 'shall we *eat out* tomorrow?' not 'shall we *dine out*?'. The results of the study gave no grounds for thinking that the use of the term eating out, in combination with requests to tell us only about 'main meals', caused any confusion or was in any way misleading. Nevertheless, the etic version 'dining out' would probably have characterised the object of analysis best because it carries intimations of 'dinner', the largest meal of the day, and an 'outing', an excursion not part of the

humdrum and mundane domestic routine. In the re-study, we deployed the term ‘main meal’ explicitly, trying to achieve comparison of like with like, mindful nonetheless that the commercial sector in the intervening twenty years had expanded provision of minor meals in more informal settings.

A sociological re-study is not like a repeated laboratory experiment in which the goal is to eliminate contextual effects. Inevitably in modern societies the context of the action will to some degree change over two decades, making it unfeasible to control contextual conditions. Nevertheless, using the same research instruments and asking the same questions significantly aids the systematic measurement of change. In 1995 we were interested in dining out (main meals eaten away from home) for a number of empirical and theoretical reasons. It was partly that nothing much was known beyond anecdote about the understandings, concerns, objectives, behaviours, purposes and frustrations which are associated with eating away from home. A primary point of departure was the long-running debate about the fate of the family meal. Equally important was the social state of the meal itself, the central sociological concept in the sociological armoury, which has been the subject of much more attention in, for example, French sociology (Herpin, 1988; Poulain, 2002a; Fischler, 2011), but also across the Nordic countries (Gronow and Holm, 2019). Commodification, which entails organisations operating through markets with the purpose of supplying goods and services for sale and with a view to profit, is a defining feature of the modern capitalist economy. Its consequences for social relationships, daily life, connections between family members and friends, as well as employers and workers are profound. Stereotypically, market relations are impersonal, transitory, rationally calculated and carry no obligations beyond the single transaction. The possibility of the logic of calculated exchange invading the most important and symbolic meal occasions may be intrinsically worrying. With that in mind we compared the restaurant meal with that taken as a guest in other people’s houses, a form of communal provision based usually upon mutual and durable interpersonal obligation.

Eating meals on commercial premises had clearly become more common during the decades before 1995. Expenditure data are totally unambiguous in recording an increasing proportion of the household budget on food being devoted to eating outside the home and not from the household store cupboard. Warren (1958) provides probably the best estimate of eating out in the period immediately after the Second World War. As part of a market research inquiry, a survey of 4,557 people in England and Scotland in 1955–56 uncovered some basic evidence about the frequency of eating out and variation by class, gender, day of the week and season. Three classes were differentiated – an upper class of professional

and managerial occupations (10% of households), a middle class of lower managerial and white-collar households (20%) and a lower class (70%). The results show that eating out occurred more often at the midday meal than in the evening and mostly at the workplace; twice as many midday meals were in a canteen than 'at a cafe/restaurant/hotel'. Approximately 10 per cent of all lunches occurred on commercial premises, and about 3 per cent of evening meals. Men were about twice as likely as women to eat both midday and 'principal evening meals' in such commercial venues, and both men and women living in upper or middle-class households visited commercial venues about twice as often as those in the lower class. Upper and middle-class men ate an evening meal on commercial premises about twice as often as those in the lower class during the summer, but the difference was less in winter. Dining out in the 1950s was thus relatively uncommon and marked by social privilege. These social differences diminished in the succeeding decades as access to meals on commercial premises became more equal, a process which Burnett (2004) perhaps misleadingly called 'democratisation'. Not that it was imagined that all vestiges of class or gender differences had disappeared. Gender continued to be of great importance because of the entrenched role of women in the provision of household meals. Matters of taste remain related to social class, cultural capital and social domination. Dining out persists as an opportunity for the display of distinction and social status. This is possible not only through the purchase of expensive and stylish food, but also through public displays of refinement of manners. Exposure in a public space, both to other diners and staff, for extended periods of time, facilitates the judgement of performances and the attribution of social esteem.

Almost all these considerations remain as sociologically relevant in 2015 as they were in 1995. The underlying social processes behind patterns of social differentiation in the activity persist. Commodification, global diffusion of foreign cuisines, class and gender differences, choice and distinction remain key questions. Additional considerations have emerged. One is the continuing and perhaps intensified pressure towards commodification, coeval with the further erosion of welfare services provided by the state. The ideology and the policy applications of neoliberalism promote and legitimise provision for corporate profit. Only the very rich have gained in income and wealth in real terms during the last decade, in conditions of imposed wage stagnation and growing inequality. Nevertheless, the ideology of consumer sovereignty still sustains a belief that market provision is the most efficient, satisfying and responsive way to obtain goods and services such as a good meal (Ehgartner, 2019). In such a political context,

the role of domestic hospitality seems even more important in assessing the sway of commodification.

The process of globalisation is now better understood and there are many signs of reaction against its consequences. Appadurai (1990, 1996) identified globalisation as types of 'flow' accelerating in the contemporary world, among which the circulation of goods, ideas and people are important with regard to eating (Warde, 2012). Access to exotic food-stuffs and the diffusion of foreign cuisine continue to grow (Lane, 2019). High levels of migration make the larger and older population of the UK more diverse. By contrast, reassertion of the virtues of local, seasonal and regional foods, and nationalist reactions against free trade and freedom of movement, have put a brake on globalisation in ways which impact upon food supply and frame tastes. This global–local dialectic flourishes ever more as culinary taste is more extensively mediated. Restaurants are frequently represented in the mass and social media. The details of restaurants and their services are widely circulated. Publicity and promotion have been extended by the Internet. Restaurants have websites; their menus and decor can be inspected by anyone with a suitable electronic device, and they invite reviews by their customers rather than journalists. Customers take photographs of the dishes served to them and publish them to friends and a wider public. This cultural climate, in which discussion of the qualities of food and dining flourishes, begets 'foodyism'. Promises of excitement about change and innovation, perpetually signalled through the media channels, give additional reason for examining dining out in 2015. The challenge for sociology is to establish the nature and degree of change witnessed in a period of twenty years and to judge whether there has really been a significant transformation in the practice of dining out.

What difference might twenty years make?

Understandings of change are often impressionistic, based on anecdote and extrapolation from personal experience. The paucity of studies of dining out means that available information sources such as government surveys about expenditure, media archives and texts about recipes, menus and restaurant rankings have yet to be fully exploited. Yet trends and innovations in practice are much discussed. Partiality for thinking about change leads to an emphasis on movement, speed and progress, with vehicles such as fashion, novelty and mobility prominent in many accounts. This, however, overlooks the fact that many mechanisms operate persistently over long periods and their effects remain much the same.

Eating is a rather routine and habitual practice and some things change less frequently and less quickly than others (Warde, 2016). Issues about the analysis of social change run throughout the book.

One focus of the analysis is how dining out fits with other eating routines and habits. Dining out is in some respects a voluntary activity. People are rarely forced to participate. They can eat all their meals at home. They can eat in the street, in the office or in a car. Even when they need to eat and cannot get home, they can obtain foodstuffs in different ways. They do not have to purchase meals but can eat snacks and sandwiches instead. Most people engage in a mixture of these activities, and how and why individuals develop specific arrangements to accommodate the range of possibilities is a source of interpersonal and inter-group difference. The composite practice of eating is an emergent effect of how people in different positions solve the problem of feeding. Their arrangements are subject to change in myriad ways because there are many elements that can be organised and reorganised to reconcile the frequency and purposes of meals away from home with domestic arrangements and obligations.

A second major question of interest is how groups represent to themselves and others the symbolic significance of dining out. As has already been alluded to, class and gender affect practice. People's behaviour is a form of expression of social position and identity. Income, ethnicity, age, household structure, generation and place of residence are other sources of differences in behaviour. Dispositions arising from upbringing and education also affect behaviour, sometimes appearing in the guise of commitments to particular styles of life. Food is a source of enthusiasm, antipathy and difference, each of which influences arrangements. We are especially interested in how people express social commitments and connections, and signal identity through their ways of dining out. This taps into core questions of sociology about inequality, structured differences and social hierarchy. Variations between social groupings in the conduct of a practice give symbolic and cultural expression to wider societal relations.

A third research question concerns the nature of the experience of dining out – what it means to people, what gives them cause for concern and what proves a source of delight. Experiences are inevitably mixed. The moral ambivalence surrounding dining out is possible because people do recognise many potential benefits of dining out. Dining out provides flexible and unimpeded access to cooked food, relieves women of some burdens of obligatory domestic labour, transports people to sites of commensality and conviviality, expands culinary horizons and awakens new tastes, increases public interest in cooking and eating, and perhaps

elevates British cuisine. To what extent these benefits are attained and whether they are primarily cultivated through dining out is a main thread of this study. If scholarly approaches to consumption have often generated an unfortunate degree of disapproval or condescension towards popular pleasures, an antidote is to listen carefully to ordinary folk talking on the basis of their experience. We attend to detailed accounts obtained from qualitative interviews to plumb the meanings of dining away from home.

Although the research focuses on reports about eating out, a thorough and comprehensive analysis of change requires an examination of the intersection of eating with many other practices. Changes in the composition of the British population, the redesign of cities, flexible working hours, etc. are all potentially relevant. The major sources of change in eating out may actually arise in rather different fields. Interpretation of the broader economic and cultural context of dining out is essential to explain changing tastes and practices.

How the book unfolds

The book has five parts. The next chapter, which concludes Part I, gives additional details of how the study was conducted, the techniques of data collection and the analytic procedures employed. It also sketches briefly some features of the market provision of eating services in the UK to give context to the ensuing account of consumption. Part II shows how dining out has become more familiar to more people over the twenty years since 1995. It examines who visits which types of restaurant and how frequently (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 considers what these visits mean to people, for what reasons they dine out and how their orientations towards the activity differ. Part III contains four chapters dealing with the three main avenues for obtaining dinner – at home, as the guest of a friend or non-resident family member, or in a commercial setting such as a restaurant or cafe. The nature of experiences on these three different sites is indicated by the use of evidence from both surveys and interviews about practical arrangements, the company kept and the foods eaten. All three avenues are subject to processes of informalisation. Chapter 8 reprises the three modes with a view to explaining how they are integrated in practice. Part IV concerns diversification, exploring orientations towards variety, especially of tastes, examining social differentiation and the pursuit of cultural distinction through the selection of cuisine style. The social and cultural value of an aesthetic approach to dining out, and the unequal distribution of that value along

lines primarily of class and ethnicity is assessed. The final Part provides a summary and draws conclusions about continuity and change in dining out between 1995 and 2015. The first of two chapters describes the contours of the shared practice of dining out in England in 2015, while the second considers the direction and extent of change over twenty years in the context of longer-term trends and institutional change.