*Erling Dokk Holm*

# Coffee and the City
## Towards a soft urbanity

# Content

# Preface

When I applied for admission to the PhD program at Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO), I planned to write a more theoretical work for my doctoral thesis, as I was interested in macro theories about society. However, due to my need for an empirical anchor, and supported by my supervisor Edward Robbins, I started to walk around the streets of Oslo: was there something out there that could be the subject of my dissertation? For many years I have been fascinated by the consumption of commodities that from one point of view could be interpreted as rather absurd, but on the other hand produce meaning and social practices.

One day, while drinking cappuccino at Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien, I had an epiphany: here I was, right in the middle of a reality where many of the ideas of the nature of private consumption appeared just as outdated as instant coffee. The number of coffee bars seemed to be increasing at an almost incomprehensible pace, and the city was obviously undergoing a significant change. So I settled for coffee bars.

I would like to thank Edward Robbins for supervising me and giving my work direction. He has also insisted on the importance of studying the human actor and not just the grand narratives of social science. We have had contact on a daily basis, and have shared long and fascinating conversations about the many sides of life. In the final period Jonny Aspen's excellent analytical skills have been decisively important. The value of Jonny and Edward's careful and relentless critique and support, can hardly be overrated.

I am also in everlasting debt to Halina Dunin-Woyseth and Karl Otto Ellefsen for enrolling me on the PhD program at AHO, and for discussions, conversations and their presence in the daily life of a PhD student. I have had many wonderful colleagues at AHO, with whom I have shared many fruitful conversations during these years. No one mentioned, no one forgotten. Olve Krange have also read through an earlier version of the text and provided me with valuable advice.

Kyrre Holmeseth's drawings of the coffee bars' interiors and exteriors are of such excellence that it seems rather unjust to print them in reduced size, as I have done here. Magnus Drogseth is the man behind the maps, and has also

# Chapter 1.  Introduction and research questions

This dissertation is about coffee bars. In it I ask how and why they have emerged in the urban sphere, how they function and how they may be interpreted as indicators of structural changes on a societal level. To put it briefly: what is it that makes coffee bars so successful in modern society?

I also ask another question: how do coffee bars contribute to a new perspective on urbanity, and what characterizes this urbanity?

I decided to study coffee bars – as a phenomenon – since they aroused my curiosity about how changes in the urban environment occur. In Oslo, I had observed that in the space of a few years coffee bars went from being rare and almost exotic places to becoming part of the everyday urban environment.

When a phenomenon arises, survives an initial boom and slowly but surely becomes integrated in the urban fabric, to the point that it becomes a natural part of it, it must have some qualities that are worth investigating.

Consequently, I began to visit coffee bars systematically: observing, taking notes and engaging in conversations. I soon came to feel that many coffee bars represented something new; that their success in a prosaic and pragmatic way reflected unmet needs. Therefore, the dissertation started out as an empirical study, in which I studied the origins of the coffee bars, their history, their design features; observed life in coffee bars; and interviewed users, workers, owners and designers. During this investigation it became apparent to me that the coffee bars I surveyed had qualities that transcended a purely pragmatic approach.

I then asked myself: Is there something in the way they work that suggests a deeper transformation of the urban sphere and its social and cultural fabric?

On the basis of these questions I decided to enlarge the dissertation and include several theoretical perspectives; this is also reflected in the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 describes the methodology applied in the dissertation; discusses questions that emerged during the course of the fieldwork; and offers an interpretation of the empirical data. One of the essential questions for the social scientist concerns the relation between structure and agency; between the work, ambitions, actions and behavior of individuals, and the power of surrounding social structures. Chapter 2 elaborates on this discussion and locates the dissertation within this debate.

Chapter 3 continues the theoretical discussion by examining the term "urbanity". This term is essential in the dissertation; it is mentioned in the title of the dissertation, and is of vital importance for understanding the "coffee bar phenomenon".

Chapter 4 is devoted to the urban history of coffee, and includes a brief description of the period from the emergence of coffee bars until the present day.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the question of the design of coffee bars. A coffee bar is typically distinguished by distinct design features, which may be related to an international design typology. Coffee bars also attract a variety of customers, and the chapter includes a quantitative description of customers. The chapter also includes a mapping and overview of the coffee bars in Oslo; the maps show location and how the number of coffee bars has increased over the years.

Chapter 6 investigates the motives and ideas of the entrepreneurs who established the four Oslo coffee bars that are closely studied in this dissertation. The chapter refers to the agent's perspectives concerning localization and principle business ideas, and also includes a discussion of a coffee bar's impact on its surroundings, and the entrepreneurs' reflections and general views regarding coffee and urbanity.

Chapter 7 examines the customers of the coffee bars; it describes how they act, what they seek, what they find and how they reflect on their participation.

Chapter 8 carries out a similar exploration of the coffee bars' employees, the baristas. These men and women who operate the espresso machines, serve coffee and keep the queue in order are vital to maintaining the quality of coffee bars. Their work ethos, motivation and practices are explored and discussed.

The empirical findings set out in these chapters raise several questions regarding the coffee bar phenomenon.

Chapter 9 discusses the empirical findings' implications for the term urbanity, and how urbanity in contemporary society is in the process of being

reformulated. The chapter attempts to locate the empirical findings within the relevant landscape of literature and theory, so that these questions may be discussed substantively. Chapter 10 carries out an excursion into the coffee bars more visible and sensory features. Coffee bars can be understood as representing a visual sensibility and also as signifying the term urbanity. These qualities represent a resource in an economy where symbolic aspects are becoming increasingly important.

Chapter 11 is titled *Conclusions and speculations*, and represents my attempt to sum up the findings of the dissertation and establish links with the other chapters. I also include a discussion of the relationship between agents and structure, and try to outline a perspective on urbanity that enriches the arguments. Most importantly, I discuss explanations that can shed light on the main research question of this thesis, summing up the sub-questions mentioned above (and detailed below) into an overarching one: *What features of coffee bars have made them into an important and growing phenomenon in our society?*

In answering this question, I will consider the following questions:

- What historical context do coffee bars operate in? (recent historical background, Chapter 4)
- How does the design of coffee bars affect the spaces they occupy? (Chapter 5)
- What is the driving force behind the entrepreneurs who establish the coffee bars? (Chapter 6)
- How do the coffee bars function in relation to their customers? (Chapter 7)
- What kind of every day practices are found in the coffee bars? (Chapter 7)
- Do coffee bars provide an opportunity for solitude, or are they in reality more social? (Chapter 7)
- What is the role of the coffee bars' employees? (Chapter 8)
- Do coffee bars have characteristics that can broaden our understanding of what constitutes contemporary urbanity? (Chapter 9)

- o How do individuals in search of reflexivity and self-confronting practices contribute to altered perceptions of the dominant theories of urbanity? (Chapter 9)
- o Does the inner life of coffee bars represent a type of social and cultural change that can also broaden our understanding of urban life? (Chapter 9)
- o Do coffee bars represent fertile ground for challenging influential theories regarding public space? (Chapter 9)

# Chapter 2. Methodology and theory

To answer the questions I raised in the introduction and to be able to analyze the data collected along the lines I have sketched out, I needed a systematic methodology and a theoretical perspective in which to anchor my methodology. I will start with the theoretical component.

## 2.1  A REFLECTION ON STRUCTURES AND AGENCY

In *The Constitution of Society* Anthony Giddens attempts to arrive at some final answers to the "everlasting" micro-macro discussion of whether society is constituted by human agency, or human agency constitutes society (Giddens 1984)[1,2]? Giddens' answer emphasizes *both / and*, rather than *either / or*, and by introducing a perception of a "duality of structure", he launches a productive attempt to close this discussion. This conceptual critique of structuralism provides an understanding of society as represented by a web where the agents have roles, but where the structure is the more determining

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[1] The debate about structure and agency is fundamental within the social sciences. The question is one that has been much discussed, especially in the history of sociology. With a slight exaggeration, it may be possible to claim that sociology itself – more than anything else – is an ongoing discussion of this matter, Indeed, the discussion of the balance between structure and agency in different settings, historically, as well as economically and culturally, is an important topic in most of the social sciences.

[2] Another approach to the relationship between human agents and structure can be found in the works of Emil Durkheim. Durkheim claimed that the construction of a society was based on what he labeled as "social facts", by which he meant social norms, cultural norms and values. In his positivistic perspective, the existence of "social facts" has a higher degree of explanatory force than actions carried out by individuals. A society in Durkheim's view is more than the sum of all the individuals' actions, and the underlying structural force – the social facts – is a more determining factor. Durkheim's theory of "social facts" aims to clarify the relationship between structure and the actions of individuals, as illustrated in his work on suicide  (Durkheim 2002 (1897)).

force. This furnished me with an appropriate framework within which to structure the present study. The emergence of coffee bars is impossible to imagine without the role of human agency; however, at the same time, the coffee bar phenomenon can hardly be analyzed without an understanding of the structural aspects surrounding its emergence.

For Giddens, the duality is exemplified in the relationship between agency and structure, where the agency is in possession of power, although the structure has more impact on the agency than vice versa. According to Giddens' theory, agents are not puppets on a string but rather subjects with knowledge and agendas. The idea that there exist such dualities is a prerequisite for his "theory of structuration", which understands all human actions as being framed by pre-existing social structures governed by a set of norms that makes them distinct. Structures, on the other hand, are not frozen in time and space, and can be altered and modified by human agency. In other words, social structures such as traditions, institutions, moral codes, routines and practices are strong and formative, but these structures can be weakened when people (human agents) begin to disregard, avoid, ignore or reproduce them in new ways.

This approach avoids reducing human agency to being a mere "function" of society or describing society as being represented by the total sum of individual actions, and opens the doors to an informed discussion between, as well as within, the two components. Giddens – in short – defines (the process of) social reproduction as constituting society. Significantly, Giddens' also aims to explore and explain the psychological reasons, or what might be called the need for "ontological security", behind the matrix of social life:

> Rather than becoming preoccupied with epistemological disputes and with the question of whether or not anything like 'epistemology' in its time-honoured sense can be formulated at all, those working in social theory, I suggest, should be concerned first and foremost with reworking conceptions of human being and human doing, social reproduction and social transformation. (Giddens 1984, 21).

For Giddens, the division between objectivism and subjectivism is to be considered as a "dualism that is deeply entrenched in social theory", and his theory of structuration aims to overcome this split and find a workable alternative position. A logical result of Giddens' theory is the emphasis he gives to the importance of combining an analysis of both the 'micro-' and 'macro-' levels. He writes:

> .. 'structure' is regarded as rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction; institutionalized features of social systems have structural properties in the sense that relationships are stabilized across time and space. 'Structure' can be conceptualized abstractly as two aspects of rules - normative elements and codes of signification. Resources are also of two kinds: authoritative resources, which derive from the co-ordination of the activity of human agents, and allocative resources, which stem from control of material products or of aspects of the material world. (Giddens 1984, 31)

Giddens' position emerged out of a social sciences tradition in the 1970s that was dominated by Marxist structuralism. This tradition argued that human action is primarily determined by social class, i.e. that society is constructed of a superstructure (for instance, education, the arts, civil society, etc.) and a substructure (the material and economic base). Marx claimed that the substructure is the formative force, i.e. it defines the superstructure. The deterministic element in this view is rather strong: if we follow Marx's thinking, the ruling classes control both the superstructure and the substructure. Herbert Marcuse, author of the influential book *The One Dimensional Man*, first published in 1964, refined this argument, claiming that we do not live in a free world, but only reproduce ruling class ideologies (even if we are not aware of this). "The enslavement of man by the instruments of his labor continues in a highly rationalized and vastly efficient and promising form" (Marcuse 2002, 45). In sum, then, the structuralist view identifies the human actor as weak, and the forces of the structures which surround the actor/agent as overwhelmingly powerful.

The influence of postmodernism, or poststructuralism, has introduced a more open-minded perspective on these issues within the social sciences. It embraces street level observations and a respect, or even an affinity, for the variety of viewpoints present in a population, even if this is within a geographically limited area. It nurtures the perception of the world as being influenced by hybrid phenomena, and views the construction of identities and psychological frameworks as being related to personal histories (C. J Thompson 1997, 441). There are no purely social situations; there are only different varieties of hybridization and interconnections, of flows, networks and small histories that have replaced the grand narratives of prosperity and a glittering future (Castells 1996) (Lyotard 1984[1979]).

The term "discourse" has played a prominent role in postmodern thinking, and involves a focus on language, not only as a communicative tool, but also as a hedging and differencing tool. Language is perceived as providing representations of existence. From this perspective, structures such as gender, ethnicity, origin and class are discursive.

Returning to Giddens, his relevance to this study is deeply entrenched in his views of human agency: "All human beings are knowledgeable agents", while simultaneously being "…bounded on the one hand by the unconscious and on the other by unacknowledged conditions/unintended consequences of action."(Giddens 1984, 282)

Giddens also places emphasis on the necessity of anchoring the social sciences in "The study of day-to-day life" and of understanding the scope of prosaic daily work. He accentuates the need to understand the "contextualities of interaction" – involving the study of interaction between actors – as well as the larger structural picture (Ibid., 281-284). This framework has helped to structure the research for this dissertation.


## 2.2. RESEARCH AND METHODS

### 2.2.1. Quantitative data

In the research I have conducted, qualitative data has been essential as it has provided the possibility of grasping the agents' motivations and actions. However, I also rely heavily on quantitative data, i.e. official statistics of various kinds, which provide an understanding and framework for the field of study: Statistics Norway (SSB), the Statistics Yearbook for Oslo Municipality, and other sources of information that have been crucial to my work.

The data set produced solely for this dissertation consists of three reports. There are maps showing coffee bar frequency and locations in Oslo, and also a statistical comparison of the coffee bars.

I also prepared a questionnaire on the model of so called "poll exit" questionnaire, where the coffee bar customers are asked a limited number of questions. Customers have been given the questionnaire when leaving the coffee bars. By asking 100 persons questions concerning their profession, work address, residential address and education, I have managed to assemble a large amount of statistical information. I have also mailed questionnaires to all the coffee bars mapped in this study, with detailed questions. However, the response rate was so low that I decided it would be more productive to use qualitative research methods. I also made a comparison of the coffee bars in Oslo I regards to size and other material factors.

## 2.2.2. Qualitative research

The qualitative data in the dissertation comprises three types: observations, participant observations and interviews. The participating observations have been carried out over a period of four years. I have operated with a list of questions, but since I have adapted to the situations that developed during the interview sessions, the interviews are semi-structured. Thirty four persons were interviewed, seventeen men and seventeen women. Three of them are owners, six of them baristas, three of them designers, and twenty two customers.

The use of fieldwork is essential to qualitative research. In itself, fieldwork is a rather broad category; it can include everything from reporting and observing to participant observations and interviewing. The observing participant method is in a sense always with us; however, skilled anthropologists have brought this method to a rather high level. My aim has not been to base my research entirely on this method, although I feel the method has proved productive. The qualitative interview has been my other essential tool.

In the light of Giddens' understanding, I have committed myself to a set of guidelines for carrying out qualitative research. They are directly aimed at the task, and inspired by the reading of Daniel Bertaux's work (Bertaux 1981)(Bertaux and Kohli 1984). Both his texts on *how* to give validity and reliability to qualitative research, and his work where this method is applied, have been of great interest. Bertaux's method is somehow similar to the so called grounded theory developed and refined by Barney Glaser (Glaser 2002). The question concerning how to reach validity and reliability is dependent on the degree of saturation – how much information is enough? Bertaux's work is inspiring, due to two factors. Firstly, he understands his work as being underpinned by a structuralist motivation – he wants to see the macro-situation in the case he is studying. Secondly, he uses a method which he calls life story interviews. The concept of using life stories, in the manner developed by Daniel Bertaux, is based on the aim of gaining an understanding of the human agent's daily life and routines, their social and cultural habits, their economical interest, and their position in the economy. Grant McCracken's book *The Long Interview* also sketches out some of the same aims (McCracken 1988). The idea is to frame a person's actions and beliefs through a context that includes their existence, their life. Consequently, the interviews are often not only very long, but they also deal with questions and conversations that might seem unrelated to the subject of the research.

I have also often experienced that I had to return to a person that I had already interviewed, because there still was something that I had not grasped.

By this I do not suggest that, in the spirit of Bertaux, I have conducted interviews that reveal life stories as such. My interviews have been much less ambitious and the resemblance between so broadly-oriented interviews and those I have conducted is to be found more in the ways the interviews are carried out[3].

I find that Bertaux in a productive way fills in and expands on the quality of Giddens' structuration theory. In Giddens' later work I have found a sentence which expresses the strength in such a thorough understanding of the relation between structure and agency: "Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do" (Giddens and Pierson 1998, 77)

An important question is to determine what number of interviews will be sufficient. I have followed the recommendations given by Daniel Bertaux and his strategy is to achieve a level of saturation. This implies that if new interviews are conducted, and they tend to not provide any new information, but only confirm what is already known, then it is time to consider bringing things to a conclusion. In my case, I have conducted more than thirty interviews and I feel I have reached a satisfactory degree of saturation.

The informants that were interviewed were chosen because of one very specific criterion: they were able to relate to the coffee bars, either as guests, workers or owners. My informants were not chosen based on statistical indicators, such as income or demographic qualities. The dissertation does not include the representative selections of quantitative methods; consequently, other methods have been chosen to ensure validity and reliability.

The so-called *snowball sampling technique* has been one of my chosen methods. Here you do not decide in advance who is going to be interviewed. I have chosen informants by asking the person I have interviewed if she or he knows somebody who could contribute to a broader understanding. In my opinion, this method is extremely effective; it gives a certain flow to the process of interviewing and opens up new areas and possibilities.

I have also used another method for establishing contact. Being a regular customer I have had the chance to observe who were the regular customers; I was then able to approach these customers and ask them if they were interested in taking part in my research. This is a useful approach because it gave me an opportunity to observe before I entered into the process of interviewing.

Regarding the designers and the owners, contact has been established through telephone or email, but the interviews have also been conducted face

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[3] For an excellent and inspiring use of life story interviews see Marianne Gullestad's legendary book *Kitchen Table Society* (Gullestad 1984).

to face. These informants have also guided me further to other interesting informants. So the snowball sampling technique is relevant even here when you look for certain formal qualities in the informants.

As mentioned above, my interviews are mostly semi-structured: I have a number of questions I have asked all the interviewees. However, I have been keen on finding as much information as possible, so I have adapted the questions to the situation, to the social setting, and of course I have encouraged the informants to speak about everything they wanted to. Most of the interviews have been conducted in the coffee bars, but some were also conducted in offices. This is especially the case for the interviews with the owners, the designers and the baristas. The interviews are either written down directly in a notebook, or recorded on tape, and then later transcribed.

Visual material also comprises part of this dissertation, and can be understood in the context of qualitative research. I have used drawings, photographs and maps. Most people will agree that drawings are interpretations; the subjectivity in a drawing is found in what it emphasizes, and in what is left out, but also its style, since style produces connotations (Boeije 2009, 141). With these reflections taken into consideration, I was interested in using drawings, since, in my view, they embellished the description of a place. This is an argument that is also supported by many of those who have written extensively on the use of qualitative methods, such as Hennie Boeije: "They can support the verbal data, contribute visual evidence and enrich the text." (Ibid. 204). Based on that idea, I contacted Kyrre Holmeseth. I had discovered his drawings in a course I had held, and felt that his way of seeing things was very similar to mine; for instance, the way I observe these places. His drawings are what mine would have been if I had the ability to draw. His drawings are in my opinion, drawings that describe the coffee bars as they really are; he captures the mood of these places.

The reflections on subjectivity are also valid concerning the use of photography. The idea that photography refers to an "objective" reality is hardly supported by anyone operating in the field of visual studies (Collier 2001, 38). As formulated by Hennie Boeije "…pictures are merely a production of the photographer who operated the camera" (Boeije 2009, 66).

The photographs I have taken myself are very plain, and they only in limited ways manage to capture the atmosphere of these places. However, on the other hand they can describe other aspects of the coffee bars and shed light on the interiors in a more detailed way than the drawings.

## 2.2.3.  Some reflections on qualitative research

> In the social sciences today there is no longer a God's eye view
> that guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry
> reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory
> laden. There is no possibility of theory-free or value free
> knowledge. (Denzin 2003, 108)

These words by Norman Denzin express in concise terms many of the points
that are often made on qualitative research. Both in the process of coding and
analyzing data, the researcher is a hostage of his epistemological limits
(McCracken 1988, 27). Due to this subjectivity, there will always be a
potential for unbiased and imprecise interpretations and understandings.

As Denzin points out, all this insight into man's limited ability to enter
the fields of social and cultural pratices, does not make him unsuitable to the
task. He just has to be aware of his own limitations.

Grant McCracken emphasizes how meaningless it is to consider the
interviewer as being set apart from a social, cultural or/and ideological
framework (McCracken 1988, 27). A person interviewing another person
tends to reproduce some specific discourses. However, addressing this
perspective does not destroy the potential of qualitative methods. I will argue
that using qualitative methods, such as interviews and participant
observations, in social science research, is based on an understanding that
human life and society is so complex that it requires methods that reduce
reality as little as possible.

Based on such an understanding, it is logical to assume that field research
brings enhanced documentation and knowledge into the research process. It is
out there in the real, but also unstable world of social relations, where the
researcher interacts with informants, and where data must be collected.

However, there are many contributions to the development of qualitative
methodology that do not necessarily grasp the full scope of what such a
situation implies. For instance, in the writing of Anne Sofie Fink, I find her
viewpoint to be out of line with the requirements of reality: "The significance
of qualitative research is unified by the researcher's fundamental research
question – he asks *why?* In comparison, the researcher carrying out
quantitative research will ask *how many?, how widespread?, how old?,* etc".
Even if this sounds wise, in my experience of conducting fieldwork, I feel it
is an oversimplification, at best, and completely wrong, at worst. To ask
people bluntly about what they feel and think is in my opinion often counter-
productive. By asking these types of questions you might get an answer, but
seldom reach an understanding. It is more fruitful to ask people about what

they do, instead of asking them why they do what they do. In my experience, the important task is to get the conversation going first, and then open up the gate to the other person's life and interests.

The interview as a method also has its own ethos. Some will argue that the qualitative interview is similar to "wandering together with" the interviewed (Kvale 1996, 4). In his approach, the interviewer may be said to be sitting next to the informant, and travelling down the same road as the informant, with the aim of discovering or obtaining the informant's real-life experiences and their context:

> When a researcher makes interpretations going beyond the self-understanding of the interviewees, a series of issues are raised: Should subjects be confronted with interpretations of themselves, which they may not have asked for? (Kvale 1996, 156)

I have to some extent done this; I feel that all my informants are just as good discussion partners as they are informants. Especially when I have been forced to go back and ask new questions, then these types of evaluative discussions have unfolded.

I have altered the name of the persons interviewed when that has been possible. In some cases this has not been possible due to the positions the interviewees hold, which make them recognizable anyway.

### 2.2.4.    A little-researched field

Academic interest in the field of coffee bars is often closely connected to Starbucks as a phenomenon; for instance, mainly in journals on marketing, retail and brand management. Journal articles with titles such as "Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies" (Verhoef, Lemon et al. 2009) and "Silo busting - How to execute on the promise of customer focus" (Gulati 2007) are typical examples.

The story of Starbucks is the story of a small local business in Seattle that grew to become a so called super-brand with worldwide recognition in the 1990s; this also resulted in a steady flow of books: *The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary Into Extraordinary*, by Joseph Mitchelli is just one of more than twenty books in which Starbucks is portrayed as the premium example of a company that did everything right (Mitchelli 2006).

Rhetoric and semiotic analysis has also been utilized in the discussion of how some coffee bar chains (and again, Starbucks in particular) represent a force in shaping the perspectives of the relationship between rich and poor, labor and capital[4].

The cultural, social and economic history of coffee has in the last twenty years been of keen interest to historians, and several books have been written on the subject. In particular, I would like to refer to two rather influential books, both contributions to the field of popular history. Anthony Wild's *Coffee, a Dark History* and Mark Pendergrast's *Uncommon Ground;* both aim at telling the whole history of coffee from the upspring in Ethiopia to today's coffee chains (Wild 2004) (Pendergrast 1999). They both grasp the grand narrative of one of the most important commodities in the world trade during last 300 years, and both view the world through the existence of coffee. In this perspective, almost everything that has happened in the world can be interpreted as being related to coffee, such as, revolutions, the Enlightenment, wars and superpower status. Both Pendergrast and Wills illustrate their narratives with a few exclusive sources, but basically their books are syntheses of existing studies in different fields where coffee has a role. Although they both show interest for the coffee bar phenomenon, their discussions on the social and cultural life of coffee bars is rather limited.

The autobiography of Howard Schultz, the man who made Starbucks into an international business of considerable size, is also an important source for understanding the development of the last twenty years, and I frequently refer to this book (Schultz 1997).

I have found rather few studies of coffee bars as social and cultural institutions, although several Master's and Bachelor theses on consumer aspects of coffee bars have been written (For instance: Bergheim, Gulbrandsen et al. 2009). In general, in studies, I find there is a much keener interest for the social and cultural aspects of traditional bars and cafes where alcohol is consumed. (Jones-Webb et al. 1997) (Nusbaumer, Mauss, and Pearson 1982)

However, the research project "The Cappuccino Conquest", to a certain extent, identifies the inner life of coffee bars as being an interesting subject (Morris 2007). It provides some interesting thoughts on personal service and coffee, but in general the project is more devoted to the study of the relationship between technological change in the production of espresso-based beverages and the consumption of them.

My overall impression is that rather few texts have been written on the coffee bar phenomenon by sociologists, anthropologists and other academics

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[4] I will elaborate on this point later – in chapter 10 – and also there refer to (Mathieu 1999) and (Dickinson 2002).

that focus on consumption and the urban sphere, and in regard to focus on the agents and their role the field seems rather sparsely populated.

### 2.2.5.   Limitations

I have written about coffee bars, their micro universe and their possible roles on a societal level. I have made an effort to write plainly. I find the idea of plain writing not only appealing due to its communicative potential, but it is also a method that can be used to sharpen the arguments in a text. And, of course, it is also a result of my personal taste. Either way, in my opinion an academic work is not characterized by its linguistic features – but rather by its explanatory capacity.

During this work, my ability to absorb and cover all the aspects of the coffee bars has been challenged. The fact is that several of the subjects that caught my interest require more space and time than I could accommodate within the context of this dissertation. For instance, the question of gender and use of the coffee bars is one of those subjects I have decided to leave behind. Although it is an extremely interesting subject, it would require a PhD of its own. Questions regarding the relationship between biological effects of coffee and the penetration of coffee bars is also interesting, but not included in the study. I could also have carried out a much more comprehensive study of neighborhoods and their relationship to the coffee bars. I have treated the subject briefly in a few places, but also here a solid study would demand an independent piece of work. There are also many other interesting aspects I could have devoted my time to, but I have instead pursued a rather narrow path. To decide what not to be studied can hardly be overrated.

Following my ambition to be close to the human agency factor, I have also in the process reduced the extent of my theoretical study considerably.

# Chapter 3.  Explaining the term urbanity

This dissertation discusses the interconnections between coffee and urban life; the term "urbanity" is a central term in this discussion. The original Latin root of the word is "urbs", or city. Urbanity generally connotes sophistication, politeness and polish; its antonyms include rustic and rural. Urbanity is also a personal trait; being "citified" would be roughly synonymous.

In our everyday language the term "urbanity" is used in a somewhat greater variety of contexts. For some it indicates a densely populated city; for others a mental state of mind; while for others, it may be used to describe a city with a vibrant street life. Many of the informants use the term in various contexts, and their understanding of the word emphasizes meanings related to city density, solitude in the company of others and sociality on a semi-public level. The first factor highlighted by many of my informants is density. One informant, Ole, said:

> A coffee bar is one of the most urban things in a city. It is here you find true urbanity…, urbanity that's the special feeling of a densely packed room, where people come and go all the time, and where there's always a buzz in the air, that's urbanity.

The second feature the informants like to emphasize is the role of solitude and interaction between strangers; one informant, Olga, expressed the following about coffee bars:

> It's something urban, and it's a bit of luxury. And you're alone
> in the crowd. A place like this is somehow dynamic. You feel
> like you're on your own, but then you can go out and find a
> slice of life. It's all about the urban.

Anders, an informant who usually sits alone by the window in his favorite coffee bar, highlighted another aspect:

> At the observation post here, by the window, looking out on
> the street, and the street looking in, maybe that's the most
> urban feeling I get. Kind of lonely, kind of integrated in a mute
> relationship... between the city and me. See what I mean?

Olga uses the word "urban", and Anders the phrase, "urban feeling", which are closely related; the words are also used frequently by the other informants. Olga emphasizes the blend of solitude and company, an observation that is shared by most of the informants.

The factors of friendships and common interests are defined by many of the informants as being typical traits of "urbanity". Caroline, who often uses coffee bars as meeting places, draws attention to the social quality of coffee bars; in her words that special attribute – being a meeting place – concerns urbanity:

> To have a place that is social, where you can go without a lot
> of formal procedures, only being a very cozy and relaxed
> place; that's very urban. You just drop in.

Anders and several of my other informants also explicitly described the relationship coffee bars have to new customers:

> I mean, we're all strangers to each other at some level. Here
> it's easy to observe; there's a certain honesty to that
> observation, and that's a special feeling as well. When I see
> someone I've never seen before entering the premises here at

Java, I feel comforted. This isn't a club, it's an open space.
That's very urban.

On the basis of the interviews I have conducted, I would suggest that the term 'urbanity' is used by the coffee bar customers to express the following:

- A physically densely-packed space

- Sharing the same space without being befriended

- A space open to strangers, not only formally, but also in reality

- A space where people can meet and talk without being in a closed club or a private sphere

A range of studies in the field of urbanism describe the term in ways similar to the explanations given by my informants:

> What I think of as urbanity is precisely making use of the density and differences in the city so that people find a more balanced sense of identification on the one hand with others who are like themselves but also a willingness to take risks with what is different, unknown.... It is these kinds of experiences that make people find out something about themselves that they didn't know before. That's what urbanity is at its best....To me, how to privilege the notion of difference, that is what urbanity is all about.

These reflections belong to Richard Sennett. It is cited from a lecture he gave in Copenhagen in 1994, where he was asked to elaborate on the meaning of the term urbanity (Grønlund 2007). Sennett's view as expressed here is symptomatic of the often normative use the term has achieved. "Urbanity" is described as being something valuable, as a social and cultural quality for enriching urban life; and for Sennett, it is more than anything else "to privilege the notion of difference".

Sennett has a clear understanding of the term "urbanity", but in the following I would like to sketch out a more precise meaning, and less normative. From my perspective, the term is related to the rise in theories on urban life at the end of the nineteenth century, namely the thematization of the relationship between structure and agency in the growing metropolises

during this period in history. When Max Weber, Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel (among others) described the new challenging conditions for individuals in the urban landscape, they focused on a set of different complex conditions.

For Max Weber, the European city, only about 1000 years old, was distinctively different from other types of urban concentrations in history, first and foremost due to its development into a democratic administrative entity. Max Weber established a theory of the European city (in his book, *The City*[5]), as a phenomenon reflecting five distinct features. A European city as the cradle for the Western European democracy and modernity existed through a sharp division from the rural areas surrounding it, and often consisted of buildings enclosed by walls. A European city also contained a market (where goods were bought and sold), a class of free citizens, an independent political administration, and it was judicially autonomous. Weber's definition of the European city was connected to a specific time in history and lost relevance as the European national states gained dominance. However, the national state built its fundament on these city structures, as Walter Siebel emphasizes {Siebel, 2000 #12}. Siebel defines what he calls "European urbanity" as consisting of three components: "First, centrality: the contrast of town and country; second, a way of life: the polarization of everyday life into a private and a public sphere; third, a hope: European urbanity cannot be understood without the hope for emancipation that has always been associated with urban life." He concludes that the classical European urbanity is more a memory than a reality; today he believes that urbanity is often destroyed through an escalating privatization of public spaces through rigid zoning policy and planning; through security and police policy and through new internal borders between immigrants and more wealthy citizens: "Heute aber ist die amerikanische Stadt zumindest für Teile der schwarzen Bevölkerung und die europäische Stadt zumindest für einige Migrantengruppen nicht mehr Ort der Integration, sondern Ort der Ausgrenzung" (p. 34).

Siebel's view may be understood in relation to Georg Simmel's essay "Metropolis and Mental Life" from 1903 (Simmel 1950), which is an important milestone in the area. This essay is crucial to an understanding of how the human mental condition is altered by urbanization – the densifying of a physical entity. In his essay, Simmel undertakes a journey into the various types of psychological situations that a metropolis projects on individuals, and situations that only can occur in densely populated environments. He follows the tradition of Weber and establishes a firm

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[5] *The City* was published posthumously in 1921 as a part of *Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft*. This work was translated into English under the title *Economy and Society* in 1958 (Weber 1978).

division between rural and urban life. For Simmel, the big city represents modernity in its clearest form, where specialization and segmentation processes unfold, and thereby also pave the way for increased individualization. Simmel carved out a theory on urban identity and a specific urban psychology.

> The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli. Man is a differentiating creature. His mind is stimulated by the difference between a momentary impression and the one that preceded it. Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. (Ibid.,. 414)

He states that a psychology adjusted to the needs of a rural reality was not only insufficient, but also dangerous when applied to an urban reality. In a rural environment individuals survived through personal knowledge and acceptance of all the other individuals, at an individual level. In the metropolis, it is necessary to create a distance to the other individuals, what Simmel labels as 'blasé'.

> …the metropolitan type of man – which, of course, exists in a thousand individual variants – develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart.

The need to depersonalize and to understand human beings in a more systemic context marks the transition from community to society[6]; this is exactly what many of my informants identify as "urbanity", a situation often existing in the coffee bars.

This state where the value of roots is deflated, is also where the cosmopolitan personality is created, and where the emancipating potential of the city is revealed.

> …the bodily proximity and narrowness of space makes the mental distance only the more visible. It is obviously only the obverse of this freedom if, under certain circumstances, one nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd. For here as elsewhere it is by no means necessary that the freedom of man be reflected in his emotional life as comfort. (p. 414)

Simmel also interprets the urban sphere as a mechanism closely connected to the money economy – in German 'geldwirtschaft'. Money is the physical manifestation of impersonal relations. A system where money is the essential exchange mechanism will in Simmel's understanding by its own logic develop into a capitalistic society. Money enables the economy to work more efficiently. Vigorous competition results in an escalation of specialization, and thereby intensifies the division of labor. Georg Simmel states that capitalism and modernity are connected and mutually depend on the existence of an urban entity, and that this phenomenon also has an effect on the moral compass of most urban citizens.

> Money, with all its colorlessness and indifference, becomes the common denominator of all values; irreparably it hollows out the core of things, their individuality, their specific value, and their incomparability… (Simmel 1950, 420)

It is here in the big city that "urbanity" emerges as an independent and characteristic feature of modernity. The development of the cultural aspects of life of urban entities at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the

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[6] Another way to identify this schism is to use other terms from sociology: Ferdinand Tönnies uses terms such as 'gemeinschaft' to 'gesellschaft'. For further reading see a textbook in sociology like Diana Kendall's *Sociology in our times* (Kendall 2008, 128).

social psychological features as described by Georg Simmel add to and expand Max Weber's definition.

Walter Benjamin, a later theorist, attempted to understand the totality of modern life, and developed a highly original project: *The Arcades Project*. Portraying urban life in Paris at the turn of the century, he describes the city as "the capital of the nineteen century". Paris was rebuilt using Baron von Haussmann's new city plan and consisted of more easily controlled spatial features. The arcades that provide the title to Benjamin's project mentioned above were iron-columned and glass-covered structures, and were mostly built in the 1820s and 1830s[7].

Benjamin focuses on the emergence of a new urban individual, the flâneur; a flâneur is literally translated as "stroller". Benjamin found the term 'flâneur' in the work of the poet Charles Baudelaire. Benjamin identifies Baudelaire's descriptions of the flâneur as the most poignant observations of the soul of modernity. Benjamin understood Baudelaire to be someone who investigated the fabric of the new urban capitalist society that had materialized in the French capital during the middle of the nineteenth century. The flâneur is the individual who can overcome and identify himself with the contradictory situations that emerge in this society. The flâneur is a child of a society going through rapid and radical modernization, where the growth and emergence of capitalistic society based on mass consumption and wide spread commodification are the key requisites.

The arcades were in Benjamin's time the most vibrant and lively public spaces of Paris; they were places full of visual pleasures and commoditized relations, and here in the midst of the maelstrom the flâneur finds his terrain[8]. The flâneur moves slowly and without purpose, freed from the demands of work, consuming the streets with his eyes, and imagining, daydreaming, reflecting about the state of himself, and the state of the world as he explores it. As Amanda Williams has formulated it: "At the intersection of mobility, imagination, and urban visual culture stands the flâneur." (Amanda Williams 2009, 46).

The flâneur is a person who lives with the ambivalence of the huge urban structure. At one level the flâneur is a person who takes part in the flow of the masses; a person who can identify himself with the crowd, with the energy created through the totality of material and immaterial life in a huge city. The

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[7] The American sociologist Richard Prouty writes in an essay called "The Origin of the Shopping "Mall (postet in his blog *One way Street, aesthetics and politics* 17.10.2009, (Prouty 2009)) that the arcades represented the most modern shopping environment the world had seen, and were the cradle for two defining new inventions in retailing: "With haggling time eliminated and fresh inventory immediately available, these innovations improved product turnover, efficiencies that would later make possible the large department stores. "

[8] When Benjamin strolled the streets of Paris most of the original 150 arcades still existed, today there only about 20 left.

flâneur embraces the impersonality of the urban landscape, both mentally and physically. However, the flâneur also experiences the loss of traditional ties as troublesome; the flâneur also develops repulsive feelings for the massiveness of this urban setting. Nevertheless, this understanding is overcome by a vital impulse to take part in modernity. Benjamin's hero, the French poet Baudelaire, describes the modernity of the urban city, as a river one has to dive into, a "maelstrom". There is no way back, modernity cannot be avoided, it has to be lived, not by resentments, but by participation. Therefore Baudelaire's descriptions of loss of meaning in a modern world, are often descriptions of solitude, of melancholia, of the outsider's position and destiny. Modernity for Benjamin is not a one-way track to happiness and joy, but a complicated situation asked to be explored by every individual.

The flâneur is a person who has the capacity and the energy to operate in this mental landscape of double folded meaning; the flâneur is a character that personalizes what Georg Simmel understood as being the uniqueness of metropolitan life – the individual's permanent inner conflict between detachment and attachment.

Urbanity understood in this context is more than anything else the daily absorption of modernity and its complicated and nerve intensifying potential. As Simmel and Benjamin among others illustrate, urbanity is modernity in its essence. For the individual it is the endeavor to connect to a common cosmos on one level, and on another level, it is a permanent struggle to emancipate and fulfill private ambitions.

When Anton C. Zijderveld in his book: *A Theory of Urbanity: The Economic and Civic Culture of Cities* (Zijderveld 2008)*,* identifies and uses the term "urbanity" he hints at that specific discussion on the effects of modernity that was raised by Simmel and Benjamin, amongst others. Zijderveld avoids a clear definition; he also points towards the idea that urbanity is "... a vigorous and vital economic and civic culture."

> …lacking urbanity, that is, lacking a vigorous and vital economic and civic culture, is, in fact, robbed of its most essential source of energy and vitality. It is a source that is neither monetary and economic, nor administrative and political, but cultural. This culture consists of values, norms and meaning. Its ultimate goal is legitimacy and averting anomy. (ibid., 164)

In the current policy and planning discourse, urbanity is often used as an expression for the "good life" or, as Alan Latham identifies in his study of urban policy in Auckland, New Zealand (Latham 2003, 1701):

> Urban policy practitioners, planners, architects and town hall administrators have over the past two decades rediscovered an enthusiasm and belief in urban life.

It is as Latham writes a: "..Belief in urban life". This belief and enthusiasm is possibly a neoliberal revamped edition of the idea of urbanity, totally removed from the complexity Simmel and Benjamin emphasize. I therefore rebuff this one-dimensional insight and in this dissertation, I relate my definition of "urbanity" to the perception developed during the nineteenth century by sociological and psychological observations of metropolitan life.

# Chapter 4. Coffee and urban life

*Everybody is using coffee. If possible, this must be prevented.*
*My people must drink beer.*

Frederick the Great, from a proclamation against coffee,
September 13, 1777 (Weinberg and Bealer 2001, 83).

## 4.1. A SHORT HISTORY OF COFFEEHOUSES AND COFFEE BARS

Early in the morning, March 3, 1959, a crowd has gathered outside the downtown department store Steen & Strøm. The department store is Oslo's best and most modern shopping area at this time, a center specializing in fashion and imported goods. It was in its present building opened in 1930 and was the towns first with internal escalators, and in 1959 it was still by far the largest. Outside of the first floor the crowd is gazing in, what they see is a modern, strange café called "Kaffebaren" (literally "the Coffee Bar"). There are two huge red machines placed on the counter. One man breaks free of the crowd, and enters Kaffebaren. It is 8.47am. This unidentified man is the first customer in a coffee bar in Oslo, and in Norway. After a short while several more people in the silent crowd have stepped inside. In a short while the rest of the café is filled (Kaasa 200).

The café had modern coffeehouse equipment, the coffee machines were Italian state of the art, built on the same principles as the coffee machines that are used in today's coffeehouses. But the coffee was not Italian roasted

coffee. They used normal Norwegian roasted coffee. Kaffebaren became a popular meeting place.



**Figure 1. Kaffebaren at Steen & Strøm. Photo: Norsk kaffeinformasjon.**

"We had customers all the time, and we served 700 – 800 cups of coffee every day," said former manager of the coffeehouse, Olav Silihagen (Kaasa 2004). The popularity of Kaffebaren allowed them to expand the business in the 1960s, which also involved an extension of the brands of coffee on offer and they started selling traditional Italian espresso. In the late 1970s Steen & Strøm decided to change the ground floor of the store, which signaled the end of Kaffebaren, and indeed of this way of serving coffee in Oslo, at least for the time being.

## 4.2.  HOW THE WEST WAS WON

It was in the Ottoman Empire that the modern use of coffee arose and spread widely. Coffee became a drink for use in social, and usually informal, settings. The Ottoman Empire was a dominant power and had established itself on European territory, in Central Europe and the Balkans, during the 1520s. The export of habits and items from the Ottoman Empire was substantial during the seventeenth century, and coffee and coffeehouses formed a part of those exports. By the mid-1600s, coffeehouses had become fashionable in London and Paris.

Students in seventeenth century England belonged to society's elite, and their economic position enabled many of them to travel abroad, in the spirit of openness to the new and the unknown. Many other European students also studied in England. The students were the advocates of modernity. It was a student – a foreign student, from Crete – who introduced coffee to the English.

Nathaniel Conopios was the first in recorded history to make and serve coffee in England. "Studying at Balliol College, Oxford, the simple act was recorded by two independent contemporary sources, the scholar John Evelyn in his diary dated May 1637, and the Oxford historian Anthony Wood" (Wild 2004, 150).

Conopios was expelled from the university soon after, for an unrelated reason, but his short stay changed the drinking habits at Balliol. It became fashionable to drink coffee in academic circles.

The same Anthony Wood also documents the arrival of the first known coffeehouse in the Western world. A Lebanese Jew – Jacob – established a coffeehouse in Oxford in 1650. He saw the potential the drink represented, and after a few years in Oxford he moved to London to establish a coffeehouse there. During the 1650s, many coffeehouses where set up in Oxford. The coffeehouses received overwhelming support from the public, but the administration at Oxford University were more critically inclined, and tried to close them down on several occasions to no avail.

In 1655, Tillyard's coffeehouse was established, and a group of regular customers here soon became known as the Oxford Coffee Club. The Oxford Coffee Club rapidly developed into a vibrant scene where students and scientists would meet to have discussions. It was an intellectual melting pot, which became an important forum for political and scientific matters – or indeed both, more often than not. In *Coffee: A Dark History*, historian Antony Wild argues that "… coffee houses were all the rage in Paris and London where the stimulant helped kick start the latter-day brain explosion known as the Enlightenment" and that "..coffee had become the fuel of the Enlightenment"  (Wild 2004, 124).

Wild is applying a hermeneutic perspective. For him the history of coffee serves as an outlook from which to view the development of the modern world, and he explains major events and structures through the production, sale, distribution and consumption of coffee. Therefore he can conclude that Tillyard's coffeehouse in Oxford housed a group of men with two agendas: discussing a wide range of topics, and drinking coffee. It was transformed into a more formal organization during the next few years – the Royal Society. Isaac Newton was chairman of The Royal Society for a period, and his fellow members took it upon themselves to make his theories known, and

to publish his work. In this light, some might say – as Wild does – that the Enlightenment was fuelled by caffeine.

The Turk's Head was another important coffeehouse, situated in Westminster, which was a meeting point for intellectuals such as Andrew Marvell and Samuel Pepys. Here they discussed political issues and shared ideas. Since the coffeehouses were so central in the shaping of modern thinking, they were also perceived as a threat to established power structures. King Charles II of England issued a proclamation banning coffeehouses, but since coffee had become so immensely popular, the ban nearly triggered popular revolts. The same situation arose in Prussia and in Sweden, when the monarchs tried to control the expansion of coffeehouses with the same motives as in England. Coffee consumed in coffeehouses seemed to foster a liberal anti-establishment movement, critical of the ruling class.

Some might argue that the shape of the political sphere in post-revolutionary Britain was a result of coffeehouses as public spaces, as these became foundries of the mode of modernity. But other structures in society were also crucial. Historians explain the emergence of a political public sphere in its earliest form, as it emerged in Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century, as related to the creation of a modern parliament (Harris 2005, 43). The British Parliament was born through the transformation of a congregation of estates into a democratic legislative body, and as a result the political discourse became more open and public.

Some crucial factors, both cultural and economic, contributed to the foundation of a political public sphere. Jürgen Habermas argues in *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (first published in 1962 in German) that three phenomena are intimately linked  (Habermas 1991, 58). The first cabinet government made the parliament a stronger institution, and an arena for argumentative discussions that proliferated and shaped the public sphere. Second, the elimination of censorship in 1695 made a substantial contribution. Finally, the founding of the Bank of England in 1694 paved the way for modern capitalism, making capital investments common, and legitimizing the capitalist mode of production. Over a short period of time the banking system was substantially enhanced and professionalized. Susan Strange comments on the introduction of paper bank-notes that they "…circulate throughout the economy, adding to the supply of money in the form of coin. As the number of banks and other specialized…financial markets proliferate" (Strange 1998, 94). It may be argued that in a society with a professionalized credit and banking system, the treatment of the citizens becomes considerably more democratic, as it is depersonalized. When clients become customers, their demands are of significance to the development of the public sphere.

Habermas emphasizes the effect the coffeehouses had on the public debate, and indeed on the concept of "public", and writes that "They were considered seedbeds of political unrest" (Ibid., 59). He also refers to the reactions the coffeehouses evoked: "Men have assumed to themselves a liberty, not only in coffee-houses, but in other places… by speaking evil of things they understand not…"

The introduction of coffeehouses in Western Europe in the seventeenth century arose in parallel with the appearance of other modern institutions, although the relationship between democracy and coffee is nowhere near

**Figure 2. Bialetti Mokka Express. Photo: Bialetti.**

causational. During the nineteenth century the consumption of coffee spread all over Europe and included most levels of society. The same happened in both North and South America. In short, coffee became a common commodity; it became a beverage for the masses, and was integrated into the eating and drinking habits in most countries. Coffeehouses became widely spread, and in this process the political radicalism they had once represented, mostly disappeared. Coffeehouses achieved status as a standard ground floor feature in urban buildings. But on the technological side, things started changing. Many different brewing techniques developed, and at the beginning of the $20^{th}$ century the Italians invented techniques involving steam. The invention of the Bialetti Moka Express in 1933 marked the birth of a widespread interest and demand for steam brewed coffee – the espresso (Schnapp 2001). When this coffee maker for home use became so immensely popular – a standard item in every Italian household – it also changed the preferences for coffee consumed in cafes and restaurants (Pendergrast 1999, 211).
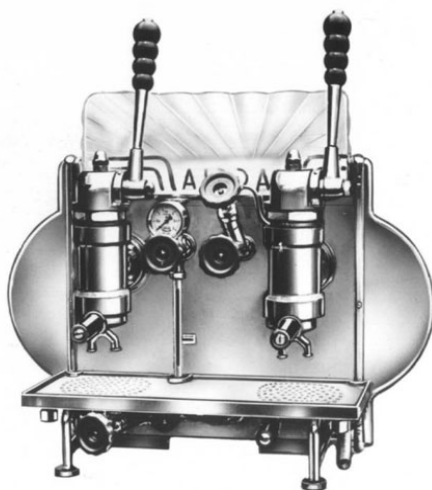
**Figure 3. Gaggia 1951 model. Photo: Gaggia Museum.**

Gaggia, Faema, La Pavoni and other manufacturers developed technically advanced machines for brewing espresso, and the steam based systems became the standard in Italian local bars, and slowly they became known as espresso bars. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the use of espresso machines spread to the rest of Southern Europe, and also to some large cities in the England, the US and the Netherlands. But for the most part in Northern Europe, in the US and in the rest of the word, espresso and espresso machines were quite uncommon. They were, for the most part, considered eccentric inventions.

## 4.3. PEET AND THE TASTE

In the late 1950s and 1960s, the American coffee market changed. The quality of coffee became an issue due to increased competition between the large manufacturers (Pendergrast 1999, 334). The large coffee brands started to compromise quality in order to cut prices and dominate the market. In reaction to this, connoisseurs with long experience in the coffee industry used their own small roasters, so they could roast the coffee in the way they used to, and for which they believed there was a still a market. One of these people was Alfred Peet. Peet was originally Dutch, and came from a family who ran a coffee roasting business (Pendergrast 1999). After the World War Two he emigrated, but he still continued to work with coffee. "He went to Java and Sumatra where he learned to love full-bodied Arabica beans" (Pendergrast 1999, 292). He eventually left Indonesia, most likely due to the decolonization process. He moved to New Zealand for a few years, but

finally ended up in San Francisco, where he worked for one of the large coffee importing companies, which supplied major roasters such as Folgers.

When Peet was laid off in 1965, it was with some relief on his part. He had been very dissatisfied with the quality of the coffee his former employer had supplied. However he decided to continue in the coffee industry, but this time on his own terms, which meant roasting quality coffee for customers who appreciated really good coffee. He bought a second-hand 25-pound roaster and ten bags of Colombian beans with some money he had inherited from his father, and rented facilities on the corner of Vine and Walnut Street in Berkeley, California.

Peet's Coffee and Tea opened April 1, 1966. His novel idea was a whole-bean coffee for home consumption. However, to create some interest in this coffee, he decided to make a place in his coffee store where customers could try a cup of reasonably priced, decent coffee, before they decided to buy the beans. In the beginning his most devoted customers were Europeans who were used to high quality coffee. The mainstream American coffee drinkers – now so used to the weak Robusta coffee which they gradually and unknowingly had become accustomed to – were "terrified" of the dark roast and the overwhelming taste. They thought it was much too strong. Peet's answer was not to "please the customers", but to educate them, and teach them the difference between what he considered to be good coffee and what he thought was more or less undrinkable.

After a year and a half his efforts began to bear fruit: queues stretched outside the store and around the corner. Peet's ambition to reach the home market had some success; however, his main customers turned out to be a social group he originally had no intention of reaching. The hippies developed a taste for Peet's coffee and his shop became a hip place to be – to the extent that his regular customers were nicknamed "Peetniks" – a play on the word Beatniks.

Serving coffee in Alfred Peet's shop proved to be more profitable than the roasting itself. Peet had, almost by accident, and by conforming to his customers' habits, started one of the first modern coffee bars. His influence on the development of the modern coffee bar phenomenon is considerable. Many in the coffee bar sector will, when explaining why they went into the business, refer to Peet's and to Alfred Peet in particular. Two of the entrepreneurs I interviewed trace their inspiration partly back to Peet's. The founding fathers of Starbucks were not only directly inspired by Peet's, Alfred Peet was also their mentor during the first phases of starting up their business. They bought coffee from him, he taught them how to make the perfect brew and about all the different types of coffee – in short, he educated them.

However, Peet's was not the first modern coffee bar in the US. There were similar shops in San Francisco selling freshly roasted coffee beans two or three years before Peet's was founded. Peet's of today is much different from the original 1966 store; it is now a chain of coffee bars owned by Starbucks. Peet's Coffee & Tea was purchased by two of the founders of Starbucks in 1984: Jerry Baldwin and Gordon Bowker. Today there are about 100 stores in several American states, with the focal point in the San Francisco Bay Area. The company also runs a substantial mail-order business, as well as supplying restaurants and offices all over the USA(Beals 2007).

## 4.4. STARBUCKS AND THE CHAIN STORE

 If Peet's is the iconic figure in the specialty coffee sector or gourmet coffee business (Fold and Pritchard 2005, 194), then the business success is Starbucks. The history of Starbucks is important because this chain of coffee bars turned espresso-based coffee into a popular commodity. Starbucks changed the way coffee was sold, how it was consumed, and to whom it is was sold. This in turn changed the discourses, the face and the functions of the modern city. The remarkable history of Starbucks began in Seattle in 1971, when three coffee enthusiasts opened a store selling quality coffee and exotic teas.

The three founders of Starbucks were idealistically rather than commercially motivated and had no previous experience in the coffee business. They were university graduates: Jerry Baldwin was an English teacher, Zev Siegel taught history, and Gordon Bowker was a writer and journalist. The name they came up with – Starbucks – was the name of the first mate in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. It alludes to the exotic and romantic aura of the coffee trade of bygone days. The founders also hoped that the Starbucks' logo, the Starbuck's name encircling a two-tailed mermaid, would convey this meaning. As mentioned above, Baldwin, Siegel, and Bowker were not only inspired by Alfred Peet, but also dependent on him in many different ways in the beginning. It was his roasted coffee that they sold, and after a while, when they wanted to roast their own, they decided to make use of his knowledge. They alternated in traveling to San Francisco to learn the craft.

In the beginning, the store sold freshly roasted coffee, but not freshly brewed coffee by the cup, except samples for tasting. Zev Siegel was the only employee who received a paycheck, and was running the shop more or less alone. The two others had kept their original jobs, and would come to lend a hand when their normal working days were over.

The store filled a niche in the market, received a lot of favorable media coverage, and in a few months the store became very popular. After one year in business, they started doing their own roasting, and then opened a second store. By 1980 they had expanded to four stores in the Seattle area, and profits were good, as they had been from the beginning. However, at this stage of development, the business success had taken its toll, and relations between the founders changed. Zev Siegel felt overworked and left the company. Gordon Bowker stayed involved as part-owner, but was no longer involved in the running of the business. Jerry Baldwin became the chief executive officer of the company, and he was also the daily manager. Starbucks ran smoothly during this period. However, perhaps few people would ever have heard of Starbucks, if it had not been for the chance entry into the business of a very important man, Howard Schultz. He may be credited with radically changing the development of Starbucks. In his autobiography, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, he gives a detailed description of the company's development (Schultz 1997). At the beginning of the 1980s, Howard Schultz was the vice president and general manager of the US operations of the Swedish company Hammarplast, which manufactured kitchen utilities. He had observed that a "…little retailer in Seattle was placing unusually large orders for a certain type of drip coffeemaker. It was a simple device, a plastic cone set on a thermos" (Schultz 1997, 25). This triggered Schultz' curiosity and he decided to pay Starbucks a visit. Schultz was taken by the taste and scent of the coffee, and the enthusiasm behind every single operation in the store. Later, when he visited the roaster and smelled the aromatic odor, he realized that this was something very few Americans had ever experienced.

Howard Schultz' immediately envisioned Starbucks future as a nationwide chain. The business appealed to him, with its top quality dark roasted coffee with no compromises made when it came to quality. After the visit, Schultz felt that Starbucks could help him to realize his vocation: "…it was my Mecca. I had arrived" (Ibid.,. 28). When he returned to New York he quickly decided he wanted to work for Starbucks, and transform their business into a nationwide chain. He mailed his proposition to the owners, but received no immediate response. They were satisfied with the business the way it was, and were afraid of rapid expansion. However, Schultz was not put off by the refusal; he kept pushing the managers over the next year, and in the end convinced them to employ him. In September 1982, Howard Schultz became head of marketing, and was given the responsibility of overseeing the retail stores.

Howard Schultz was determined to expand the business. He believed strongly in the concept of selling freshly roasted quality coffee, and felt that the three owners of Starbucks underestimated its potential, and also that they

were thinking too small. Their ambition to make only good coffee somehow implied a lack of ambition to expand.

Howard Schultz' ambitions for Starbucks sprung out of another experience. On a business trip to Milan in 1983 he was struck by the large number of espresso bars and the multitude of espresso-based drinks they served. So far Starbucks had avoided selling brewed coffee; it was a retailer, a shop, not a café. Schultz' experience in Milan had been similar to the epiphany he had experienced when he first visited Starbucks: this is too good to be true! He had observed how the espresso bars had a major effect on Italian communities, and indeed were essential parts of any neighborhood. They were vibrant places where people met friends, where neighbors gathered, where you could come alone or with others, and people would sit around the bar, like boats anchored around a dock, chatting and laughing with the baristas.

The number of espresso bars in Milan was 1500 – in a city the size of Philadelphia. In all of Italy there were more than 200, 000 espresso bars. Schultz felt that he could move Starbucks in this direction: the company would give its customers the sensation of experiencing a local identity. In a way, reading Howard Shultz' autobiography *Pouring Your Heart Into It*, is to study a businessman who understands how modern capitalism *can* work. His immediate response to what he had observed in Milan was to try and recreate this more or less organic Italian tradition in an American framework.

Howard Schultz stayed in Milan for a week, trying to absorb as much as possible of the Italian coffee culture. He was seduced by his first "café latte", and also stunned by the fact that this coffee drink was not available in the US, at least not as far as he knew. To him it was "the perfect drink", and he was convinced that the person who introduced it to the American market would achieve huge success (Ibid., 53). The word "experience" became important for Schultz at this stage, not only as a description of what a good cup of coffee should be, but as an overriding concept: More than anything else, going to Starbucks should be an "experience". More than fifteen years after Schultz' revelation in Milan, books like *The Experience Economy* were published (Pine and Gilmore 1999). The academic interest in the phenomenon grew, and was often focused on cases such as Starbucks. Schultz foresaw this. Of course "experience" had always been a factor in marketing, and therefore in the economy of the industrial word, but Schultz observed the increased intensity and scope of it, and built his overall vision of Starbucks on that notion. This ability to perceive a change in consumer preferences at an early stage is what makes Starbucks stand out as a business case.

Full of enthusiasm he went back to the US and proposed that Starbucks should start serving cappuccino and other espresso-based drinks. This was

the key to further expansion, he thought. And he was convinced that by transforming Starbucks into an Italian espresso bar, the company could achieve an important differentiating edge.

However, the founding fathers of Starbucks were doubtful. They worried that this might be a step towards losing control of the core business. Schulz eagerly pushed to alter their conservative attitude towards his plans, but with limited success. After nearly a year he was given permission to install an espresso machine in a corner of a new Starbucks' store that opened in April 1984. Starbucks' sixth store in downtown Seattle delivered staggering results. It immediately became the best performing Starbucks store, and after two months it was serving more than 800 customers every day – more than three times as many as the average Starbucks. For Schultz this was another revelation: "Our tiny 700-square-foot store, near the entrance of Seattle's tallest building, became a gathering place. We were filling a void in people's lives" (Schultz 1997, 88).

However, the commercial success of the espresso bar did not have the expected effect on the other owners of Starbucks. Jerry Baldwin explained it this way: "…we're coffee roasters. I don't want to be in the restaurant business" (Ibid., 61). For Schultz that postulate made no sense:

> To me espresso was the heart and soul of the coffee experience.
> The point of a coffee store was not just to teach customers
> about fine coffee, but show them *how* to enjoy it" (Ibid., 61).

This experience – both the success with importing the Italian way of serving coffee, and the dogged conservative attitude of the Starbucks' owners – made it clear to Schultz that he would have to start his own business. He was 33 years old and wanted to devote the rest of his life to building a modern business empire. He was interested in coffee more as a means than a goal. The goal was business. When he announced that he wanted to leave the company to start his own business, Baldwin and Bower did not object. Schultz and the founders of Starbucks had obviously arrived at a point where their paths were going in different directions. Howard Schultz left Starbucks in late 1985.

Schultz' ambition was to build a business modeled on the Italian espresso bar. He wanted it to be large, and emphasized a strict focus on growth. Consequently, he was convinced that he had to build a chain of espresso bars through a solid process of branding, establishing a professional management team, and inviting long term investors. It might seem ironic that the first investor was his former employer Jerry Baldwin. Schultz ended up working

closely with Bowker (as a consultant) and Baldwin (as a director), managing the new company which was called Il Giornale. In December 1985, Schultz and Bowker went to Verona and Milan and visited some 500 espresso bars. They observed the bars and how they were run, and even videotaped the baristas working.

The plan was to raise enough capital to launch eight coffee bars in areas where the company thought the people were oriented towards "experiences".

If they were successful, the next step would be to raise more capital and expand further. Later on there were many who would agree that this was a splendid idea, but at the time there were few. It took Schulz a year to raise the money, most of the potential investors thought selling a cheap commodity like coffee could never be a profitable business on any serious level.

By mid-1987, Il Giornale had three espresso bars running, two in Seattle and one in Vancouver (Canada). As the name suggests, Il Giornale was modeled on the classic Italian espresso bar. The menus were in Italian, opera filled the air, and the baristas wore white shirts and bow ties:

> Our primary mission was to be authentic. We didn't want to do
> anything to dilute the integrity of espresso and the Italian
> coffee bar experience …." (Ibid., 87).

Schultz, who was always interested in the customer's experience and point of view, saw that his idea of authenticity had to be balanced with other demands: "We gradually accepted the fact that we had to adapt the store to our customers' needs" (Ibid., 87).

It was through this process that the modern coffee bar – the Starbucks concept – started to develop. When the American consumption pattern met the anesthetized version of original Italian espresso bars, they adapted to fit one another, which was a key to further success. The adaption to the non-puristic American consumer, who likes to add flavor to beverages, is one example of how the coffee bars had to adapt.

In spring 1987, Jerry Baldwin and Gordon Bowker, decided to focus on Peet's in the San Francisco Bay Area, a company they had owned since 1984, and they sold Starbucks to Schultz. He took the opportunity to keep the Starbucks name for his chain of coffee bars, and the Il Giornale espresso bars adopted the Starbucks' logo. Schultz now had everything he had hoped for: a well nurtured brand with a history, stores selling freshly roasted coffee beans and coffee equipment, roasting facilities and espresso bars. Schultz was backed by investors, and could now start introducing Starbucks all over the

USA. He aimed at opening 150 Starbucks outlets within the next three years, a goal he reached even before the planned date.

Howard Schultz firmly believed that Starbucks espresso bars would be a huge success all over the USA, and that there was a demand for this type of retailer that had never been met. So he set up Starbucks with a focus on growth. His means to achieve rapid expansion was to use financial muscle, which in this case meant using equity capital and avoiding debt. His strategy was expansion without surplus for the three first years, followed by economic growth. This proved to be a relatively successful strategy, and by 1990 the company had 100 operating coffee bars. During these three years a wave of coffee bars hit the USA, and competitors with pretty similar concepts were popping up everywhere. Starbucks decided to counter the competition by expanding further, but since their growth was based on in-advance investments, the financial capacity of Starbucks became an issue. The company therefore turned to the stock market, and in 1992 became registered on the New York Stock Exchange, a strategic decision that marked the beginning of strong expansion. At the time there were just a little more than 100 Starbucks stores in North America; in October 1993 the number increased to 272, and then to 425 in October 1994; and by 1995 it had reached 700, and passed 1000 stores in September 1996.

In Schultz' view location is essential in order to achieve profitable growth, and so is interior design. At the beginning of the 1990s he professionalized the process of finding locations. He decided to have a headquarters' group with a store development process, based on a six-month opening schedule as its main task. And in 1991, Starbucks set up an in-house team of designers and architects to make sure every store had the right image and character. The coffeehouses had to be custom-designed for several reasons. One was that the company, like McDonald's, adopted a policy to avoid buying real estate to build its own buildings, and so the limits of existing facilities had to be considered in each case. Another was the need to blend in, in an urban context; the variations between the different stores were important.

There are many identical elements that are repeated in the design of each Starbucks store, but none of them are identical. Some are very small, just a long counter with a barista behind, occupying as little as eight square meters, while others cover as much as 500 square meters. The world's largest Starbucks, a five-story megastore, is located in Seoul, South Korea, which opened in 2001. The location also reflects the flexibility of Starbucks. Some are located in office buildings, while others are located inside or just outside central shopping malls or retail structures; some are located in airports or on university campuses; and some of course are located in neighborhoods.

The concept was expanded during the 1990s. Where people used to stand and drink their coffee, they now used a bar stool, and there were more seating areas: "Grand Cafés with fireplaces, leather chairs, newspapers, couches, and lots of ambience were created to serve as flagship stores in high-traffic, high-visibility locations" (Arthur A. Thompson and Strickland 1999, 248).

The company also developed different categories of stores, and experimented with the drive-through concept in locations where speed and availability were demanded by customers. They also developed a smaller kiosk concept, which could operate in public spaces such as office buildings and supermarkets. A project called "Stores of the Future" in 1995 had a vision that Starbucks would be:

> …an authentic coffee experience that conveyed the artistry of espresso making, a place to think and imagine, a spot where people could gather and talk over a great cup of coffee, a comforting refuge that provided a sense of community, a third place for people to congregate beyond work or the home, a place that welcomed people and rewarded them for coming, and a layout that could accommodate both fast service and quiet moments. (Arthur A. Thompson and Strickland 1999, 249)

The team behind "Stores of the Future" studied the coffee industry, the fast food industry and the history of Starbucks' image and design, and came up with a strategy for dealing with the complex situations both of the past and future, suggesting alternative store designs. Within each of these basic templates, the store in question was given the freedom to adapt them to the actual location, the idea being that one of the templates could be used in every thinkable situation.

By the end of 1996 Starbucks implemented this strategy and started opening stores based on the templates. The aim of the strategy was to lower the costs of opening new stores; it resulted in more functional and popular designs, and made it possible to open stores in locations that had not previously been accessible.

This approach changed the Starbucks organization drastically. It enabled the company to build a worldwide chain. From 1996 to 2006 the expansion was extremely rapid, with approximately one new Starbucks store opening every day in the USA. It was also in 1996 that Starbucks went abroad, and opened a store in Japan. In 1998 the chain appeared in Europe. In 2010 the company has around 16,600 stores all over the world (up from 8700 in 2005),

although they had to close more than 600 stores during 2008 (Starbucks Corporation 2010, 2). The success is a result of Starbucks' ability to acquire regular customers; the average regular customer visits Starbucks 18 times a month.

Starbucks did not become a brand by luck. Corporate branding is the company's main tool with which to achieve profit and expansion – and ambitions have been high from the minute Schultz decided to devote his professional life to the specialty coffee sector and wrestle his way into the then small Seattle based company:

> The Company's objective is to establish Starbucks as the most recognized and respected brand in the world. To achieve this goal, the Company plans to continue rapid expansion of its retail operations, to grow its Specialty Operations and to selectively pursue other opportunities to leverage the Starbucks brand through the introduction of new products and the development of new channels of distribution. (Starbucks and Company 2006).

### 4.4.1.    The relevance of Starbucks

Starbucks' story is relevant because it shows the creation of a concept: the serving of espresso-based coffee; which was so successful that it was eventually copied throughout the world. It seemed to fill a need in the life of the modern consumer, a need which up until that point in time had not been identified (Michelli 2007, 96). A general observation I have made during my research in Oslo is that many entrepreneurs and coffee enthusiasts have a rather negative attitude towards Starbucks, but almost all of them mention Peet's. Peet's is today an up-market version of Starbucks; serves better coffee, has more satisfied customers and employees, and is a little more expensive. Peet's is, as I have mentioned, owned by the same people who started Starbucks, and is in content not true to Alfred Peet's original company, which was not a coffee bar at all, but a retailer of freshly roasted coffee for home brewing.

The paradox of this story of coffee and the city: everyone who tries to start a coffee bar uses the formula developed by Howard Schultz and Starbucks, but because some do it with much more refinement, they are then rewarded by their customers as being deemed "more authentic". In general, the literature on coffee connoisseurs views Starbucks' domination of the industry as both a curse and a blessing, as exemplified in Sebastian Little'

article *Why we hate Starbucks* (Little 2007) . On the positive side, the company has promoted specialty coffee and coffee quality – compared to what existed before they started their expansion. On the negative side, the company has become such a huge corporate business empire that in reality it is quite detached from its original ideals of coffee perfection.

The way I see it, Schultz' genius is rooted in his loyalty to the espresso bar as an operator in an advanced service economy – what we might call "the experience economy", which Pine and Gilmore define as: "….memorable events that a company stages …. to engage in a personal way" (Pine and Gilmore 1999, 2).

## 4.5. THE RETURN OF THE ESPRESSO

Starbucks is a huge operator – it has now bypassed McDonald's as the world's largest retailer of food and drinks. The company dominates the coffeehouse market in most countries where it has been established, and yet, Starbucks has never opened a store in Norway. It has been proposed, obviously, but the Norwegian market is considered to be too demanding, and too mature for Starbucks (Jebsen 2003).

Oslo was without cafés serving espresso coffee for only an intermittent period of time. In the beginning of the 1980s several cafés opened up in Oslo, some of them with original Italian coffee machines. In 1983 the café Sjakk Matt opened in Haakon VIIs Gate and it was an immediate success in a town where the nightlife and cafés were sparse and very traditionally equipped. In a short period of time several cafés and bars opened in Oslo which were styled on those which were to be found in large cities such as London, Berlin and Paris. Although the flair of the café life of the cosmopolitan cities had arrived, it would take a few more years before the first "authentic" coffee bar opened in Oslo. It autumn 1994, a small coffee bar called Rooster opened in the center of Oslo, in the busy old train station, Østbanehallen. A week or so later, Thomas Pulpan and Steinar Paulsrud opened another one called Kaffebrenneriet.

The entrepreneur of Rooster, Robert Buan, had the idea of opening a typical American coffee bar in Oslo, a feature he felt was missing from the city. He had spent many years in the US, in Seattle, and had become accustomed to coffee bars there. He saw the opportunity of creating a similar concept in Oslo.

The second coffee bar, Kaffebrenneriet, was a small, one might even say tiny coffee bar, which was located on a busy corner in Bislett, a central area in west Oslo. Tomas Pulpan had met his Norwegian partner Steinar Paulsrud in the US, and a while after they moved back to Oslo; they decided to open their own business. The idea of running a coffee bar had matured gradually.

They too, similar to Robert Buan, had grown used to coffee bars as being a natural part of an urban environment and found something to be lacking in Oslo. They saw a business opportunity, and although they were apprehensive concerning what kind of reception this new phenomenon might receive, they quickly started to hunt for a good location and found the "Hole in the Wall" in Theresegate in the summer of 1994. To begin with, the response was rather limited, but within a few months the two new coffee bars began to attract a larger clientele. Both started to acquire regular customers, who returned every day ordering the same thing.

Several more coffee bars were started up, and most of them survived their first year. The maps, which are included later in the dissertation, show that today there is a high frequency of coffee bars in Oslo, and a ceiling does not yet seem to have been reached. The maps illustrate that not only have the coffee bars grown in number, but also that the phenomenon seems to have spread outwards to every area of the city. However, the density of coffee bars is of course much lower in less populated areas; however, coffee bars may still be found in non-urban areas.

By 2009, there were about eighty coffee bars in the central area of Oslo, and they have an annual turnover of approximately NOK 400 million, and represent a substantial contribution to the economy of the area they operate within (Eniro 2010). In the next chapter I will take a closer look at four of them.

# Chapter 5. Four coffee bars and their characteristics

My ambition is to understand "the coffee bar phenomenon" in Oslo, and one of the important tasks is therefore to explore the material aspect of coffee bars. As a result of that ambition I devote this chapter to exploring coffee bars as designed objects, investigating the customer groups they attract, and examining their spatial distribution (where are they located in Oslo).

The coffee bar is a design typology, it is a standard interior design, with a global diffusion, and is easy to classify by its visible characteristics. You may be in Hong Kong, New York or Oslo, and even if coffee bars might differ, the similarities between them are very visible. The coffee bar – like the burger bar, the diner or the classical French restaurant – is characterized by distinct design features. "If you have been to one coffee shop, with the exception of service and palette, you've been to them all. Coffee shop layouts vary little," as Rene Miller writes in the online design manual ehow.com (Renee Miller 2008). Most people would easily recognize when they are in a coffee bar, at least if they are used to the concept, although the difference between a coffee bar and a café can be rather small, and often there is a blurred line between the two.

## 5.1. WHAT MAKES A COFFEE BAR A COFFEE BAR?

The internal layout of a coffee bar is further characterized by several very distinct features, as:

…the barista and cash register will almost always be toward the back of the coffee shop. This allows customers to walk through the entire shop, get a feel for the aesthetics of the place, and then choose what is within their personal comfort zone for seating… By positioning the cash register and espresso machines at the back, in plain view, owners and their help can maintain a service oriented vantage point for their patrons, both seated and upon entrance (Renee Miller 2008).

The design manual further emphasizes the baristas' work environment:

Equipment needs to be properly stationed behind the counter to give optimum service to customers. Two things will almost always be within easy reach of the barista: the espresso machine and the cash register. Two other pieces of equipment will usually be behind him: the sink and any type of griddle or stove for Panini sandwiches or the like. No customer wants to be splashed with dirty dishwater or spattered with olive oil from a pan. By keeping the coffee front and center – and allowing customers to quickly pay and be on their way – while keeping less appealing appliances and sinks at a safe distance, service are enhanced and more efficient. (Renee Miller 2008)

From a purely visual point of view two distinct features typify the coffee bar. There is a bar or counter where the coffee beverages are produced and sold, and counters along the windows, equipped with tall chairs – so-called bar stools. The space left in the room will then normally be filled with small tables and chairs; there are also coffee bars which use large tables or sofas (Matzen and Harrison 2001). The origin of the counter along the windows is not easy to identify, but it is not a standard design feature imported from Italy. Rather it seems to be an adoption of  the typical American diner bar, but in the diner the bar is fronting the kitchen, not the windows (Langdon 1986, 108).

**Figure 4.Terry's Coffee Shop in NY. Photo: Daniel Schwen, Wikipedia Commons**

Despite the importance of interior design features, since the localities that name themselves and are understood as coffee bars are in practice so different, there must be a more satisfying definition of what a coffee bar is. It is arguably more precise to see the coffee bar as a place where coffee – primarily espresso-based coffee beverages – is the main product sold, and everything else that is sold is there to support the main product. This definition complements the design-based definition, and also locates the coffee bar as a typology when economic measures are used. Coffee bars receive the majority of their revenues and turnover from coffee. When I interviewed owners of coffee bars, most of them emphasized this factor. Some of the entrepreneurs also add another factor, that of quality; in other words, many coffee bars that I would identify as a coffee bar are not meeting the standard they understand as a minimum requirement for being a coffee bar.

## 5.2. DIFFERENT WAYS OF ADOPTING A DESIGN TYPOLOGY

Many customers who had visited coffee bars in the USA found that the first coffee bars in Oslo bore a strong similarity to the outlets of the American

chain Starbucks. This was not only due to the green colors that Kaffebrenneriet adopted, but also because the typology was initially implemented in its most basic form. The counters along the windows, the bar stools, the counter where the coffee was prepared and served; and, most of all, that they actually served very good coffee beverages, based on espresso.

When Kaffebrenneriet opened their first coffee bar in Thereses Gate in 1994 they did everything themselves, including the design. They had a clear idea of the concept they wanted to design, and even if they were influenced by the modern coffee bar typology, they had a sense that they were in a business where personal relationships play the most central role.

Therefore their ideal was: "…the old grocery counter with personal service", said Steinar Paulsrud, one of the entrepreneurs behind Kaffebrenneriet.

The idea that everything they sell should be displayed at a single place – the counter – was essential to the design of Kaffebrenneriet:

> Something that was very important for us was the hand-eye coordination as I call it.

Therefore they decided that the counter should manage all the transactions in the coffee bar. If a customer wants 250 grams of coffee beans, the customers should experience the transaction being processed right there in front of him. No goods would be picked up in another room and then brought back to the counter. They wanted the counter to be the "commando bridge" of the coffee bar. This concept was motivated by the wish to avoid potential misunderstandings. They also thought that when the customer experienced the work being done in front of them, they would also receive better service and be more integrated into the process of making coffee.

Another essential feature of the design was the use of particular colors and shapes. Kaffebrenneriet is known for their use of coffee bowls, and Paulsrud explains how important that feature is:

> Nice circular shapes and colors that we almost could have used at home, and colors that can be combined with all kind of colorful people. If you have green hair, then it goes with yellow, and if you don't have hair then it fits also with yellow, if you have red hair then it also goes with yellow. But most people tend to be rather pale against white.

**Figure 5. Caffee Latte in a bowl. Photo: Erling Dokk Holm.
14.02.2008**

This can be observed as a rather feminine touch, especially the use of coffee bowls, but Kaffebrenneriet's management doesn't share that idea. They consider it to be a minimalist interior, but since they have a color palette of some breadth, the effect is rather different.

After a few years Kaffebrenneriet went to professional interior designers. But the use of professionals did not result in a total transformation of their visual identity, on the contrary. The idea was more to refine what they already had, and to make the overall design better equipped for the company's further expansion. At one point they even employed an in-house designer.

In the beginning, the in-house designer was keen on changing the whole design, but in the development process she grew more and more aware of the qualities in the original design. She became more conservative than the founders themselves, and she protected more than they would have done in her further development of the design concept. The in-house designer has also stayed more true to the idea of a grocery counter than the founders.

But maybe most essential for Kaffebrenneriet is that customers recognize it as a coffee bar, not a café or something else:

> ... What defines a coffee bar has a lot to do with the openness I
> feel we have, the transparent possibility for all customers to see
> what we are doing, both with insight into the locale, insight
> into our products, and insight into how we do it.

Kaffebrenneriet emphasizes the importance of equality between customer and employee; therefore it is important that they are on the same physical level. "Then there would be a movement in relation to power and to the eye".

This demand on the interior design is rooted in a philosophy that says "no doorsteps" (thresholds), either in physical or mental terms, and Paulsrud definitively believes that there is a relation between high doorsteps and exclusiveness.

Robert Thoresen opened Java in the former premises of a small out-dated sewing and "notions" store. He believed that it was possible to create a coffee bar characterized by higher quality at all levels, for both products and service. But he was also eager to design a place that was different, that had a more refined aesthetic and functional approach.

When he started up there were almost no coffee bars in Oslo compared with the situation today, but he notes that:

> I thought all the existing coffee bars were too identical. They were too inspired by the American layout. The location of the espresso machine, espresso maker, the presentation of the pastry, the assortment of pastry, how the lines are organized, etc.

His motivation for doing things differently was also the existence of something he calls a "monopoly on coffee bars". A roaster of specialty coffee in Oslo – Solberg og Hansen – had by that time developed a full range set of coffee bar equipment. They would deliver everything from the coffee to the coffee machines, to cups and plates. Robert Thoresen found this situation very unappealing and decided to put his own stamp on the coffee bar:

> So I decided to go for a very 'different' machine, I wanted a red one, but I wanted a Brasilia. I wanted to remove the brand name, this should be our machine! Red, and a 'different' brand. I wanted 'different' cups, other glasses. I wanted to present the beverage in another way. I wanted 'different' drinking straws. I spent a hell of a lot of time to find our visual identity, and by this I don't mean just the graphics. Of course, as an architect, I had a precise notion of the look of the interior. For instance, I

was very keen on designing the coffee bar as a place with a
clear identity of being a bar.

Thoresen illustrates this by referring to regular customers who come in and
find their place by the bar, and are served when it's their turn. Even if there is
a line they don't stand in the line. This is because they understand how the
place works:

It is our job to find out where that person is in the line, when it
is his turn. But we have to communicate in a way that makes
him comfortable, so that he knows when we know.

Thoresen realizes that there are many different ways to design a coffee bar,
and some of them might be more profitable than his. For instance the idea of
asking people to leave the bar after they have given their orders is one such
approach. But even if this might be a better business model, the idea doesn't
appeal to him. Java as he has designed it is something else:

So Java is a bar… The concept is a bar. And in a bar you
should stay, sit, wait and stay. We invite you….

He illustrates by explaining how they decided to keep the concept when the
possibility to double the space arose, after the neighboring store closed. The
doubled amount of space would have made it possible to change the concept
totally and install tables and regular chairs. To make it more like a café. But
that was out of the question. The doubled amount of space makes it important
to:

…keep the intimacy, we must keep the tidiness, and the
knowledge, it must be possible (for the barista) to work alone
and own the whole room… it must be easy for those who are at
work to give the customer attention … but also the light – there
is a special light inside here.

Thoresen emphasizes the importance of the baristas' working environment, but his understanding of the baristas' working conditions are seen from the customer perspective. The design is directed towards his strong devotion towards the "coffee experience" as a whole, with the aim of creating:

> …attitude, knowledge, atmosphere, order, tempo, and maintain dialogue and contact with the customer about coffee.

Thoresen said there are three things that he has given high priority: the location, the space, the interior and the product. He describes his interest in the design of the place as everything but an interest in minimalism, a label observers often use to describe Java:

> By working environment, I don't just mean that this should be a place where it is nice to work, etc. It should be that too, but it must be a job you are proud of... This is a nice place, but the most important is that we should be proud of our work.

Thoresen uses the term "coffee credibility", and wants to attract customers with this quality:

> Those who come here must have a reason to come, either based on their ability to taste the difference, or if not, then we have to tell them how things work. We must have coffee cred. If we lose it, then we should do something else.

Elisabeth Toth, the owner of Evita Espressobar, opened up her first coffee bar in 1997. She had a very simple philosophy; she just wanted to start a coffee bar, similar to ones she had visited in Oslo, as well as other places around the word. She was implementing the three crucial design factors in her opinion – that make up a coffee bar:

> I wanted counters along the windows with bar stools, I wanted a rather long counter, so I could do all the operations there, and I wanted huge windows.

The windows were there already, but the rest she had to make herself.
Together with friends she set up the coffee bar in a short time, and even if it
does not have the same finish or the same consistent design details that most
of Kaffebrenneriets outlets have, or Java, it is first and foremost a coffee bar
very true to the original typology:

> That was what I wanted, a coffee bar. Nothing else. Today I
> can see that it could have been done in another way, but we did
> it all ourselves, and it is after all a rather nice place. Don't you
> think so?

The designer, Petter Abrahamsen, has long experience designing bars,
restaurants, cafés and coffee bars. He has been in the business since the
1980s, and has played an important role in developments. During recent
years, he has also been working with the biggest coffee bar chains. Oslo had
very few restaurants, bars and cafés until the 1980s, when a wave of new
places were opened. Due to a more liberal political regime concerning the
sale and distribution of alcohol, less regulations in general and a sharp
increase in consumer spending, the situation changed rather rapidly.

Until then interior designers were pretty rare, and had a limited market,
but the heydays of the mid-1980s changed all that. Abrahamsen was among
the young designers that set their hallmarks on developments, and during
those years they designed and redesigned bar after bar, restaurant after
restaurant. During this period a rather lavish style was adopted, and some of
the projects were distinctively postmodern. But other projects were actually
more low key, and based more on ideas of supplying different segments in
the population with styles in accordance to their preferences.Petter
Abrahamsen said there is always a balance between what the owners will
seek and what the designers think is the best idea:

> There is a huge potential for conflict here, but the designers are
> important only when they can avoid conflicts and create
> understanding for better ideas.

Abrahamsen identifies one factor that changed the design approach in the
1980s: the internationalization of the bars, restaurants and cafés. There was in

this period a solid impact of design ideas from abroad, especially Europe, but also the US. He mentions especially the introduction of the concertina doors. This typically French solution opened up bars and cafés in a new way: it gave them a friendlier look, and invited people in. It was a distinct and modern approach where light and openness became essential qualities. These design ideas had been hidden in the 1970s more or less, and the 1980s represented a rebirth of this strategy:

> To me there is no standard answer to the question: what makes a great coffee bar? But in general I think that the quality of the light is essential. But also the style, or the taste or whatever you call it. It has to be distinct in one way or another. Not something tossed together without a plan.

Abrahamsen also underlines the importance of an intelligent floor plan. It must be easy to move around inside the coffee bar; it must be designed to cope with the number of people standing in the line and the number of customers sitting, eating and drinking; those two requirements should not be in conflict, but in a productive interplay:

> But maybe most significant is the need for huge windows, windows that let the light in, but also that makes it possible for people that like to sit in the windows to be seen from the outside.

## 5.3. THE ACTUAL DIFFERENCES

In the following, I present several maps showing the location and the interior design of four coffee bars in Oslo: Java in Ullevålsveien, Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien, Evita in Smalgangen and Kaffehjørnet at Tonsenhagen. These four coffee bars, which I will mainly focus on here, have some obvious similarities, but also some rather unexpected differences. I will discuss some of the findings I have reached when comparing them. What is immediately obvious is the fact that they are located in three different parts of the city, and consequently different with regard to their social structure and class composition; they also vary in other respects and to my surprise more than I thought they would.First, I would like to shed light on the four different

spaces; by using visual material it is possible to view the coffee bars on a structural level.

### 5.3.1.    Java – location and design

Java is located in Ullevålsveien 47, in a part of city called St. Hanshaugen.
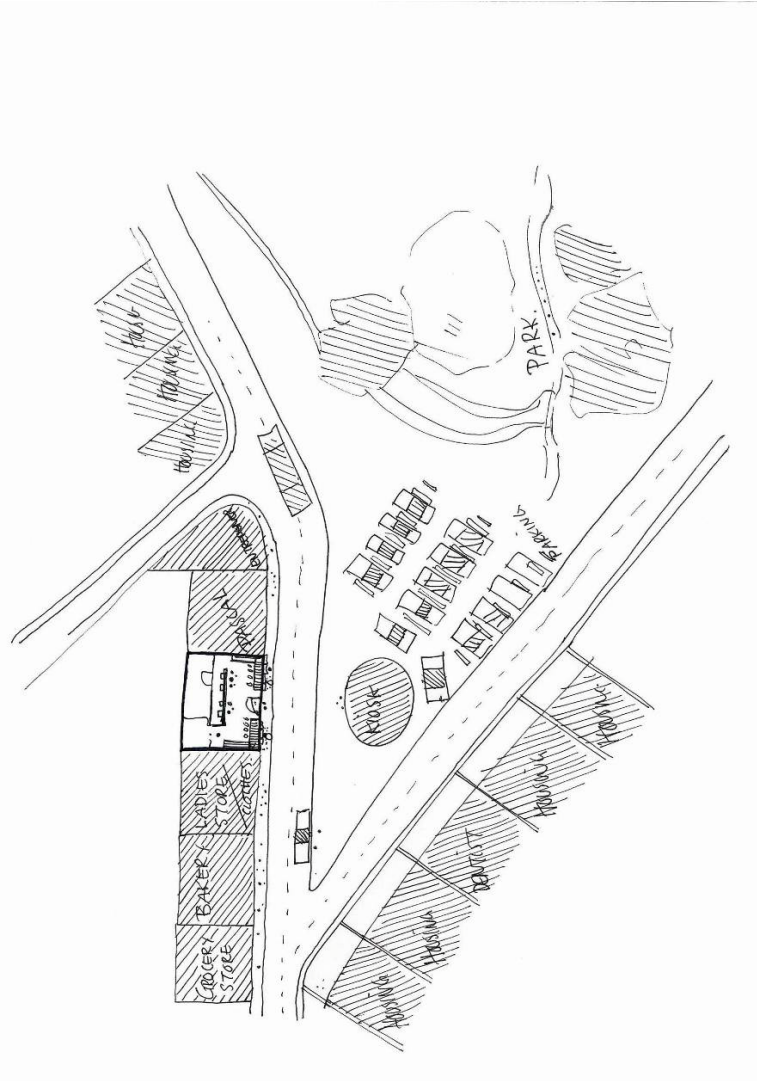


**Figure 6. Java. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth. 2008**

St. Hanshaugen is a wealthy white middle class area (Thompson and Strickland 1999, 244). The coffee bar Java has been here since 1997; it has expanded and today also occupies what was once the neighboring shop. The coffee bar is about 40 m2.

St.Hanshaugen is only 1.2 kilometers from Karl Johan, the city's main street, and is a neighborhood mainly dominated by housing, shops and services. However, it is also close to commercial districts, and not that far from Oslo University College. As the drawing here illustrates, Java is located in a street full of shops, close to a junction, a bus stop, a kiosk, and a city park. In other words, the coffee bar is highly integrated into the commercial and urban fabric of St. Hanshaugen.



**Figure 7. Java. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth**

Java is located on the long side of a building. The traffic is not unnoticeable, but neither is it heavy. Street life is rather vibrant, at least by Oslo standards, and there is a steady flow of people passing up and down the street. When Java also uses its outdoor space, as it does also during the mild days of the winter, then the coffee bar is an integral part of the street. As these drawings point out, or even maybe exaggerate a little, Java is to a certain extent a place with blurred territorial borders, and contributes substantially to the street life in this part of Ullevålsveien. Inside, the coffee bar is long and rectangular shaped. It has a long counter covering most of the long side of the coffee bar, and then there are counters along the windows and also along the two sidewalls. It is equipped with seventeen bar stools, and not one single table or regular chair.

**Figure 8. Java. Photo: EDH.  14.09.2008**

Java is basically a bar with a space built around it. Apart from the counters along the windows, most of the activity in the coffee bar is concentrated around the bar; this is due to the length of the coffee bar, and the limited depth of the space, as the illustrations show.



**Figure 9. Java. Photo: EDH.14.09.2008**

The bar is constructed from dark varnished wood and equipped with an integrated glass cabinet mounted on the top of the bar. The food is displayed here, together with freshly roasted packed coffee. The coffee is packed in red and silver colored bags covered with a thin layer of plastic. On the top of the glass cabinet, displayed on trays, are fresh bakery items, such as croissants and buns.

Five industrial-looking lamps hang over the bar. A huge red espresso machine is located behind the bar, and its red top is visible to the customers. The menu is on the wall behind the bar. It is made of a rubber board – typical

in the 1970s – and is a design feature that for some might signal an ironic distance, while for others it may have the effect of projecting a nostalgic fleur to the place. It is also of course very practical, as it is easy to make changes to the menu.

Figure 10. Java. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth

The wall behind the bar is covered with small mosaic tiles in white and different shades of green; the small white tiles increase in numbers where the wall meets the ceiling forming a pattern. The two other walls in the coffee bar are colored mint green, matching the tile wall. A huge modern abstract painting hangs on the wall to the south. The tall windows reach from the ceiling to the floor.

As a result of an ambitious design approach, Java is distinctively different from the other coffee bars in Oslo, and has a more simple design than Kaffebrenneriet. The design approach is characterized by a combination of care for small details and an overall originality.

However, even if it is more visibly-oriented towards a classical modernistic design, it still signals, as perceived by the customers, coziness and a more rustic feeling than one might have imagined. The use of dark wood, the lack of pure white walls, and the small elements of personal taste in the design, such as the lamps and the menu, soften the modernistic approach, and the long bar is reminiscent of a classical American diner, even if the overall design does not point in that direction.

**Figure 11. Java. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth**

### 5.3.2. Evita Espressobar – location and design
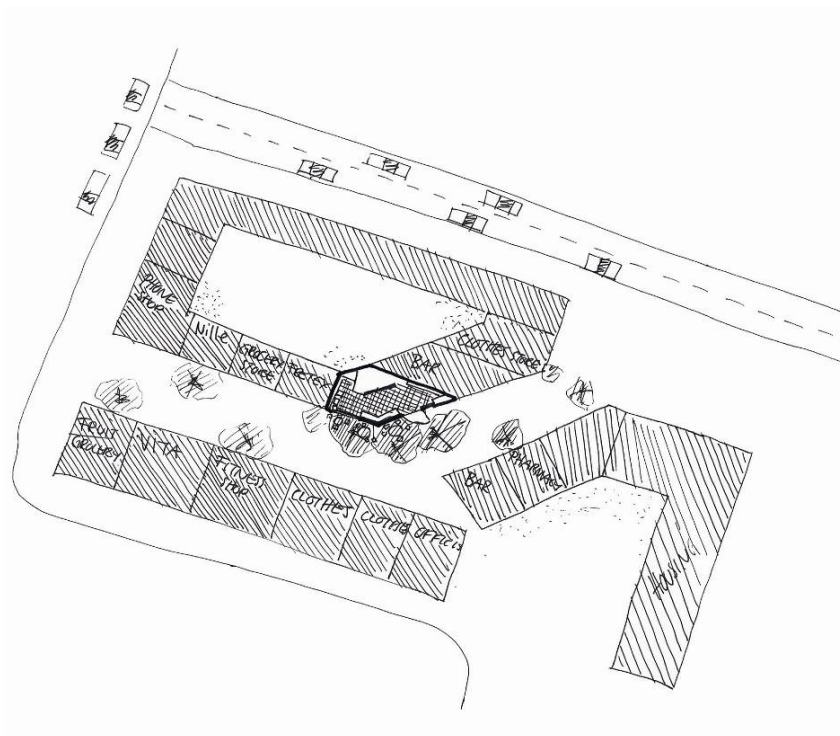


**Figure 12. Evita. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth.**

Evita is located in the pedestrian street, Smalgangen, in Grønland in eastern-central Oslo, in Gamle Oslo ("Old Oslo"), a district with the lowest average income in Oslo (Utviklings og kompetanseetaten i Oslo Kommune 2009). Smalgangen is a part of the retro-urban landscape of the late 1980s. Evita Espressobar was opened in 1997. The coffee bar is rather small, about 40 m2. On street level, Smalgangen is characterized by a large number of small shops, and some public service institutions; above first floor level there are mainly apartments in the neighboring buildings. Smalgangen is a pedestrian area, with no access for cars.
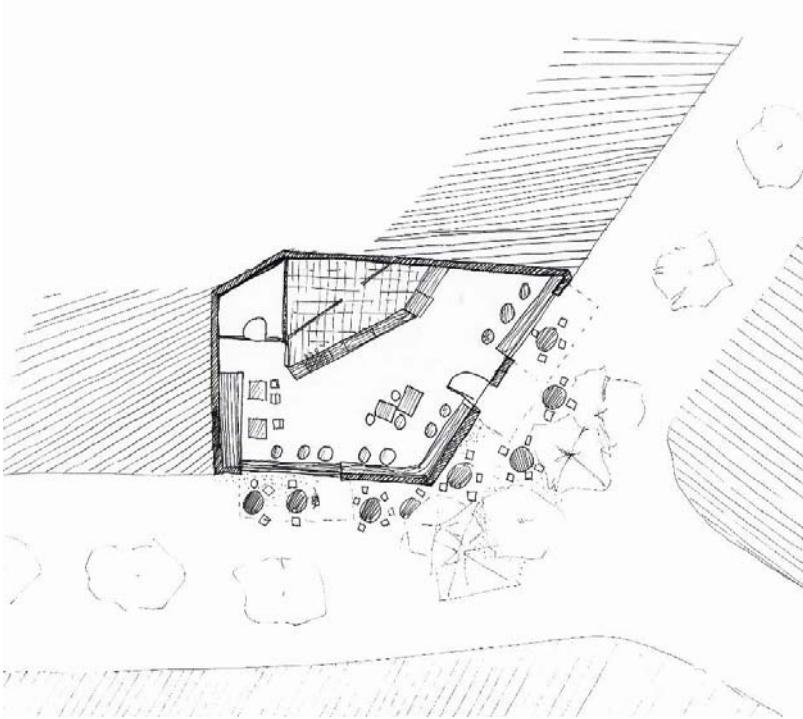


**Figure 13. Evita. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth**

Evita's location on a corner in this car free environment makes it a natural meeting point, and it blends easily with the two traditional pubs and the rest of the small shops in the neighborhood.

The possibility the coffee bar has of using a substantial part of the pedestrian street means that it is an integral part of street activities, even more so than Java.



**Figure 14. Evita. Phot: EDH. 15.03.2009**

And due to the green structure of the pedestrian street, mainly leafy trees, the outdoor space also provides shelter from the sun in the summer, and creates a feeling of protected space.

Evita is smaller than Java and Kaffebrenneriet; however, the space is used efficiently. There are fourteen bar stools, bars along the walls, two small bar tables located in the middle of the coffee bar, and two tables with chairs and a sofa.



**Figure 15. Evita. Photo: EDH. 15.03.2009**

The bars are constructed from dark varnished wood as are the stools. Evita's counter is much more limited than Java and Kaffebrenneriet, both in volume and working space,

It is made with a glass front filled up with coffee beans in a decorative manner, and the name "Evita" is written in coffee beans. The counter incorporates varying height levels and is filled up with bags of roasted coffee, chocolate and other types of coffee accessories. A food display case contains ciabattas and cakes etc.

The wall behind the counter is covered with a handwritten menu on a blackboard, but also shelves displaying mocca pots, espresso machines, and other types of coffee equipment. The walls are painted in a mustard yellow color, and are also used for the sale and exhibition of art, mainly paintings on canvas.



**Figure 16. Evita. Ill. Kyrre Holmeseth**

Evita in Smalgangen is a small, mostly crowded place where the design itself seems to lack overall guidelines, apart from being true to the coffee bar typology. Compared to Java and Kaffebrenneriet above, Evita is a place with a more spontaneous kind of design. Even compared to Kaffehjørnet it appears as less planned. Elements have been introduced incrementally, and it is does not have the refinement of Kaffebrenneriet or Java. This does not mean that the design of Evita is characterized by a lack of the necessary design

qualities. The space is used efficiently, and the very simple layout supports the flow of customers and ensures rapid service.

### 5.3.3. Kaffebrenneriet – location and design

Opened in 1998, Kaffebrenneriet, an outlet of the coffee bar chain of the same name, is located in Ullevålsveien at the busy junction with Waldemar Thranes Gate. It has twenty four bar stools supplying the bar, counters along



**Figure 17. Kaffebrenneriet in the streetscape. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth**

the windows, and also some located inside the coffee bar. It also contains seven tables and seventeen chairs and a long bar counter. The coffee bar is about 100 m2, and larger than most other coffee bars in the city.

The coffee bar is in St. Hanshaugen, the same part of the city as Java, and roughly 100 meters south of the latter. However, Kaffebrenneriet is situated in a much more busy street landscape with lots of pedestrians, due to its location at a junction with traffic lights, The surrounding shops are all rather small, occupying the first floors of the buildings mainly. It is mainly a residential area, but there are also some offices. Waldermar Thranes Gate is also an important east-west-east route for walkers and bicyclists in this central area.
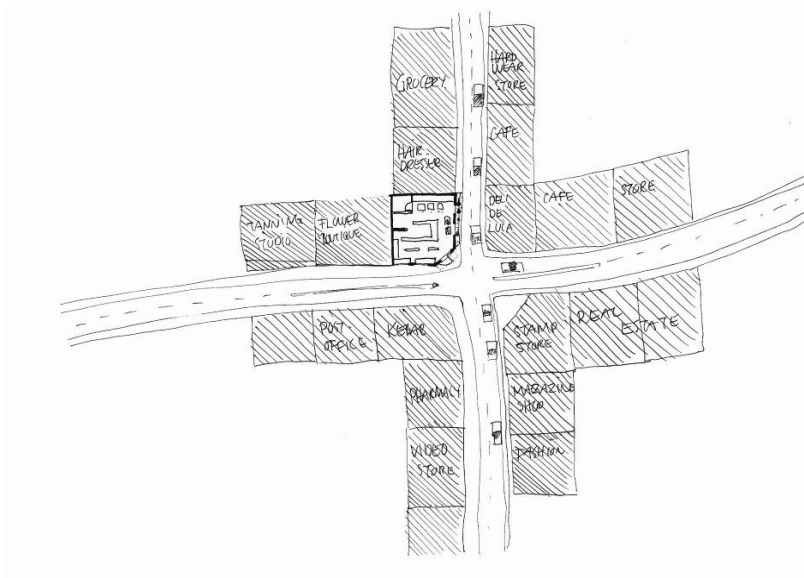
**Figure 18. Kaffebrenneriet. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth. 2008**

The interior design of the coffee bar combines standard coffee bar design with window- counters and free-standing counters elsewhere in the coffee bar, and more conventional café design, such as the use of regular chairs and tables. The considerable size of the coffee bar makes such a diverse design possible. The location of the bar counter is different from most other coffee bars. It is not a long enclosed counter located at the end of the room, but rather a centered u-shaped counter, which enables the baristas to establish visual contact with the whole room. This design feature is also a result of a redesign; when it opened in 1998, it had a traditional coffee bar layout with a long counter extending over almost the whole breadth of the room. The size and shape of the room meant that this design was less successful than in other places which the coffee bar chain had opened. The redesign copes with the physical limitations of the space to a greater extent. The coffee bar chain, Kaffebrenneriet, operates with a distinct design language. It is – denotatively speaking – based on the use of the colors green (close to racing green) and mustard-like yellow, both colors are intermingled with light varnished oak. The tables and counters are in light oak, although not all Kaffebrenneriet's coffee bars use exactly the same materials. Some of the coffee bars in the chain use tables which are darker brown, and some of the tables are linoleum coated.

**Figure 19. Kaffebrenneriet.  Photo: EDH. 22.08.2008**

The furniture and the interior design of these coffee bars is anchored in a modernist tradition, but the design does not pursue a radical modernism. The design is a very moderate design, and the use of colors confirms such a modest modernism. The counters are usually dominated by large green espresso machines, and the food items for sale on display. They almost resemble old fashioned village stores, where the goods for sale are placed on the counter, as explained by Paulsrud above. The space on the counter is mainly occupied by roasted coffee and also chocolate, and other appliances such as mocca makers and espresso machines for home use. The counters usually also have a food display case in which sandwiches, cakes and other sorts of food items are displayed and stored. The espresso-based beverages are made by hand, and this "personal touch" is greatly reinforced by the handwritten blackboard menus, which are mounted on the walls behind the counters.



**Figure 20. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth**

The Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien is dressed in the design philosophy of the chain of coffee stores, but compared to many of the other Kaffebrenneriet coffee bars, the one in Ullevålsveien is rather modest in its display of coffee accessories. However, in comparison to other coffee bar chains,

Kaffebrenneriet stands out as a chain where the retail part of the coffee bar is more visible. The roasted coffee is packed in small paper bags designed so they echo a natural and environmentally friendly product. Chocolate and other accessories are packed in transparent bags.

Nevertheless, although the Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien creates such an impression, it is not a place that only has rustic qualities; and although the counter is literally full of wares for sale, it is not noticeably crowded or overfilled. There is still sufficient space for customers to place their orders and for the baristas to serve the customers.

And as mentioned above, the interior design of the room is not minimalistic. Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien is modern in its design, but the rustic atmosphere is created by the display of goods and wares for sale, and the look and feel of these wares, and by the handwritten blackboard menu, and also by the tableware in all shapes and sizes.
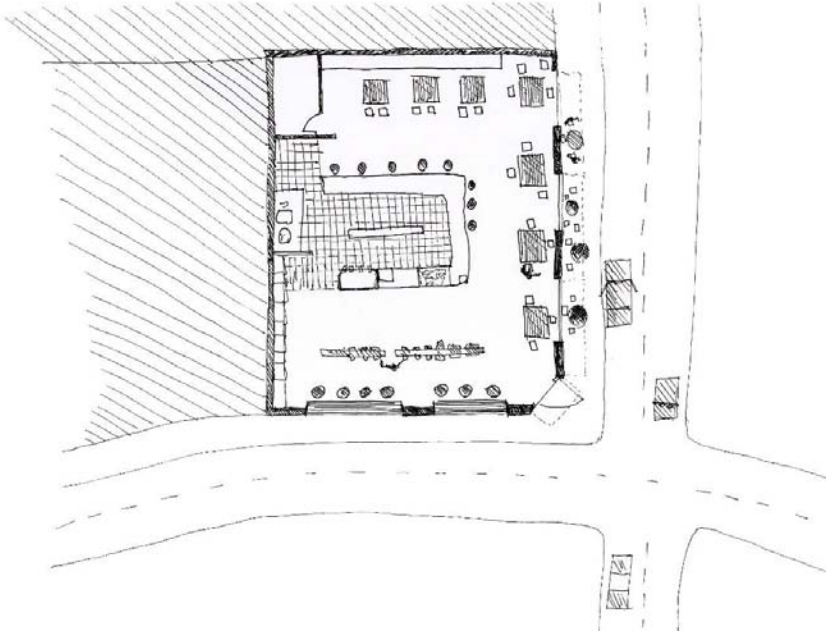


**Figure 21. Kaffebrenneriet. Ill: Kyrre Holmeseth.**

### 5.3.3. Kaffehjørnet– location and design



**Figure 22. Kaffehjørnet. Ill: EDH**

Kaffehjørnet is located at the junction of the two roads Rødbergveien and Selvbyggerveien in the heart of the satellite community Tonsenhagen, which together with Årvoll form a suburban area on the west side of Groruddalen. Tonsenhagen and Årvoll are in the Bjerke district, a less wealthy area in Oslo. Tonsenhagen and Årvoll are nevertheless not representative of the district, and have a less diversely ethnic population and a higher average income level than Bjerke district as a whole.

The Tonsenhagen and Årvoll areas that are typical of Norwegian residential areas, some might even call them suburbs. However, the term *suburb* should not be understood with regard to the meaning of the word as it is used in the US. The proximity to the city core makes these residential areas rather different than regular North American suburbs. The term "drabantby" is used in Norwegian and Danish and may be translated with "satellite community or town", although this translation does not always take into account national and regional differences.

Tonsenhagen was built in the 1950s and 60s, and consists mainly of four-floor apartment blocks. There are also three high-rise buildings and a small area of terraced housing. Årvoll has a more varied housing layout, including small houses, duplex houses, apartment blocks and a new block of townhouses on the edge of Lillomarka, part of the large forest area that surrounds Oslo. Årvoll has many larger housing units, whereas the majority

of the apartments in Tonsenhagen are two or three room ones. The demographic structure in Tonsenhagen is characterized by young people, often with small children, who are gradually replacing the older inhabitants who moved here in the 1950s. As with most Norwegian suburbs, Tonsenhagen is located close to nature, and also seems to be more harmonious and esthetically pleasing than most suburbs built in the post-war period. The architecture, the harmony between buildings and nature, and the general "interface" are of a high quality in many cases. There is no traditional suburban shopping mall, and most of the inhabitants do their shopping in another geographical zone, at Linderudsenteret shopping mall, on the other side of one of the main highways that head out of Oslo (Trondheimsveien). However, there is a small concentration of shops in Tonsenhagen Torg (Tonsenhagen Square), which is located on the border between the Tonsenhagen and Årvoll areas. The Square includes four shops and a business to be precise: a grocery store, a kiosk, a hairdresser, a coffee bar ("Kaffehjørnet"), and a real estate agency. In 2008, around 10,000 people resided in the Årvoll and Tonsenhagen areas (Oslo Kommune 2008)(Oslo Kommune 2008).



**Figure 23. Kaffehjørnet. Ill: EDH.**

Tonsenhagen is therefore a place without any distinctive urban qualities. Tonsenhagen Square is perhaps the only exception. However, Tonsenhagen Square seems to lack most of the qualities one would normally associate with a "square". It is for most part rather empty, and there are very few commercial and cultural activities, and it is by no means the epicenter of Tonsenhagen.



**Figure 25. Kaffehjørnet. Photo: EDH. 23.02.2009**

The coffee bar, Kaffehjørnet, opened in 2003 in what used to be a watchmaker's shop; the location at the corner gives the coffee bar a central position in this landscape. In summer, and also to a certain extent during the winter, Kaffehjørnet uses the outdoor facilities offered by the wide sidewalk, so that it is able to double its capacity. The space inside the coffee bar is quite



**Figure 24. Kaffehjørnet. Ill. EDH.**

small, only about 20 m2. However, the space is used very efficiently. As the illustrations show, the bars along the windows extend the capacity of the place substantially, since both of the outside walls of Kaffehjørnet are dominated by large windows.

There are six bar stools by the windows, that's all. The interior design of Kaffehjørnet definitely states that it is a coffee bar: the coffee machine in the center is the most essential feature, as well as the use of counters along the windows. However, like many smaller locally owned coffee bars, for instance Evita, Kaffehjørnet is characterized by a lack of consistency of design; the use of colors and design elements seem to be rather impulsive, and different elements seem to have been tossed together without any overall plan. The wall behind the counter is filled up with coffee accessories, but the bar counter itself is so small, it can hardly serve as a place where goods are displayed. However, there is a glass display counter displaying cakes, buns, sandwiches and cold drinks.

Kaffehjørnet is a small, intimate, and inconsistently designed and full of daylight. These factors woven together create a place with a very cozy atmosphere, where the personal touch is highly evident. The tiny room seems – due to the large windows – larger than it is.



**Figure 26. Kaffehjørnet. Photo: EDH. 26.05.2010**

The four different coffee bars discussed here represent the diversity that may be found in coffee bar design; there may be some key features which they are all loyal to, but their interiors have very different styles. These styles are dependent on – as the first part of this chapter show – personal taste, different levels of design interest, and different perspectives concerning the importance of design.

## 5.4. THE CUSTOMERS

These four coffee bars not only represent divergence in design, but also in different users. In the following I will address these differences[9].

| | Java | Kaffebrenneriet St.Hanshaugen | Evita Smalgangen | Kaffehjørnet Tonsenhagen |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demo-graphic profile | 20 –50 = 96 % <br> 20 –29 = 26 % <br> 30 –39 = 54 % <br> 40 –50 = 16 % | 20 – 50 = 91 % <br> 20 – 29 = 19 % <br> 30 – 39 = 44 % <br> 40 – 50 = 28 % | 20 –50 = 94 % <br> 20 –29 = 29 % <br> 30 –39 = 34 % <br> 40 –50 = 31 % | 20 – 50 = 95 % <br> 20 – 29 = 29 % <br> 30 – 39 = 41 % <br> 40 – 50 = 25 % |
| Gender balance | Men = 51 <br> Women = 49 | Men = 44 <br> Women =56 | Men = 54 <br> Women = 46 | Men = 42 <br> Women = 58 |
| | | | | |
| Higher education | 54 % | 58% | 36% | 52% |
| Office work | 30 % | 75 % | 57 % | 69 % |
| Physical work | 2 % | 2 % | 7 % | 18 % |
| Creative work (creative class) | 68 % | 23 % | 22 % | 8 % |
| Other (welfare etc) | <1 % | <1 % | 14 % | 5 % |
| Ethnical profile <br> Caucasian <br> Non-white | 99 % <br> <1 % | 99 % <br> <1 % | 46 % <br> 44 % | 97 % <br> 3 % |
| Arriving alone | About 70 % | About 70 % | About 50 % | About 50 % |
| General visual appearance of customers | Stylish | Well dressed, lightly refined | Extreme variety. From "fashion freaks" to vagrants | Normal/causal |

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[9] The statistical information presented in 5.4 and 5.6 where collected for this dissertation. (See 2.2.1.)

### 5.4.1. Java – a description of the customers

Most of the Java customers Java are aged between 30 and 40 years old, a majority of about 54 percent is in this group. As a rule very few of the customers are outside the age span of 20 to 50 years old, except kids in company with their parents. Java seems to attract as many men as women. White people seems to be the rule, very few customers with other ethnic origin are among its clientele. The customers at Java are in general more fashionable. Most customers at Java have a defined profession, but what makes Java stand out in this comparison is its ability to recruit customers from the so-called creative class.

### 5.4.2. Evita – a description of the customers

Evita has a demographic profile more similar to the other coffee bars than what one might expect based on a general visual impression. The visual profile of the customers at Evita is quite different and that might produce some blurred observations. The most interesting difference when it comes to demographic profile is that Evita's customers are more evenly divided concerning age: the groups between 20 and 30 years, 30 and 40 years, and 40 and 50 years are all of similar size.

However, there is a larger number of men, and a much higher percentage of people without a clearly defined profession or job; the figures show this explicitly, but a much higher percentage of the customers at Evita are on some form of welfare. The clearest difference is to be found in the ethnic balance; where almost at least half of customers are from ethnic minorities.

### 5.4.3. Kaffebrenneriet – a description of customers

The ethnic and demographic profile of Kaffebrenneriet at St. Hanshaugen is rather similar to Java's, but there seem to be a higher number of people in their forties. Similar to Java more or less, the clientele is made up of a very high percentage of Caucasians, and has the highest number of highly educated customers; it also attracts a higher percentage of women than the neighboring coffee bar further up the street, i.e. Java. On a national level there is a correspondence between higher education and gender that supports this pattern, and that might explain this structure.

### 5.4.4. Kaffehjørnet – a description of the customers

The ethnic and demographic profile of Kaffehjørnet in Tonsenhagen is more similar to the two coffee bars at St. Hanshaugen than the one would first

imagine from the appearance of the surrounding buildings and environment. The population of Tonsenhagen and Årvoll is mainly made up of ethnic Norwegians. A great number of other suburban areas in the Groruddalen are in this regard different; i.e. a greater preponderance of ethnic minorities.

The clientele of Kaffehjørnet is dominated by women, and the number of women on maternity leave occupying the bar stools at Kaffehjørnet are during periods during the day rather substantial. Kaffehjørnet's customer groups are characterized by both a high degree of trades' people and many with higher education. This may be explained by an observation I have made: I have met many couples at Tonsenhagen and Årvoll, where the man often works in a trade, such as plumbers, electricians and carpenters, while the women often work in the public sector in professions such as teaching and nursing.

## 5.5. A DISCUSSSION

As these numbers illustrate, these coffee bars are not frequented by younger or older people. The huge postwar generations, which now are turning into senior citizens, seem to find their comfort elsewhere. Besides age, the most visible differences are ethnic backgrounds. Evita Espressobar in Smalgangen has a customer base where every second customer is non-white. This mirrors the district where it is located, and the same is the situation for the other coffee bars – the lack of non-white customers at Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien and Java, also reflects the district where they are located. What it does show, in respect to Evita, is that this coffee bar has a broad attraction, an attraction that goes far beyond the more media mediated perspective that coffee bars are only for the white middle class[10]. In fact, Evita seems to attract a broad range of people, and seems to lack a distinct customer profile.

Kaffehjørnet is in most respects more similar to Kaffebrenneriet and Java than to Evita. Most suburban areas in this part of Oslo are highly diverse regarding ethnicity, but Tonsenhagen and Årvoll is a rather more homogenous district dominated by an ethnic Norwegian population. Kaffehjørnet echoes its surroundings and therefore the middle class characteristics of the area.

What is perhaps more surprising is the variation concerning one specific variable is more substantial between the two very closely located coffee bars at St. Hanshaugen: the so-called "creative class" variable; the conclusion being that the differences between the two neighboring coffee bars are not ignorable. As the inventor of this term, Richard Florida, has shown, many of

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[10] For one of the best in this tradition; read David Brooks *Bobos in Paradise* (Brooks 2001)

those who belong to this "class" lack higher education (p.184) (Florida 2002). I will devote space for a discussion on Florida and the ideas of a "creative class" later in this text, especially in chapter 13. At Java 2/3 of the customers belong to the creative class, whereas in Kaffebrenneriet (roughly 100 meters further down the road) only 1/4 of the customers belong to this group. Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien is, in this regard, much more similar to Evita Espressobar. This illustrates that Java is a coffee bar with a clientele that differs from the others studied here, and most likely from most other coffee bars. I have not collected quantitative data for all of Oslo's coffee bars concerning this variable, but during my field work I have arrived at the understanding that there actually is a difference between Java and most other coffee bars in regard to whom it attracts.

## 5.6. MAPPING

Mapping is an established technique used in order to see spatial patterns. I have made a mapping of Oslo's coffee bars that also covers the development in time, not only the spatial development. It consists of four different maps, mapping four different positions in the history of Oslo since 1994.

**Map. 1. 1994-situation. ill: Magnus Drogseth**
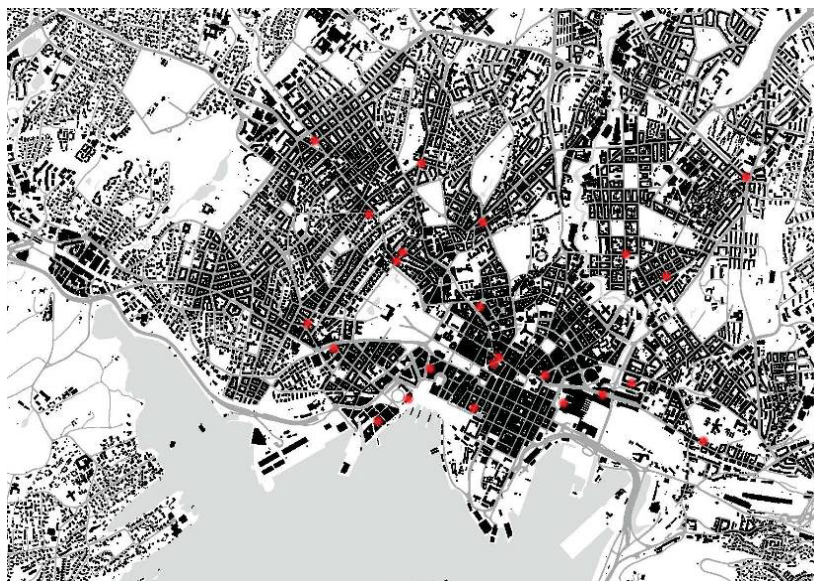


**Map. 2 1998-situation. Ill: Magnus Drogseth**
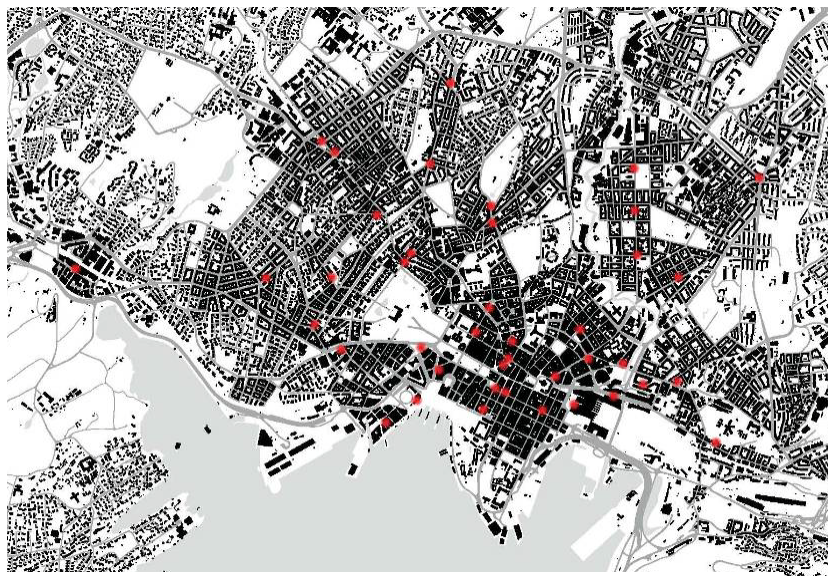
**Map. 3. 2003-situation. Ill: Magnus Drogseth**
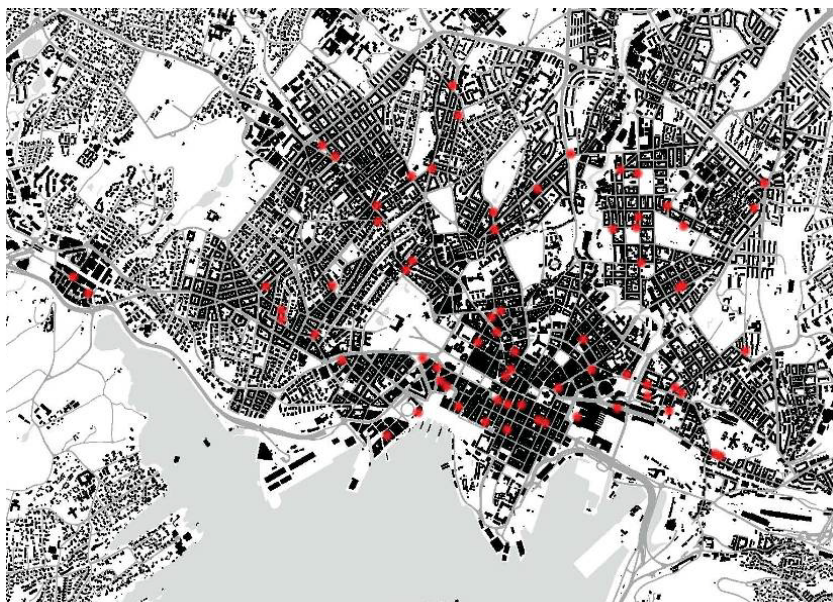


**Map. 4. 2008-situation. Ill: Magnus Drogseth**

These maps illustrate the increase in coffee bars in the inner part of the town – inside the so called Ring 2 (the ring road which encircles central Oslo) – during the period 1994 – 2008. In 1994, two coffee bars were established; in 2008 the total number had increased to 67 bars in the inner part of the city (this does not include coffee bars in shopping malls). The increase has been significant and demonstrates that after the appearance of the first coffee bar there was a great increase in numbers, which makes it legitimate to use the expression "the Oslo coffee bar phenomenon". The various figures for coffee bars in Oslo in 2008, with respect to number, sales, size, and seating capacity etc. is presented in the following chart:

|  | Oslo |
|---|---|
| Number of coffee bars centrally located | 67 bars |
| Cups of coffee sold daily | 28000 |
| Total space | 4549 m2 |
| Total seating outside | 1260 seats |
| Total seating inside | 1789 seats |
| Corner localization | 33 (49 %) |
| Total length of façade | 733 m |
| First coffee bar established | 1994 |
| Second coffee bar established | 1994 |

These numbers confirm that the overall size of the sector is substantial and that it is a business which every day provides many seats and many cups of coffee, and is a visible part of the central areas of the city. Also by constructing the figures for an average coffee bar, a picture is drawn:

|                                  | Oslo    |
|----------------------------------|---------|
| Average cups of coffee sold daily | 418     |
| Average space                    | 68 m2   |
| Average seating outside          | 19      |
| Average seating inside           | 27      |
| Average length of facade         | 11      |
| Average facade in glass          | 73 %    |

The four coffee bars I have studied vary both positively and negatively in relation to this average; the average coffee bar first and foremost shows how small, and thereby how flexible these enterprises are. The coffee bar viewed from this angle appears as a type of enterprise which may be adapted to many different kinds of localities, where only a few other comparable businesses could adapt. For instance, very few restaurants could survive with such a limited available space.

# Chapter 6.    Motivation, location and street level effect

## 6. 1.    THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG? – THE COFFEE BARS AND THE ACTORS

In order to understand why coffee bars are established and why the sector is growing year by year, I will, in this chapter, focus primarily on the agents and their roles, but I will also take a cursory glance at the structural framework they operate within. The ideas and the actions of the owners; the entrepreneurs, are most likely essential for understanding the phenomenon, and therefore need to be investigated.

What sort of people establish coffee bars? Do they share any particular characteristics or motivations? What are their ambitions: To simply participate in an expanding and profitable market or achieve other goals?

## 6.2.    WHY COFFEE?

In 1994, Steinar Paulsrud and his partner Thomas Pulpan opened Kaffebrenneriet. They had both resided in Los Angeles for many years; Steinar had studied and worked there, in PR, and specialized in computer businesses. When they moved back to Norway in the beginning of the 1990s he had no plan of going into the coffee industry:

> I was applying for jobs in furniture retail, that was where I really wanted to be, but the job market was dry, and I didn't manage to get work in that sector.

Steinar and his partner started talking about opening a coffee bar together. They had been regular customers at local coffee bars while living in Los Angeles, and the idea of consuming and serving good coffee in Oslo became more appealing as they discussed it. Steinar was hired by a computer firm, but his real interest was turning to coffee, and they started thinking about opening a coffee bar. To pursue this business concept was easier said than done. They had serious difficulty in finding a landlord who would rent them a business location:

> No one believed that we could make a successful business selling coffee; it took time to find someone we could convince.

Today this might seem an odd problem, since coffee bars are common, but back then coffee was not perceived as a commodity in demand or with business potential. After planning and discussing the idea for a year, they managed to rent a small store facility at Bislett, on a corner of Theresegate. In 1994, they opened their first coffee bar. Steinar Paulsrud's story is about considering a business concept with no financial precedent, but also about mustering the enthusiasm and initiative to go for it anyway. Both partners believed firmly in their idea, and recruited their friends and families to help renovate the store. After many weeks of hard work everything was in place. They did all the work themselves, and had no professional help. The color palette they picked, where green was a substantial factor, might remind some of Starbucks. "No, I would not say that we are inspired by Starbucks. It is Peet's we have been looking at", said Paulsrud; and explained that while Starbucks is not considered a high-quality coffee bar, Peet's is much closer to their ideal: The coffee is better, and the stores are cleaner, more carefully designed and much better reflect the ideas he finds appealing in the coffee-bar industry.

While Kaffebrenneriet was expanding slowly but steadily in the central areas in Oslo, other entrepreneurs were also entering the scene. One of them was Robert Thoresen. He had established two coffee bars, and a small roaster. Like Paulsrud and Pulpan, Thoresen was inspired by his experiences in the USA. Even if he was uncertain where his interests would take him, he had his mind set on one thing:

> I wanted to work with coffee, but first and foremost I wanted to create an arena for the consumption of coffee.

In the early 1990s, Thoresen lived in San Francisco, where he studied and worked as an architect:

> San Francisco is a city very different from Oslo, but also very different from most other cities in America. It is often compared to European cities. It has very defined neighborhoods, with specific names, to which people have a sense of belonging and identity. The neighborhoods contain all the facilities needed in everyday life, such as banks, groceries, pharmacies and usually a place to drink coffee."

In San Francisco, Thoresen found a commercial phenomenon which fascinated him. He took an interest in the many launderettes that were all over the city, in every single neighborhood:

> They were places where you could sit and watch TV, read newspapers and talk to the other people there. And the customers would go across the street to get a cup of coffee and come back. I even saw places where the combination of a coffee shop and a launderette was the concept. I did not necessarily want to run such a place myself, but I had a very clear idea of its potential. I was also fascinated by the many strange, small San Francisco churches. The buildings could be very different from anything that we would call a church in Norway, for example by having the first floor of any normal house.

Thoresen has an abundance of stories about San Francisco, where he found a special, urban atmosphere that he wanted to learn from. In his own words, urban facilitators such as the coffee bars could "wake up a neighborhood":

> The coffee bars in San Francisco also caught my attention. I went to them regularly myself, and therefore came to understand how they work. A coffee bar not only provides you with the product you want, it also offers a relationship – a

sense of belonging – and allows you to find your favorite place, try different beverages and develop a set of preferences. You develop a dynamic relationship with the staff working there, and with the other regular customers. A cup of coffee costs NOK 20; that's reasonably priced for an "entrance fee" to a place where you can sit all day. Starbucks have made a point of being the so-called "third place". My intention, when opening a coffee bar, was to generate urbanity. San Francisco is famous for many things, but the west coast of the US, from San Francisco and north to Seattle, is especially well known for specialty coffee. I think what I wanted to create was an "urban generator"; it might seem like big words, but that is how I would describe it.

Thoresen points out the historical position of coffee in western culture, and emphasizes that coffee to him has always been a social drink:

Coffee is the least common multiple! People never thought that the coffee bars could be a success in London, but….

Although Thoresen's ideals are easy enough to understand, choosing to quit his career as a busy young architect to go into the coffee business does seem rather drastic. Why would someone with a professional background, educated as an architect, give it all up for coffee?

Architecture is about great visions, but also small details. I see the coffee bar in an urban structure, but I am nevertheless attentive towards the details. I think I'm rather ambitious and proud. I was seduced by the potential of the product and by the scope of it. You can compare coffee to wine. My ambition is to be a connoisseur. The coffee bars will be expected to offer expert knowledge on the art of making espresso.

Robert Thoresen's foray into the coffee business was also fuelled by another ambition: he wanted to continue working as an architect: "I thought I would be able to sit in the office at the back and draw, while the business was running quietly." That has certainly not been possible, and reveals what was a

very naïve perception of what it means to run a business. His skills as a designer and architect have nevertheless been useful, in the design and construction of the two coffee bars he owns today. Thoresen's two stores, Java at St. Hans Haugen and Mocca at Briskeby, have very distinctive designs.

Smalgangen is a pedestrian street enclosed in an urban complex called Grønland Torg, which was built in the mid-1980s. Today, it is a thriving urban space, busy with people, trade and city life; but it has not always been so. When Elisabeth Toth opened Evita Espresso bar in Smalgangen in 1997, it was a dead strip of a street, in a virtually rundown area. There were a few shops in the area, most of them struggling, and Grønland Torg was considered an example of failed city planning:

> I had always dreamt of running my own business. I ended up with a coffee bar largely because I had a baby. The coffee-bar concept started to intrigue me, as I found a café near the baby's day care center, which had an espresso machine. Although it was not a proper coffee bar, I immediately fell for that way of making coffee. Not that I was entirely unfamiliar with the technical aspect of it; I have worked as a waitress all my adult life. Having worked in all kinds of establishments, you start wanting to run your own place after a while. A coffee bar is also one of the few businesses you can combine with having a child, something which is important to me. After I had a child, working nights became unacceptable.

Elisabeth Toth was born in the mid 1960s, and came from what she described as a very industrious family. She considers herself as hard-working, and values this trait highly in others. She has no formal training, nor has she aspired to acquire it, but explains her talent for business with a kind of feminist motivation:

> I have always liked Madonna, and she has been a role model for me. She has always gone all out, and always managed. When the film where she plays Evita Peron came out, I was deeply moved. I identify with women like that, who always come out on top and who work hard. That is why I called the coffee bar Evita.

However, Elisabeth Toth can vouch for the fact that establishing the coffee bar was no easy proposition. No one would rent her premises.

> I found the facilities in Smalgangen and asked the mall management if I could rent the place, but they didn't really believe in me. They gave it to a store selling handbags instead. When that shop went bankrupt in two months, I was ready and moved in. I did everything myself; friends and family helped to redecorate, and we had no professionals involved. That's how it has always been – we do as much as possible ourselves. It was rough in the beginning, and it took a long time before we made even as little as NOK 1000 a day. But that day – I guess it took a couple of months – I celebrated with champagne. I had promised myself I would do that. I didn't take out any salary at all for a very long time, and it wasn't until after six months that we started showing a little profit."

The fact that Elisabeth Toth calls Evita an *espresso bar* rather than just a *coffee bar* is no coincidence:

> The quality of the espresso is of great concern to me, because it is the core of everything we do. You cannot make good coffee drinks out of bad espresso.

Visitors at Evita will agree upon Toth's claim that Evita sells outstanding coffee, although it is a matter of potential debate whether it is of as high a quality as the coffee at, for example, Java. Most customers I have spoken to at Evita think the coffee is terrific, but the general opinion among coffee-bar customers in Oslo differs somewhat: it seems that amongst them, Stockfleths, Java, Mocca and Tim Wendelboe reign supreme. Elisabeth Toth is of the opinion that she and her staff make great coffee, and that the large number of customers is proof of this.

> People have become very aware of quality when it comes to coffee, also in Grønland.

The owner of Kaffehjørnet, Mohammed Mahgoub, used to live in downtown
Oslo, but moved to Tonsenhagen at the beginning of the new century. He was
considering opening a business on his own. He had held various kinds of
jobs, including working in the service industry. He soon identified a potential
in the Tonsenhagen and Årvoll area. His motivation was mainly that he
missed coffee bars, and that he lived in a district that did not have one. He
also observed that Tonsenhagen only had a limited variety of shops, not a
single café and certainly not a coffee bar:

> Tonsenhagen and Årvoll are nice areas, they really are. But
> they are also areas without some of the qualities that most of us
> like. It's not like a city here (i.e. city center).

Consequently, he wanted to start a business that could offer some of those
features and qualities that he missed; elements he thought could be brought
into the area.

> This will never be like Grünerløkka here, but it may develop to
> something more city-like; I hope more urban type life will
> come here, more businesses like mine, and transform this
> rather "slow" place into something more ... like... something
> more energetic. You know...

Mahgoub refers to his own experiences in the central-Oslo as a springboard
for his idea of bringing the concept into the suburban area in which he lives:

> I used to spend a lot of time in coffee bars in central areas such
> as Bislett and Frogner; and I thought it might be an idea to
> have a coffee bar here in my local area. Why not? This is
> where I live!

## 6.3. LOCATION

### 6.3.1. Kaffebrenneriet

Even if people seem to drink coffee everywhere at ever-increasing rates, a coffee bar cannot be located just anywhere. Most people who work in ready-to-eat/drink businesses will tell you that good locations for a store are at an intersection, at places where people shop, or on corners where the store is easily noticed. Large corporations like Starbuck's have through more than 20 years of experience found criteria like these to be essential. That location is central to profitability and thus the ability to survive has been well confirmed by many types of research in this field (Quigley 1998, 131).

Thomas Pulpan and Steinar Paulsrud use a set of criteria when they try to find good locations for new branches. So far – by May 2010 – their chain has reached 20 stores. Paulsrud revealed to me some of the factors they look for in a new location. One important factor is proximity to different sources of customers. The success of a coffee bar relies to a large extent on its ability to attract a wide range of customers. A perfect day in a coffee bar might look something like this: In the morning, customers come in for coffee before work; then those who start working late, and parents with babies on parental leave turn up. Between 11.30 am and 1.00 pm is lunch, and the store fills up with customers who work in the area; in the afternoon students and shoppers visit the coffee bar.

Attracting such a wide variety of customers is very demanding, and to reach this goal the coffee bar must:

- be located in an urban, busy and lively environment. This implies, for instance, that the traffic in the area must be at an acceptable level; i.e. the traffic should not be too heavy, and should not dominate the location; however, the location should not be too quiet either.

- be close to major shopping areas such as shopping malls.

- be close to centers of education.

- be close to areas where young parents take their children for strolls.

- be close to office environments and/or be located in a neighborhood with internal tourism.


Steinar Paulsrud emphasizes walking direction as an important aspect to consider. The way he sees it:

> …there is something about the direction of the traffic … if you're going out for a coffee; somehow it seems more natural to go in the direction of the city center, not the other way.

Kaffebrenneriet has, with considerable success, expanded while keeping its identity and design features pretty much as they were. Its expansion strategy is incremental, and based on the idea of slow and controlled growth, both financially and in terms of improving quality. By being true to the location criteria, the financial risks have been reduced. Most of its branches make a healthy profit already during their first operating year.

Paulsrud's attitude towards location might, however, seem more schematic than it really is. He points out that he must also like a location on a more subjective level, and that the process involves gut feeling. During the interview, we touched upon disagreements about potential future locations. In situations where there is disagreement involved, they resort to the schematic approach I have described above. Kaffebrenneriet's location policy is a hunt for the typical urban space: a place where there will be friction both mental and physical. When a coffee bar works well, most seats will be occupied, but there will still be room for a few more to squeeze in and there will be a permanent, but acceptable, queue in front of the till.

Kaffebrenneriet's focus has been on establishing profitable businesses by finding the right locations, more than on active urban idealism. Compared to some of the other actors in this field, they represent a rather conservative approach. They first opened a store at Grünerløkka – a district in the eastern part of the inner-city – when it was already fully regenerated as a field for urban consumption and lifestyle projects in 2005. They have not stimulated the process of urban upgrading at Grünerløkka any further, and they were not the first coffee bar established there; on the contrary. But this doesn't necessarily mean that Kaffebrenneriet has never had such an effect on its neighborhood. The owners can – for instance – explain how one small street has changed after they opened a coffee bar there. They view their stores as enhancers of the urban environment – a description that seems confirmed by the day-to-day operations of most of the Kaffebrenneriet branches. A common notion, shared by many and including the entrepreneurs behind the coffee bars, that they upgrade their surroundings socially and culturally, is hard to test empirically. This is not my intention either. Nevertheless, the correlation between the expansion of coffee bars and other more up-market shopping activities is hard to neglect. People like Paulsrud and Pulpan must be considered as important not only as entrepreneurs, but also as skilled observers of the urban landscape.

### 6.3.2. Java

The process of choosing the location for Java, the coffee bar in Ullevålsveien 47, took some time; Robert Thoresen explains:

> I lived a little north of Ullevål and worked in the city center.
> Every day I would cycle down Ullevålsveien, and I noticed that
> the area was a kind of neighborhood.

Thoresen describes the part of Ullevålsveien that caught his interest as a kind of market and shopping district. There was a small and rather shabby convenience store, a bank, an undertaker, a furrier, and a cut-price retail shop. Thoresen's eyes fell on the retail shop, which sold household items such as shampoo, kitchen devices, and all kinds of odds and ends, at low prices. The shop was doing badly, sold next to nothing, and stayed open purely because of the owner's stubborn attitude. When Thoresen offered to rent the premises, everybody was happy. Not just the landlord, even the staff at the shop was glad to see someone new with the courage to start a business in this part of Ullevålsveien. Thoresen liked the location; it was just opposite the bus stop, where there was also a kiosk with a newsstand.

Thoresen had some money, not much, but enough to renovate and build a coffee bar from scratch.

In the beginning, the business was not a success, but after a few months the situation changed. Customers became regulars. Java experienced busy hours and business flourished. Thoresen started to get the feeling it would be possible to make a living from it.

Although he was very happy about how the coffee bar was doing, he was still unsure about the future. He felt very uncomfortable, when that same autumn, the coffee bar chain, Kaffebrenneriet, opened an outlet close by on the corner of the junction, Ullevålsveien and Waldemar Thranes Gate. However, it was also a positive signal:

> Just one more acknowledgement that my analysis of this
> neighborhood was right.

Thoresen soon also realized that the "extra" coffee bar had no obvious negative impact. On the contrary, the business expanded and it seemed as if the local clientele could be divided into categories; some preferred Java and

others Kaffebrenneriet. But more important: a cluster of coffee bars seemed to establish a vibrant street life, in which coffee bars were seen as being a natural ingredient. This consequently attracted even more people to this part of the street.

Not long after opening Java, Thoresen opened a second coffee bar. It is called Mocca and is located at Briskeby, west of the city center. There was no commercial motivation behind Thoresen's decision to branch out, but rather a curiosity to see whether the concept – with minor adjustments – would be applicable to a part of the city with a more permanent and static population. It would prove to work very well indeed. Thoresen is convinced that he has contributed to St. Hanshaugen's change of character over the past few years, and that the coffee bar there has had a much greater impact than the one at Briskeby:

> The street is full of life now, and the neighborhood has improved; it has become a lively, friendly area.

Thoresen is conscious of his role as an active agent in the urban field, not least as an urban innovator. He is greatly interested in coffee and the quality of coffee, and he knows more about these things than anyone else I know. Even internally in the coffee bar sector, he is something of a specialist. At the same time, he is interested in other factors of urban development, and he sees himself as a "transformer" of neighborhoods. Like the entrepreneurs of Kaffebrenneriet, he refers to changes in the coffee bar's immediate environment, and points to all the commercial agents that have followed in his footsteps since he started his coffee bar. To Thoresen, Java is an example of how an individual with a strong drive and belief in a project, can create something with important ripple effects.

### 6.3.3. Evita

When Elisabeth Toth established her business in Smalgangen, it seemed an odd spot for a coffee bar. That was, at least, what people told her. So why did she choose Grønland, and why Smalgangen?

> To me Grønland has always been an interesting place. I used to work in the area, and knew that although very many people are in motion here, there were remarkably few places to go – apart from the old shabby cafés.

She points to what she calls an urban pressure in the area, which seems to represent Oslo at its most "urban". The people here are city people following a city pattern and a flow that you do not find many other places. She also credits Grønland with the qualities possessed by its inhabitants:

> It's very varied. Not least, we have many immigrants living here. They are generally sociable people who enjoy conversation and coffee, and who don't drink alcohol. I've given that quite a bit of thought.

Anyone desiring proof of these claims is advised to take a walk down Smalgangen to Evita Espresso bar. You will find a different kind of people here than in the west of the city. The varied appearances of guests sitting at the tables witness different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as do the different languages one can hear spoken.

A year after Toth opened Evita, a new opportunity presented itself: premises at Brugata 17. She immediately recognized it as a brilliant location for an espresso bar; many people work in the vicinity, and the street is always crowded. In addition, the sidewalk is wide enough to accommodate an outdoor seating area. Again, she did everything on her own, and began the project with low start capital. This outlet was profitable almost from day one, proving Elisabeth Toth right in her choice of location. Running two coffee bars was hard work, and she had no ambitions of further expansion. However, one day something remarkable happened. A real estate developer, Pecunia, knocked on her door and invited her to be a part of a new project called "Grønlandskvartalene", an apartments and commercial complex in east central Oslo. At Teaterplassen ("Theater Place"), which is located in the middle of these city blocks, it was planned to include on the first floor establishments selling food and drink and other facilities.

When she opened at Teaterplassen in late 2006, it was as one of the first businesses established there; the rest of Teaterplassen was first completed in 2007. At that time only a few of the around 750 apartments on the floors above had been built and sold.

With Evita Espresso bar as an integrated part of the project, they achieved an effective means of promoting the housing project: "Evita *is* the coffee bar at Grønland – full stop." claimed the real estate office that handles the sale of the apartments (Pecunia 2008). Thus, Evita has become a brand that is directly tied to Grønland as a location. Without doubt, it has been important

in promotion of the new housing project in the heart of Grønland; and in the advertising material used for Teaterplassen, it has been given classic urban characteristics, if in slightly exaggerated terms. Teaterplassen is described as "an urban oasis" and "the vital nerve of Grønland";

> Sculptures, fountains and slim, tall trees reach for the heat of
> the sun – welcoming all … a the coffee bar, a greengrocer's, a
> 24-hour convenience store and restaurants serving sushi, tapas,
> Indian food and pizza, make Teaterplassen a vibrant addition to
> the diversity at Grønland.

 The ethnic variety is in this way emphasized as an asset, and the coffee bar, restaurants and other facilities are use to assert this claim.

Elisabeth Toth started out as an eager entrepreneur with a project nobody believed in, in a part of the city bypassed by everyone. Ten years on, the area is an integrated and necessary part of a huge property development scheme involving both private and public funding. The new apartment blocks, Grønlandskvartalene, are characterized by a high population density and questionable housing quality, as there are small or no out-door spaces for the occupants of the high-rise buildings. However, through the marketing mentioned above, the apartment blocks are related to a vibrant urban space characterized by a wide assortment of restaurants and bars.

The Evita Espresso bar plays the role of "the authentic Grønland coffee bar". However, the outlet at Teaterplassen was by no means an immediate success; Toth said there were few customers and low levels of activity in the neighborhood. However she said:

> But it's all about keeping at it. I had one year when business
> was really slow, before something suddenly happened. Today,
> things are running smoothly, and the large out-door seating
> area helps business along.

Toth is aware of her function in the neighborhood, and is especially eager to point out what Evita has contributed to Smalgangen: "Before I opened Evita, the area lacked a place to meet." She can outline the movements of various customer-groups through a typical day, and knows how important it is for the shopkeepers in the area now that they have a place to meet:

> They come in at 9 am – the shops open at 10 am – to sit and
> chat with each other before the working day begins, as this is
> virtually the only place where they can go.

### 6.3.4.    Kaffehjørnet

In 2003, Tonsenhagen Square had some shops and businesses: a grocery
store, a kiosk, a watchmaker, a hairdresser, a real estate agency and a
women's fashion store. The watchmaker located on the corner closed that
year; the premises being vacant, Mohammed Mahgoub decided the time was
ripe for him to open a coffee bar.

Mahgoub emphasizes the suburban structure of the area, and explains that
there is always potential for a coffee bar whenever there is a certain density
of people:

> When you actually think about it, it is strange that no one had
> done it before. After all the area, Årvoll and Tonsenhagen, has
> about 5000 inhabitants I think. That's a lot of people. And not
> one single café! Strange I thought.

Mahgoub was also convinced that the watchmaker's shop had the perfect
location:

> I called it Kaffehjørnet, because it is on the corner. Daylight
> comes in from all sides, which makes it feel larger than it
> actually is. And a corner is also a good place for people to hang
> out. You see that everywhere you go. Don't you?

Mahgoub makes a fair claim that Kaffehjørnet has met a need in the
community, not only for good coffee, but also a place where people can meet.
The tiny coffee bar is usually packed with customers, and during the day
there always seem to be a lot of parents on maternity leave together with their
kids.

> But also, I think that Kaffehjørnet makes Tonsenhagen and
> Årvoll more "urban", in a way. The coffee bar is a cozy place,
> and people like to relax and chat when they are here. Do you
> know what I mean?

As my observations and interviews illustrate (presented later in the
dissertation), Kaffehjørnet functions as an information hub that serves the
local community due to its openness, informality and location on a corner.

## 6.4. HARD FACTS

The data concerning the major customer base of the coffee bars, namely the
age group 20–39 years, sheds light on the transforming processes in Oslo,
and the potential for institutions like the coffee bar. People in their twenties
and thirties make up 36 % of the population of Oslo, giving the city as a
whole a young profile. If we look at the districts of the city, the figures
become more intriguing. In the central parts of the city, the percentage of
inhabitants in the age group 20–39 years is much higher. In Gamle Oslo the
category represents almost exactly 50 %; 55% in Grünerløkka; 56% in St.
Hans Haugen; 53% in Sagene and 45% in Frogner. All these figures are well
above the average. The other outlying parts of the town, south, north and
west, are different. In Vestre Aker the age group 20–39 years represents 14
%; in Nordstrand, 25 % and in Grorud, 30 %. These data show that there is a
massive over-representation of people in the age category 20–39 years in the
central areas of the city, and especially in the eastern-central areas. This over-
representation corresponds with the average size of houses and apartments
(Statistics Norway 2008).

The percentage of single households also varies in each district. The
statistics show that single households constitute more than 50% in only one
district – but this district is so small that it does not in fact count as a
contributor to the coffee bar customer base. The numbers for the other
districts however, show that single households make up a substantial part,
and that the more central a district is, the more likely it is to have a high
percentage of single households.

The data also illustrates that in districts with a high number of coffee bars,
the average size of the housing units is small. Areas with many single
households are likely to have a smaller average housing unit size. The
average housing unit size in 2006 was 75.8 m2 in the inner-city, compared to
97.5 m2 as the average (Oslo Kommune 2008, 108). These average figures

include many rather large apartments and houses in the outer part of the central city; more precise numbers for each district show this.

In the districts Grünerløkka, Sagene and Gamle Oslo, 2-room apartments are most common, closely followed by 3-room apartments. If we compare the graphic representation of Grünerløkka to for instance Søndre Nordstrand in the chart above, we notice an obvious difference.

The price level in the real estate market reflects some important factors. The relatively high prices in the central districts reflect social and cultural structures. Obviously, such structures exist, and when looking at the level of education in the different districts, a pattern becomes visible. Education is never a perfectly accurate indicator of class. Therefore, the levels of education in various districts do not form a blueprint of the city's class structure. The relationship between the two, however, is high in most western countries, also in Norway[11].

It makes sense to interpret these findings as an indication of social class structure; the division of east and west in Oslo is well established as representing opposite regions, concerning spatial and economic status. This division of the city into two is also emphasized by the fact that the percentage of people living below the poverty line follows the same geographical pattern (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 2007). However, can we in any way relate this to the distribution of the coffee bars? The immediate answer is no. The pattern of the coffee bars is not very similar to the pattern of economic class. Yet, if we investigate the social structures of the inner-city, we get a different picture (Wessel 2001, 891). The inner-city population has a high mobility, indicating frequent shift of residence. Those who move into the inner-city districts are generally of middle-class background with economic resources, whereas those who move into the inner part of the east from the inner west, are mostly young, often single and with moderate incomes  0). The average age is 33, and small households are typical: an average of 1.34 persons versus 1.9 persons among those who move out.

In other words, there is a visible pattern of young people with a high level of education – with typical middle-class features – moving into the inner parts of the east of Oslo.

The empirical data gathered here shows a change in the relative size of this social class in the central districts of Oslo; this indicates that the customer base for coffee bars is substantially higher in these districts. On the other hand, the importance in focusing on the development on the streets is nevertheless crucial. Even if there is a structural backing for the increase in

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[11] For further reading on the subject I recommend Marianne Nordlie Hansens *Class and inequality in Norway: the impact of social class origin on education, occupational success, marriage and divorce in the post-war generation* (Nordli Hansen 1995) and the article "Social stratification and attitudes: a comparative analysis of the effects of class and education in Europe*" by Matthis Kaljmin and Gerbert Kraaykamp (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 2007).

coffee bars, someone actually has to open and run them. In other words, it is micro-level activities I strive to understand, as it is not given that any macro-structure alone can bring about a flux of coffee bars opening in an area.

## 6.5. SOMETHING IN THE STREET

What the four entrepreneurs have in common is the strong belief that their businesses have a positive influence on their surroundings, making it livelier and attracting the public to the area where they operate.

The three downtown entrepreneurs emphasize how their businesses have contributed directly to the success of other stores and establishments in the vicinity, and how a coffee bar can pull a street, or a whole district, up a notch on the economic scale. This was certainly the case when Kaffebrenneriet and Java were established; although, Evita in Teaterplassen was an extreme case. In the cases of Kaffebrenneriet and Java, the local area gradually changed character soon after the stores were established. The neighboring shops were more or less completely substituted in the space of a few years. Shops selling goods were swapped for those offering various services. When a furrier closes to make room for a restaurant, this is an indication of changes in the consumption pattern. It would of course be misleading to claim that the coffee bar alone was responsible for this shift in the local economy, but it is meaningful to consider its part in the process. The entrepreneurs are probably right: their contributions to the city have most likely altered the local communities, and acted as catalysts in the shift from a goods-based economy to a post-modern one, directed at a lifestyle-oriented consumption.

An example of the opposite case was the opening of Evita Espresso bar in Smalgangen, which did not significantly alter the class character of the local area. The rest of Smalgangen is still pretty much the same as before; it contains mostly inexpensive stores. There is a real-estate agent, but no hairdresser's, no sushi bar, no local deli or popular fashion store. Apart from one trendy and pricey corner shop chain – Deli De Luca – the street has mostly shabby cafés, cut-price stores and no brand-clothes shops. It looks as though Evita has had no similar effect, and its clientele also differ from that of the other the coffee bars. However, both the owner and customers identify Evita with a more busy and lively environment in Smalgangen – maybe implying that Evita has brought about a change, but not regarding class. Where Kaffebrenneriet to a certain extent and especially Java recruit customers from the educated middle-class, the clientele at Evita is more representative of the population surrounding it[12]. Kaffehjørnet in

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[12] To some degree this is also true for the Evita outlet in Brugata. The third Evita outlet, however, the one at Teaterplassen, is of a completely different character. Here the customers mostly belong to the white educated middle-class – that is at least my understanding based on rather limited observations, not on a deeper examination. The internal variation at Grønland is, in other words, substantial, and the coffee bars seem to

Tonsenhagen Square is a very small business, but visually extremely poignant. It stands out from the rest of the activities in the area; the level of engagement in the street outside is high.

Based on my studies, Evita in Smalgangen seems to represent an exception to the rule.

All the other coffee bars seem to have had some effect on their surroundings, at least on a micro-level. It is not given that the coffee bar is the primary initiating force, but the data gathered from interviews might indicate such an explanation. The manager at Java points out how other stores, with the same kind of target customers, went from struggling to survive to achieving success, due to the arrival of the coffee bar.

The four entrepreneurs of Java, Kaffebrenneriet, Kaffehjørnet and Evita Espresso bar all agree on one concern: They make good coffee, and it is the quality of the coffee that is vital for the survival of the businesses. They also agree that the public, in other words everyone, as they target a wide range of customers, demand good coffee. A second issue on which they agree is that of the coffee bars' positive contributions to the local community, both directly by being nice, friendly places, and indirectly by bringing new life to the area.

I have shown here how four different agents perceive their own businesses, the characteristics of their environments and their impact on these environments. Even if these views are colored by the agent's subjective self understanding and subjective perceptions of their surroundings, they are valuable both by being informed observations and reflections, and by representing a more ideological perception of their own actions and deeds.

My overall curiosity, formulated in the research question raised in the introduction, has in this chapter been met at several levels. I have learned that the entrepreneurs are both skilled and hard working; that they have developed knowledge in their field of crucial importance for their success; that they are rather advanced observers of their neighborhoods and near environments, that their ideas of localization have proved right, and that they represented, when they started up, a new and radical understanding of consumption in the urban sphere: Nobody saw a market for coffee bars, they did, and they believed in it.

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have been integrated to the extent that they represent the different population groups who frequent the different areas.

# Chapter 7.   The customers

## 7.1.   INTRODUCTION

To find additional layers to enrich my understanding of the coffee bar phenomenon I turned to another interesting group: the users of the coffee bars, i.e. the customers. Most coffee bars attract a wide variety of people, and in this chapter I will describe and analyze the central motifs and behavior I observed and identified among such customers.

For this work I only interviewed regular customers since they normally contribute to the large majority of the visits a coffee bar receives; my study indicates that between 70 and 80 percent of the customers are regulars, and this number is also recognized as the standard in the industry (Schultz 1997, 88). Regular customers are also essential to a coffee bar due to their ability to bestow an identity and an atmosphere on a place through their relationship with the staff and each other.

In general there are three different types of customers: those who just pick up a coffee and leave; those who use the locale to be alone, and those who use it for socializing. The first group is not included in my study, partly because most of the coffee bars receive limited sales from these customers, but more essentially because these users don't use the coffee bar for anything beyond the purchase of the commodity. They don't set their mark on the place. The two groups I focus on are those who are using the coffee bar in a social way, and those who as a rule use it alone (of course, a person can belong to both groups, but for clarity's sake I have separated them here).

The qualitative material I have gathered indicates that there is an important difference in the behavior of and use of coffee bars by those who engage in socializing processes and those who keep to themselves. The description below is therefore divided into two parts, the first called "On your own" and the second "Social aspects". This division allows me to describe

each group more clearly, although I have had to make certain choices as a result: there are phenomena that I located under "On your own" that would also have made sense under "Socializing". Before I discuss this division in detail it is worth examining the themes which all of the coffee bar visitors I interviewed identified as important: Coffee bars are understood as inexpensive, informal, considered to offer a low threshold and to represent urbanity.

## 7.2. THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES

### 7.2.1. Inexpensive

When I say that most of the coffee bar customers defined the coffee bar they use as inexpensive, they do not mean that the coffee they are served is inexpensive. 30 kroner for a cappuccino is not inexpensive. On the contrary, many would regard 30 kroner for a cup of coffee as expensive. Before the coffee bars came to Oslo coffee was in general a more modestly priced commodity. Coffee was established as something with a low price tag, and there was not a reputable regime where price and quality were tightly linked. For many, "coffee quality" was a reference to how many hours had elapsed since the coffee had been brewed, not the quality of the beans and the roasting. With the arrival of the coffee bars this discourse changed, and coffee quality in itself became a topic of interest.

What the customers mean when they say that is inexpensive to use is that it is *relatively* inexpensive. There are not very many places you can visit and only pay for a cup of coffee, and continue to stay – if you wish – for hours. Ordering just a cup of coffee at a café where most people eat seems inappropriate to many customers. As Renate, a hairdresser – one of the regulars at Evita – emphasized:

> It is an acceptable price, for me that is essential. I can afford to stop for a cup of coffee. I can't afford to eat breakfast at Evita. But a coffee, that's OK.

Most coffee bars are also equipped with today's newspapers and, if you take that into account in your budget they might even offer a reasonable value compared with buying a newspaper yourself. As one of the entrepreneurs behind the chain Kaffebrenneriet emphasized:

> Where else do you get access to a room with free newspapers
> and the ability to stay for as long as you want for the price of a
> cup of coffee?

Although this argument makes sense, one of the baristas I spoke with during my research said that she had been thinking of the daily cost many of the customers must include in their budget:

> I have customers that spend between 50 and 100 kroner here
> every day, year-round. That is a substantial sum of money, at
> least for a person living on a normal income. But then I guess
> they consider it is worth the price.

### 7.2.2.   Informality

A coffee bar primarily sells coffee, and that very simple fact is one of the reasons for the informality a coffee bar represents. The option just to order coffee, and nothing else, makes an important contribution to the informality of the coffee bars, at least according to Anders, a regular at Java. Anders is in his late thirties, and works in marketing.

> A cup of coffee is something very common. OK, the coffee
> served inside here is posh, yes, with all the different versions
> you can have, like cappuccino, macchiato, caffe latte, double,
> simple, you name it, but it is still a cup of coffee. Don't forget
> that.

Anders underscored that coffee in itself is a drink that connotes "a relaxed normal attitude", and that coffee is not something most people would label as out their reach either culturally or in taste.

> "You can order 'today's coffee' if you don't like the other
> more sophisticated coffee beverages, and that's something you
> are accustomed to,

Anders said, referring to coffee as an integral part of most Norwegians' diets.

That a coffee bar is a simplistic service institution further contributes to the informality. You have to stand in line for the products you buy; you pay at the counter and bring them back to where you have chosen your seat. You are doing a lot of the job yourself. As another customer explained:

> A coffee bar is not a canteen, but on the other hand, it shares many of the same features.

There is a certain truth to this statement, the similarity to a canteen, to the self-service part of the customer experience. Even if it is easy to argue that the production of your cup of coffee is a nurturing and skill demanding process – the other parts of the experience are marked by a high degree of self-service. The informality is directly connected to the staff and the tasks they do and don't do. Since there is no table service, the staff becomes less dominant, and the space inside a coffee bar becomes more the property of those who visit it than is true in most restaurants and cafes.

> One of the reasons why I feel comfortable in most coffee bars is that the staff leaves me alone. I mean they just don't walk around and ask you "Anything else?" or "How was it?" That makes the space more mine…

said Sølve, who works at an advertising firm and is in his early forties. He wanted to emphasize that a good coffee bar "has the ability to connect to the normal people in the street outside." This argument is also relevant regarding the dress code, which as Sølve noted is "as liberal as the street outside". Many of those I interviewed pointed out that a liberal dress code is obviously a factor but at the same time also based on an incorrect assumption, namely that Norwegian society in general is governed by a conservative dress code. As one of them put it, in fact:

> Nowadays you can enter a top notch restaurant in jeans, and no-one will raise an eyebrow.

Still, the comparison to the restaurant is productive for what it suggests about the understood *appeal* of a coffee bar.

Olga also differentiated the coffee bar from other places where drinks and food can be bought and consumed, and underscored that the coffee bar is a more informal setting to meet. She added:

> …restaurants are very different. It's both a question of money and time, but maybe most important … a restaurant is … much more of a project.

References to the informality of a coffee bar also encapsulate other qualities, more subtle and less easy to observe – many of them further elaborated below – but most importantly the relaxed mood, the mental openness of the space. However expressed, it is clear that informality is important, and coffee bars stand out as places with a low threshold – from a psychological perspective. It is worth noting that there is a considerable correlation between the experience of informality – a mentally low threshold – and the physically low threshold or barrier to entry of many coffee bars.

The question of informality was an important one for the customers I interviewed. From what coffee bar customers said to me, it is clear that informality is a basic feature and an absolute precondition; it is a principal part of what makes a coffee bar a coffee bar. But most customers used other words in their attempt to describe informality, and it is my interpretation of their verbal descriptions that brings me to label informality as a requirement. Customers often used the simple word *mood*, and the more or less synonymous *atmosphere* to describe what I consider to be indications of informality. Everyone seemed to be seeking this *mood*. A client at Java said:

> Atmosphere, now that's important, I think. This place, I might call cozy. Very cozy, even! On the other hand, it isn't a place you can hang out at for a long time, as they only have bar stools to sit on.

Or as Hilde, a regular at Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien said:

I think it's very nice to be inside here. Although there are
chairs outside, and the weather is fine right now, I don't like
sitting out there. The coffee tastes better in here.

### 7.2.3.    Low threshold

When I argue that coffee bars represent commercial spaces with a low
threshold, at least compared with most cafés and restaurants, one factor I give
more weight to is the transparency of their façades. Coffee bars are mainly
characterized by a transparent façade, although the extent of transparency
varies; some fronts are all glass, while others have very large glass windows.
The transparency seems to have many effects. One is – as discussed later in
this chapter – the possibility of being able to look out the window at the street
outside is an important feature for many users, especially those who use a
coffee bar alone. Another effect of transparency is that those who are
considering entering a coffee bar can – without actually crossing the
threshold to enter the locale – make a judgment about it beforehand. A
transparent façade lowers the barrier to entry. When you sit inside a coffee
bar and observe those who are coming in, most do it with a self-confidence
that reveals that they have been there before. But there are also people who
display more insecurity, people who seem to be considering whether it is
worth entering or not. These potential customers have become accustomed to
service providers that – at an increasing pace – are being equipped with
transparent façades. From the beginning of the 1990s to the present, there has
been a boom in glass architecture and a transformation of the architecture and
urban design in most Western cities[13]; the increasing frequency of transparent
façades may also be interpreted as the realization of a part of the modern
movement's program[14].

The designer Petter Abrahamsen (mentioned above) argues that it is not
possible to understand the current development of coffee bars, first floor
restaurants and cafes without reflecting on the new technologies in glass and
glass façades. When photographing and then comparing the façades of coffee
bars, it becomes evident that the coffee bar typology in itself is a substantial
contribution to the increased use of glass in façades.

Abrahamsen obviously has a point in that the glass façades in themselves
make the coffee bar one of the success stories of the service industry, and the

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[13] The more radical use of glass is an intrinsic part of modern architecture and is linked to
technological innovations. For an overview of the development in this area since the early 1990s
see *New Glass Architecture* by Richard and Gilbert (Richards and Gilbert 2006) .
[14] For further reading see e.g. Charles Jencks' books on architecture and the modern movement
(Jencks 1973).

customers also seem to appreciate this aspect of the design. Kristine, a high school teacher in her mid-thirties, is a regular customer at Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien and is aware of the qualities of transparency:



**Figure 27. Huge windows at Kaffebrenneriet. Photo: EDH. 14.04.2010**

> It's a question of security. When I walk down the street and look into Kaffebrenneriet I can easily observe if it will be comfortable for me to enter. Is it empty or is it full, do they have a space for me there; do I have to walk further? That quality is essential for a coffee bar. That is what makes it so easy for me to enter.

After being introduced to this argument, I developed a question I asked many of my informants: "What is your reaction when you enter a place – a bar, café or restaurant – and realize that there isn't space for you?"

The answers were rather compelling: all found it uncomfortable, and wanted to avoid these experiences in the future. One even said it made him "feel like a misfit, someone who is not welcome." The presence of the glass facades provides the logical response to all of these experiences. Or again, as Kristine said: "It is a question of security."

### 7.2.4. Urbanity

In their description of their use of coffee bars, several of my informants offered interpretations which implied that coffee bars are places where urbanity is created and nurtured. However, many of the informants explicitly refer to the coffee bars as making urbanity and urban life possible; some of

these are referred to in chapter three. For instance, one informant, Ole, observed that coffee bars are where:

> …you find true urbanity…urbanity, that's the special feeling of a densely-filled room, where people are always coming and going; where there's always a buzz in the air; that's urbanity.

Olga stated that a coffee bar is:

> …something urban and it's a bit of luxury. And you're alone in the crowd. A place like this is somehow dynamic. You feel like you're on your own, but then you can go out and get a bit of life. It's all about the urban life style.

When visiting Kaffehjørnet, a coffee bar located in a suburban structure, that quality becomes especially apparent. Ella, in her early thirties, on parental leave, is a regular at Kaffehjørnet and visits the coffee bar almost every day. In her view the coffee bar keeps her connected with the urban life she left when she and her husband moved out here.

> I was here all the time when my first born was little. It was, and still is, a good place for those of us who took the *big* step of moving out here to the "forest" – a "staggering" 17 minutes away from the city by bus. In an Oslo setting that is quite a distance.

She sees Kaffehjørnet as being proof that young people who settle outside the city center want to bring their social activities with them to their new local areas. For Ella, Kaffehjørnet gives her a sense of the urban life she "thought" she had left behind when she moved out here.

> Kaffehjørnet is a meeting place which gives you a taste of urban life. You get to know people too – first the people who work here, and then people who live in the area.

Nils a carpenter, just turned forty, lives in the neighborhood and is a regular at Kaffehjørnet. He usually spends some time reading the papers with a nice cup of coffee, and looks at his visits here as relaxation in its purest form:

> I work shifts and have quite a bit of free time during the day, when I like to come here. I grew up in the area and have moved back; and although Kaffehjørnet wasn't the main reason for doing so, I'm certainly glad it's here.

Linn, in her mid-forties, is originally from the countryside, and works in a bank in the center of Oslo; she has lived here for many years, and agrees with Nils:

> I love living here, so close to nature. But access to good coffee is important. It's something completely different, and it connects us with the city. So many things come with that cup of coffee.

Johanne, one of the new residents at Tonsenhagen, said that she finds herself as pretty representative for the new generation of people who live here: "I used to live in Grünerløkka, and it was very nice, except I got tired of buildings. The idea of moving out of the city center became very appealing after I had my first child." Johanne has three kids and will soon be thirty; she stresses that Kaffehjørnet offers more than just an attractive service; it is something more:

> The coffee bar makes this area more complete. You get used to good coffee living in the city.

Erlend lives in Årvollskogen, but he is not a regular customer at Kaffehjørnet. Although he enjoys coffee, he thinks one of Kaffehjørnet's main functions is attracting people who do not use the surrounding forest areas for leisure activities; he enjoys jogging:

> The coffee bar represents for urban people what the cabins represent in the forest areas, for people who go walking or running there. Kaffehjørnet survives because of women on maternity leave and young parents at home with babies.

When addressing the question of urbanity explicitly, most customers will applaud and say "Yes, coffee bars are a facet of urban life". I have been very careful in raising the subject for exactly that reason; it is important when working with interviews and observations that the individual's subjective experience is brought to the front. The really clear distinction in my empirical material is that most of the informants who use one of the three coffee bars located in urban environments seldom use the terms "urban" and "urbanity"; on the other hand, the informants at Tonsenhagen and Årvoll use the terms more often[15].

Nevertheless, the coffee bar seems to be viewed as an urban phenomenon for most users; some will say it explicitly, while others will regard it as self-evident and not make an issue out of it.

## 7.3. ON YOUR OWN

The next pages are dedicated to a description of those people who spend time in coffee bars on their own. There is a common notion that coffee bars encourage certain forms of sociality, and indeed there is a certain truth to that perspective. However, if you watch the spaces filling up with people drinking coffee, you will soon observe that many people are there on their own. This observation also finds valid support in statistical material: the majority of coffee bar customers actually visit coffee bars on their own[16]. I have illustrated that there is a substantial difference between the four coffee bars in this study regarding this characteristic. My intention in the following discussion is to attempt to understand their reasons for going on their own to a coffee bar. I will begin with a description of the situation before the coffee bars achieved popularity in Oslo.

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[15] The reason why they differ on this topic is probably because a coffee bar is considered by most informants to be a "natural" part of the city – a notion and a discussion I will return to in the concluding chapter.

[16] For instance, please refer to Allegra-Strategies (Allegra-Strategies 2007) and Nancy Koehn (Koehn 2001, 142).

### 7.3.1.   A new situation

Being alone in a place where they serve food and beverages was until recently a social taboo in Oslo; however, during the course of the 1990s this taboo disappeared; at least, that seems to be the overall opinion among those I have spoken to during my research. Of course the taboo had its limits and exceptions. For as long as there has been a mass culture, there have also existed commercial spaces and places, where there has been cultural acceptance for persons being on their own. For those who have sought psychological isolation combined with physical integration into a mass of people, their options have been few, and they have received limited acceptance. This is probably due to the fact that being alone in commercial and social spaces in Oslo has previously in some contexts been associated with awkwardness. It has been viewed as an explicit display of "loneliness" and has seldom been understood as an intentional status chosen out of preference.

Of course there have been exceptions. Women have traditionally been able to visit confectioners ("konditori" in Norwegian) on their own (women make up the majority of the customers); these establishments have traditionally sold pastries, cakes, buns and rolls and lower quality brewed coffee. In addition there are the hotel bars and the fast food shops, which are places where one could always comfortably visit on your own. These three types of places have in common that in addition to serving refreshments, they also offer a connection to a social setting. One can assume, however, that not everybody felt comfortable entering these places on their own.

The primary reason for this supposed uneasiness is cultural: it has not always been considered "normal" to go to a café or restaurant on your own. Most restaurants and cafés have been designed for togetherness and company. A table is intended for two or more people who already know each other; and two or more chairs around a table are a demonstration of the "true and authentic" function of a table. And consider the phrase: "a table for two"; listen how easily it rolls off the tongue compared to "a table for one"!

This is still the situation in many restaurants. A single person entering will often be shown to a small table prepared for two. The headwaiter will then often remove one set of cutlery. This action is perhaps a demonstration of the essence of a table – it should be for at least two people; and how being alone in a restaurant is, although acceptable, still breaking "the norm". However, what is certain is that things have changed over the last 10-15 years.

The bar as a phenomenon is different; it also caters for the guest who comes alone. The "brotherhood of men" in bars is a familiar concept in most cultures where alcohol is sold over the counter. In Southern Europe the bar

has been a place for coffee as well as alcoholic beverages (Katovich and Reese 1987, 308).

However, things were different for women. A bar was traditionally not a place for single women; the general context being one of men on their own and alcohol. Women would constitute a minority, and their presence was often interpreted as having sexual associations. The bar as a place for men on their own will often socially exclude women; an interesting related fact is the fact that prostitution has often been based in and around bars (Edlund and Korn 2002, 121).

In a coffee bar the situation is quite different, and the arrival of coffee bars changed women's access to public spaces. This topic is so interesting that it deserves to be researched independently, and therefore I have chosen not to explore it any further here. Symptomatically, the interviewees that appreciate the possibility of being alone in coffee bars are often women; such as Ingrid, a consultant in her late twenties. Her description of Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien emphasizes what she identifies as being the most important quality for her, the lack of sociality connected to the place:

> It may not be silent here, but the sounds you hear are produced by people who drink coffee; who turn the pages of their newspapers; the sounds of the milk steamer; the making of the coffee and the words that pass between the baristas and the customers. In fact, none of the people inside this room are actually talking to each other, at least not at the moment. You just have a bunch of people who do not know each other, but who all use the place. As a place to be, you know…

### 7.3.2.   Routines

On the basis of the qualitative material collected for this dissertation, I believe it is possible to identify a set of factors that can further explain the success of coffee bars. First, I would like to focus on people's 'routines'. Many of the people I have interviewed during my research often refer to their almost daily visit to the coffee bar as part of their "routine"; thus logically they are also regular customers. The definition of a 'regular' is a customer who goes to the same coffee bar at more or less the same time every day. Ingrid, who is a regular customer at Kaffebrenneriet, describes this in the following words:

Even if there might be visual indications that things are
dynamic and going on, in reality it is not the case. Each day is
like every other day, the people that are here are more or less
the same people – day in, day out.

In other words, she not only comes back every day at the same time; the
place itself is also the same every day. This is a description of perpetual
motion, of a daily recurring scene. Although I have to admit that my own
observations differ from Ingrid's; I see people nod and exchange greetings; I
also acknowledge that most of the customers do not enter the premises in the
company of others, and rather few engage in conversation. Ingrid said she is
convinced by the idea that nothing really happens:

> … everything is stable; it's not like a river; this is inert land,
> solid rock. Regularity is the conclusion of our everyday life.

Every morning, after she has taken her kids to the kindergarten, she sits here
for a while; before facing hours of work in a busy office, she comes here,
orders a coffee – always the same type of coffee, a double cortado – reads the
newspapers, she prefers Dagbladet, one of the tabloids.  Ingrid explains that
she likes the rhythm that the coffee bar contributes to her daily life, and hints
at the needs for routines:

> It's something I've been accustomed to doing over the years.
> Something I find…satisfying.

Olga emphasizes that the coffee bar offers her something almost intimate; a
place where she has the feeling of belonging:

> There are so many things in my life that I don't do. I don't go
> to the gym; I don't have kids or a husband. I don't even have a
> dog to walk. If it wasn't for that ridiculous job of mine, I would
> have had one. But I have Kaffebrenneriet.

Olga has a very clear definition of why she visits Kaffebrenneriet:

It's a routine, but a positive one. It's something I long for.
Something I feel for. When I'm there, I'm always satisfied.

For her this routine is important; for instance, her working life lacks such
routine. Visiting Kaffebrenneriet everyday covers one of the things she said
belongs to other types of life. Anders, who works in an advertising firm, very
often starts the day with a coffee at Java. He finds himself in a similar
situation, also motivated by the ability to create regularity.

My visits are an important routine in my life. At least for the
present. I think I have been coming regularly for two years; but
on the other hand, that doesn't a mean a commitment for life. I
can grow tired of course – that's possible. But for the time
being, it's perfect. I need it. It gives my life some rhythm.

What Anders is saying is rather similar to what all the other "regulars" I have
interviewed say: the visit to the coffee bar has become a part of their
consumption of time, and whether this is called a routine or a habit, it is an
integrated part of their daily life. Some even include the coffee bar visit into
their written schedule, such as Finn Christian:

Maybe it's not a routine, although I write it into my schedule.
However, on the other hand, it is a routine, since I am so often
at a coffee bar. But if you were to ask me from a psychological
point of view, I would say that routines are extremely
important for the psychological well being for most of us.
Routines are our mental harbors.

### 7.3.3. Contemplation

Olga, Ingrid and most of the informants in this chapter share the view that the
coffee bar is a place where they can sit and contemplate – where mere
contemplation is one of the reasons why they are regular users. Some of those
I have interviewed intentionally use coffee bars as a place for what they call
"sorting things out", "clearing the mind", and "to reflect on life". Anders
adheres to this view:

> It's a very existentialistic experience, drinking coffee, looking out at the street, looking at nothing really. While sitting here I fall into a meditative mode... Sometimes I just think about almost anything that comes into my mind. Other times I try to come to terms with the 'big questions'. There are so many things in my own life I must try to understand; there are so many aspects of my personality I'd like to understand, to come closer to....

Anders emphasizes this as being one of his reasons for visiting Java. It is a place that makes it possible for him to be alone: "I don't appreciate the company of others when I'm at Java, because I like to be on my own."

Anders is attracted to what he calls "peace"; he seems to find that Java enhances his inner peace:

> There is a peaceful attitude at this place; even if it is busy – on one level – it leaves you alone. That's where the peace is.

Anders likes to use the term "self- interrogation" about the "conversations" he has with himself. He is not very satisfied with his life; he openly admits that his relationships with women are "complicated"; his relationship with his parents is "fragile"; and he has also noticed that he's becoming dissatisfied with his work.

> I think I'm pretty normal; I haven't identified what I really am; I'm searching for something…And the coffee bar is ... my temple…

he said, laughing, adding that he finds his choice of words rather silly; however, they still describe "reality" rather precisely. Anders emphasizes that his "reality" is the same reality most people in today's society share:.

> You know, most people wonder about life, the meaning of it. God is definitively dead for the most of us.

Anders paints a big picture here; he describes the coffee bar as a place where people's inner selves engage in permanent self-confronting activities (a term I return to in chapter 9). Amongst the informants I have interviewed, Anders in particular is the person who has especially described his use of a coffee bar along these lines; however, most other coffee bar visitors would seem to agree on this point. What makes his description important to me is his ability to relate the experience of meditative or philosophical time-consumption with the design features of the coffee bars.

### 7.3.4.    Observing and being observed

Anders, who certainly knows how to express himself, said that a coffee bar is: "…basically a seat at a window", from where he can observe the street, and all the people in it: "I like looking at the streets, especially this one. It's full of people, it's very… it's interesting, indeed". He describes the urban scenery, and comments:

> As long as there is a certain dynamic aspect to it, it's good.
> Good for thinking.

Anders has reflected upon the design of the huge windows:

> I think that is one of the reasons I like coffee bars, and
> especially this coffee bar, Java.

When asked to elaborate on what he means by "interesting", he mentions the ability to follow the changes, such as in the scenery; the great number of small changes taking place all the time. The bus coming, the bus leaving, a beautiful girl walking by, an old lady walking at an incredibly slow speed - hardly moving her body at all, strange people, those with a shocking visual appearance, and the normality of most people.

> I'm by nature very visually-oriented. A window where you can
> peep without embarrassment, that's perfect for me.

Anders relates the scenery outside, or at least his visual consumption of the street scenery, to his inner universe:

> Let's picture a parking lot; I don't think that would work.
> That's a dismal scene; it wouldn't be good for thinking.

I find it hard to disagree, and also when Ingrid describes her activity of looking out at the street, she tends to describe the dynamic aspect of the scenery:

> I like to look at people passing by along the sidewalk, and the traffic. People moving; some walk slowly as if the day has not yet started; some are in a hurry; some just look chaotic; some have strollers, some walk hand in hand; some are slow and relaxed; some are on the phone.

Ingrid describes how some people talk to each other as they walk down the road; how some talk to themselves; how some sing a tune, probably the one they are listening to on their iPod; some hum; others have their eyes set on the sidewalk; others focus on something beyond; some do not seem to care what is going on around them; others look through the coffee bar window and right at her. She likes it when this happens, although she never reacts. Ingrid does not nod; she does not respond to eye contact. She does not admit to being looked at:

> This is something new. It wasn't like that before, but now it is. You can sit there all day, if you like, in a window; you can watch and you can be watched. You're on display, and that's ok, you can watch them, and they can watch you. And yes, that's the city.

For Finn Christian, the relationship between the street and the coffee bar is essential. If the coffee bar is not open towards a lively street he avoids it; and he finds that many coffee bars are a little dull, when they don't have this street-window relationship:

> I prefer places where it's possible to sit and look out into the streets. I feel that the view, even if it's not nature, is an interesting view.

"The view" as he describes it does not have to be very busy or very visually appealing either, but it must be dynamic:

> It's what a city is all about. All those people on their way to something – I don't know; isn't that just very appealing. People moving through the streets.

For Olga that feeling of sitting in a window, doing nothing, maybe reading a newspaper, looking at the street life, is also about "the view".

> I love the mountains. When I'm on a mountain top, I think it's the possibility of being able to see almost to the end of the world that attracts me. It's not the same here, but it's also a kind of "view". It has to be ... interesting.

Olga also uses the word 'interesting' with more or less the same meaning as the other informants; but she includes one important refection, which is also shared by Ingrid:

> Maybe it's because I'm a girl, but people also look at me. I'm rather a shy person so I shouldn't like it. It's not that I love it, but I accept it. It's a part of it. And you also have to ask yourself: "Are they really looking at you?" Maybe it's narcissism that a lot of people with too much self-esteem think they are being looked at; but in fact they're the ones doing the looking. If you see what I mean…?

Olga's description provides an opportunity to gain more insight. She suggests that there might be a certain exaggerated interest in one's own visual qualities; i.e. that sitting in a huge window "on display" to people passing by

makes them believe that they are viewed as desirable objects. Olga also offers another explanation; she admits that being looked at "is a part of it", and suggests therefore that there is some pleasure in being looked at. Following her argument, I could suggest that coffee bars seems to accommodate the spread of a modest form of exhibitionism; and this line of reasoning often strikes a chord with columnists when they portray contemporary urban life; or, for instance, in Helen Fielding's novel, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Fielding 1998).*,* where one of the qualities of the coffee bars is that they allow people to put themselves "on display".

However, this notion of a widespread, and almost "democratic", form of exhibitionism does not seem to be among the most frequently given reasons for visiting coffee bars. On the other hand, the element of reward is a reason often given.

### 7.3.5.   Reward

Several of those I have interviewed have commented that drinking a cappuccino, café latte or a macchiato in a coffee bar is a reward they give themselves. For instance, Kai said:

> That cup of cappuccino is a reward in itself, but also a reward
> in another sense: it creates extra time.

The function of rewards is a part of the internal life in most organizations and essential for efficiency. But what Kai and others are doing is that they adopt this strategy on an individualized level – in pace with the autonomy of their work – and transfer it to locations outside of the workplace. Kristine who: "…has a problem with coffee, it keeps me too awake" and therefore prefers tea, has observed that there is a difference between tea and coffee:

> Coffee has a kind of "time element". Just like cigarettes. You
> can sit drinking a cup of coffee for a pretty long time. You can
> treat yourself to a cup of coffee. You "take a cup of coffee[17]".
> It's an idiomatic expression. It refers to a unit of time – a break
> – you know more or less how long it takes. But tea – I'm a
> typical tea drinker – is drunk differently. It has a different
> chemical effect on the body, which means it is part of a

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[17] In Norwegian the term to "ta en kaffe" literally means "to take a coffee", it can also be translated into "to have a cup of coffee".

different ritual. With coffee you get a kind of break, whereas
tea provides a kind of relaxation, and it is not the same as a
break.

Kristine points towards an essential integrated part of the coffee consumer's
everyday life, i.e. that a good cup of coffee can function as a "reward", a
commodity that in itself implies the idea of a break, i.e. "a coffee break".
Coffee as a reward has long traditions in western societies, and was earlier
often drank in combination with cigarettes. In the industrial sector coffee and
cigarettes were integrated into the schedules of workdays, as rutinized
rewards, where a break in the work schedule automatically meant the
consumptions of these goods (Dandridge 1986, 162).

The integration of coffee breaks as a part of working life is illustrated in
many studies (See for instance (Burawoy 1979, 59)). In Great Britain, tea
became the dominant drink during the eighteenth century and replaced coffee
(Pomeranz and Topik 1999, 84). Historians will often conclude that tea has
had the same position in Great Britain as coffee has had in most other
industrial countries (Johnsen 2008, 95).

On the basis of the collected data, people who frequent coffee bars on
their own are more likely to refer to a cup of high quality coffee as being a
"reward", than those who use coffee bars for socializing activities. That
difference in orientation seems logical to many of the informants, and as Finn
Christian remarks: "When you're alone in a coffee bar, it's an act of
individualism – a relationship between you and your ambitions, or your
thought and ideas. Your coffee is crucial to you." Kristine elaborates on that
answer by saying that "also the idea of giving yourself a reward is perhaps a
way of explaining to yourself that you've taken a break, in order to legitimize
it." She said that in reality most people really do not need coffee breaks, their
work is not so tiresome; but that the idea related to taking a break is a
construction based on the notion "of hard manual labor and the reward
waiting there for you". Ingrid, on the other hand, rebuffs the whole idea of a
coffee break being a reward. In her perspective coffee consumed in coffee
bars has no need of being legitimized by such a construction. Then again, she
emphasizes another perspective – that coffee breaks are productive: "I think
most people sitting here drinking coffee are not at all thinking that they do it
'because they deserve it'. On the contrary, they do it as a part of their
interaction with the world – the coffee makes them think better – reflect
more; you know... see things clearer. There's no need for an excuse".

### 7.3.6. Privacy

Observing people in the various coffee bars, I have noticed how easy it is for people to sit rather close to one another without talking or even exchanging friendly small talk. Some of the customers will nod or smile when someone takes a seat next to them, but many act as if they are alone in the room.

A coffee bar which I find rather busy is in Ingrid's opinion quiet; people come and go all the time; small conversations fill the room; the noise from the steaming of the milk; from the coffee grinder; from the cash register etc. "I don't register those noises, they're there, but nevertheless. There's also noise in your own apartment, from the radio for instance. Well I find privacy here. It's a very private space for me; I feel more private here than in my own kitchen."

Ingrid is commenting on a phenomenon many coffee bar customers experience: the feeling of privacy; a privacy that is hard to interpret from observations alone, and a privacy that first and foremost is a mental state. The idea that someone is more private in a semipublic space than in his or her own apartment is easy to reject as vain talk, or as an exaggeration. However, if I take her statement at face value, which I think I must do, then the coffee bar supplies her with a space where she feels she can be alone and engage in her inner private life.

Not all of my informants use the term "privacy", but those I have interviewed who mostly frequent coffee bars on their own, share Ingrid's opinion. Kai is a consultant, and in his late thirties. His schedules are tight, his income is rather high, and he said this: "For me it's a feeling of being surrounded by a private space, a space no one can break into. That's the exclusiveness that characterizes all private spaces."

It is a to a certain extent a paradox that many of those who live alone, also visit a coffee bar to be alone, to stay alone. Or is it? Olga, who is a sharp observer and can describe the internal life of the coffee bar in great detail, has noticed that a coffee bar is a place where the difference between those who socialize and those who do not is often quite great. In her opinion, customers like herself, who come alone and leave alone, do not engage in any social interaction during their stay at the coffee bar; they experience privacy at one level – the privacy connected to the mind; to the thoughts they are engaged in; their visual connection to the street outside, to the other aspects of life that are not present there. Then again, they also consume the sociality of the others in the coffee bar: "It is a bit watching TV – you watch them, you listen to them, but they don't notice you."

Finn Christian is another person who is attracted to the peace and privacy of the coffee bar. I met him in a coffee bar that I do not regularly go to, and nodded to him because I thought I had met him previously, although I could

not be quite sure. He has one of those faces that look familiar, but I wasn't able to place him. He realized I was uncertain who he was, and introduced himself. We talked a little and then he left the coffee bar. In the few minutes we talked it became clear to me that he – maybe more than anyone I had met before – used the coffee bar regularly as a provider of a service rather than as a retailer of coffee. He was paying for solitude. I later contacted him and asked him for an interview.

Finn Christian is in his mid-thirties. He is a psychologist, and works for a firm that specializes in organizational processes and caters for individual clients in work-related situations. He enjoys his work, but it is a very intense job. And this is where the coffee bar comes into the picture. To Finn Christian, the coffee bar represents a place where, during the course of the day, he can rebuild his energy and find peace in being alone:

> I can sit back for a while, and I like going alone. I just like to sit there and drink something hot and look at the people outside, or just do nothing, or maybe just read the papers. During a relatively busy day at work, I manage to put aside half an hour, maybe one hour. Occasionally, as a special luxury, I can have two hours off just to read the newspapers and relax. However, my visits here are intentional: I insert them into my schedule and inform my colleagues.

Finn Christian arranges this in the following way: if he has six clients one day, he knows he has will have a free hour between 2 pm and 3 pm. Finn Christian's strategic use of coffee bars is related to his work, or to put it another way: work is his reason for going there. He does not go there every day, but about three times a week. Especially when working long hours, the coffee bar is a necessity:

> I work in the clinic, but also as a consultant and adviser, and I am responsible for marketing. …you have to do something else, you have to change your environment…I need somewhere where I can get away, and where I can turn off my mobile…and reload.

To Finn Christian, an important function of the coffee bars is that they are places where he is "unavailable". However, the choice of coffee bar is important to him:

> I prefer a place where it's not too crowded, where they have today's newspapers and where it's possible to sit and look out into the streets. I feel that the view, even if it's not nature, should be interesting.

Although coffee bars can be viewed as being arenas for socializing, it is the fact that you can go there and talk to no one that makes them so valuable to Finn Christian. For him it is essential. The solitude is a state that frees him from obligations, making the coffee bar a place:

> …where no one expects anything of me... I won't say it's a meditative experience, but I like to protect my energy."

Although Finn Christian is not into the New Age scene, he sometimes uses the type of language that is associated with it. He uses the term "energy" a lot. To him, *energy* can refer to various types of phenomena and experiences. He said he can feel when he is running out of energy, and tries to get away from the office before he runs completely empty:

> You know yourself … And when you feel that you stop functioning at work, you know…

To him, being alone is a resource that he can use strategically. It is a tool he needs in his daily work. It has an effect on his psychological state, which at the end of the day is actually a question of efficiency – the coffee bar is part of the foundation he has built his career on. Finn Christian has made new acquaintances in coffee bars in the past, but it does not happen often:

> There is something in being alone, where you don't have to relate to others. Just being someone who observes.

Finn Christian seems to be typical of a certain category of customers who have an instrumental attitude towards coffee bars. Kai is another customer I have got to know, and his use of the coffee bar is also fundamentally instrumental: "I am a latte-man; I like the foam, the thick foam." Looking into the tall café latte in front of him, Kai said: "Coffee's ok, but latte is heaven". Kai, who works in an office nearby, said that strictly speaking he does not have the time to visit Kaffebrenneriet:

> I'm a man of routines; I have small children and their needs run my life. I come in late, and leave early, so when I'm at work, I have to work like hell. But I've found out, to my great pleasure, that if I take a break down here, fifteen minutes, and drop lunch, it gives me more time. I eat my packed sandwiches at my counter reading or writing; down here I do nothing. I just sit and gaze into the street. Very often, I sit over there.

Kai points in the direction of a corner of the coffee bar, which has windows all the way down to the floor, and where there is a narrow, high counter and a couple of tall bar stools:

> Or I sit here, in one of the sofas; however, I have experienced that people come over here – for instance a couple – and ask if they can sit here. Of course, there's room enough, but I don't like sitting face to face to people I don't know. So I prefer the table at the window.

Kai is often very busy, so days might pass between the times he has the opportunity to come down here. But when he started skipping the daily lunch with his colleagues in the canteen, he has been here more frequently:

> Of course I can't drop lunch every day, but I don't have to have lunch every day either. Twice a week is enough to give the impression that I'm still around eating lunch with my colleagues.

Kai describes what he calls "the lunch problem": most people like to eat with others, and the conversation around the lunch table can be important to them. But at the same time, lunch is very often dominated by people you do not really have any interest in talking to, personally or professionally:

> I feel that lunch is an investment with very random returns. Here, on the other hand, I feel that I get a real break. Here, I set the criteria for the time I spend. That's important to me.

Kai's language is full of business jargon. He talks about "investment", "returns" and "criteria", as if his visit to the coffee bar was a business operation. And in a way, it is. He takes the approach of a business man, and is a strong believer in rational choice. Kai believes that all human conduct is a result of the permanent quest for personal utility. Indeed, there are different forms of utility, but our actions can and must be understood as maximizing utility:

> To me, coming here is a way of rewarding myself. I work even harder than I would have, had I not had this place; so when I come down here I feel like I've really deserved it. I give myself a break; it's a treat; and when I think about it, it's maybe the only time during the day – and the evening and the morning – when I can spend some time on my own. This is freedom.

To Kai, freedom is the opposite of being with others, so his freedom is in a way the absence of company and the work place. The company is a structure that forces you to talk, to engage in discussions, to listen, to smile, to take part. Kai does not like that very much. His whole life is tightly scheduled, with obligations and commitment. Only in the coffee bar is he on his own. Solitude is his answer to the feverish activity of his life.

Olga works as an air hostess. She lives alone in a loft conversion, and is forced to work awkward hours. Always in a hurry, her routine on a work day involves stopping at Kaffebrenneriet, on the corner of Ullevålsveien and Waldemar Thranes gate, picking up a coffee – a latte – and then continuing down to the train station, where she takes the airport express train. Because she works shifts, she also has days when she does not work at all, but finds herself with a lot of spare time. A substantial part of it is spent in coffee bars – generally in Kaffebrenneriet, because it is in her neighborhood. She takes

the time to visit Kaffebrenneriet on most of her days off. Occasionally she will go more than once in a single day, but only rarely:

> There is something social, but also anti-social about the coffee bar. People sit on their own, drinking their lattes. It's a very ego-centered thing. But they all have something in common – like a theme. They share something even if they don't speak. You trade identity around the coffee, something like that…

Olga is a sharp observer and describes the internal life of the coffee bar very distinctly. Her experience of it must be seen in the light of her personality. She is a very modest person, and seems to observe, rather than be observed. Interestingly, she does not believe herself to be considered a regular customer by the staff at Kaffebrenneriet. Her appearance and behavior are so "mainstream" that she is not treated like a regular customer. She does not feel integrated into "the big silent coffee conversation", as she describes it, but she is comfortable with her position outside of it. The fact that the coffee bar makes it possible to be alone whilst also being surrounded by a lot of people is something Olga finds attractive:

> I like to be one of many people who are alone in places where it is socially legitimate to be alone. Sometimes I'm there only for the amount of time it takes to make the coffee, and other times up to three hours. It's a place where I mostly go alone. …and then there's the fact that I'm alone in a crowd. There's something dynamic about a place like this. You can feel alone, and then go out into the hustle and bustle.

She also finds that there will be people in a coffee bar that seem eager to make contact that approach her; those who always try to start a conversation. "But you rarely meet those characters in this coffee bar", she said. "But I've seen them – they are the "coffee terrorists". I'm not that kind of person. I don't start conversations with others just like that. That's just not me." But she has learned that the coffee bar is not a place to make new friends, and in her opinion this has a lot to do with the line of retail and with opening hours:

It's not a place for flirting. It's a place that only stays open in the daytime; they don't serve alcoholic beverages, and maybe more importantly, it's a place where you can be alone, while still having a bit of life around you.

For Olga, the coffee bar is a way of being present in society, without taking an active part in it. Her own ability to be passive, to *not* engage in conversations and other forms of socializing behavior, is what makes the coffee bar a comfortable place for her:

Restaurant, or most cafés, they demand something of you. It's like you're not welcome when you're not operating in the company of others. You never get that feeling here.

Kristine sits on a tall bar stool gazing through the window out into the street. She always carries a little notebook. Sometimes she writes in it, sometimes she does not. But it is always there, accompanying her, beside her cup of tea. Now she is here, at Java, she likes the place, and she drops by almost every morning on her way to university. Although she is a regular customer, she is not always "faithful" to Java, and might decide to go to a different coffee bar for a couple of weeks. She always returns to Java though, even if she goes to other coffee bars. "You could say I'm not a typical customer, at least that's what the staff here thinks: 'Hey, are you here again, haven't seen you for months' they say, and laugh when I turn up after a long absence." Kristine describes her own life as rather unstable, but there is one stable element in it, and that is the daily trip to the coffee bar:

Often I have spare time in between things to do, and I head to the coffee bar to sit and think. Coffee bars are places where you can be alone without looking lonely. There's no social rule that says you can't be alone in a coffee bar. And of course there's something about the interior of coffee bars. They're built so that it doesn't look stupid sitting alone.

### 7.3.7.    Interpretation: solitude for many reasons

My research question is: *What features of coffee bars have made them into an important and growing phenomenon in our society?* I believe that the explorative path I have taken into the realities of coffee bars fully illustrates how valuable this design typology and social construct is in people's everyday lives. A visit to a coffee bar can become part of a person's daily routine. A coffee bar offers a space for contemplation, and the possibility to observe and to be observed. A coffee bar can take on the role as a place where rewards can be collected and also as a harbor for privacy; privacy that can fulfill various functions. For most of the customers I have spoken to who visit coffee bars on their own, these are the most striking qualities, as well as the informality, the low threshold and the reasonable prices.

They are interconnected and woven together and often hard to separate; and in my interpretation they all zoom in on one focal point – the state of solitude. The users of coffee bars themselves do not actually use the term "solitude"; they prefer to use other words. However, I believe the word "solitude" is a precise and meaningful description of the practice many of the customers hold. In the contemporary world, solitude may be viewed as being a pragmatic and important tool with which to manage stressful work and challenging everyday life, and even the bigger questions of life. There is both a psychological and a lexical difference between solitude and loneliness. Hara Estroff Marano, a psychologist, who I will later refer to with regard to theory on the subject, formulates this in the following way: "Loneliness is marked by a sense of isolation. Solitude, on the other hand, is a state of being alone without being lonely and can lead to self-awareness"(Marano 2003).

Some of the coffee bar visitors actively seek solitude. Among these are the customers who use the coffee bar strategically, such as Finn Christian. The coffee bar is an integrated part of his work days. He uses them for planned breaks, where he can "reload" and "protect his energy". In short: the coffee bar is a place that helps him to function as an organized and dedicated professional. For Kai the coffee bar is more of a recreational space, a place away from work, where he is freed from the social obligations at the office. The coffee bar is a place where he experiences freedom. For Both Kai and Finn Christian the coffee bar is an obvious place to go when the burden of work becomes too heavy, or when social life at work is too demanding. They feel a need for solitude; it becomes a way of surviving busy schedules and stressful work. Although I have noted that Finn Christian is a strategic user, he also mentions the more non-instrumental parts of being in solitude. He underscores the pleasure of being a person who "observes" others.

For Olga, Ingrid, Anders and Kristine the quality of sitting in the window looking out at the street with no clear intention whatsoever is essential. They

are there on their own on purpose, and they regard it as an important part of their life. The solitude has a positive effect on them. For them the coffee bar is a place for contemplation, for a certain type of mental retreat from the other parts of their lives. The world outside of the coffee bar functions for them as "scenery"; they observe it, and, "visually", they are also a part of it, but they are still separated from it by the windows: this idea is formulated by Ingrid: "You can look at them, and they can look at you." As mentioned above, Olga points out, there is a certain comfort being on your own in a place that is vibrant with life: "There is something dynamic about a place like this. You can feel alone, and then go out into the hustle and bustle."



**Figure 28. Customer at Java. Photo: EDH. 06.04.2010**

She identifies an essential feature of the coffee bars; i.e. their ability to give the customers the feeling of being alone in a positive environment; she expresses this in the following way:

> …and then there is the fact that I'm alone in a crowd…I like to be one of many people who are alone in places where it is socially legitimate to be alone.

**Figure 29. Solitude at Kaffebrenneriet. Photo: EDH. 05.05.2010**

An important feature of the coffee bar is that it offers solitude without mental obstacles; a place designed for being alone, as expressed by Kristine. In my opinion, Kristine's observation is the sole key to the question why coffee bars are so successful. When Olga – a rather shy person – finds comfort in being on her own in a coffee bar and not in a restaurant, or even a café, there must be something extraordinary about the coffee bar. The fact that the design typology is also made for single customers enjoying their own company, and not only for groups (as most tables actually are), is probably the single most powerful explanation.

**Figure 30. Sitting in the window. Photo: Erling Dokk Holm. 05.05.2010**

There is also another quality worth elaborating on: the huge windows. As mentioned above, windows covering a large proportion of the facade are an important part of the typology, and it has several effects on those who seek solitude in a coffee bar. One effect is that customers can look out at the street scene, while people passing by along the sidewalk can look into the coffee bar, and view its human interior. Ingrid is aware of this phenomenon, and argues that the huge windows integrate customers into the urban landscape, also mentally. Anders shares this opinion, and describes this in the following way: "…it's basically a seat at the window". The effect on potential customers is substantial. As my interviews reveal, entering a coffee bar for the first time is seen as an easy thing to do compared to most cafés.

The different types of users that prefer to go to the coffee bar to enjoy their own company all agree on the ability of coffee bars to supply a basic psychological need – the need to be alone. Olga, one of the informants I return most often to, is almost always alone in her favorite coffee bar. I believe that this explains why she is able to make acute observations of the inner life of these institutions. As a "representative" of all those customers who seek solitude, and as mentioned above, she describes a quality of the coffee bars that can only be observed by those who sit in silence themselves:

> There is something social, but also anti-social about the coffee bar. People sit on their own, drinking their lattes. It's a very ego-centered thing. But they all have something in common – like a theme. They share something even if they don't speak. You trade identity around the coffee, something like that…

In my opinion Olga grasps a profound understanding of the coffee bar phenomenon. The coffee bar is both social and anti-social; it offers both a space where solitude can play itself out, and at the same time accommodates a silent community of coffee drinkers, sharing a commitment to their daily rituals, fixed in the same space, with a variety of individual preferences, but also – probably – for many of the same reasons.

## 7.4. SOCIALIZING

A coffee bar can function as a location for complex forms of social life. This part of the chapter will focus on the use of the coffee bar as a space where people engage in social relationships.

Sociality can be expressed through manifested behavior of different types. People can meet at a social level, where they engage in each other's verbal communication, or a place can promote an environment where people get to know each other.

However, sociality can also be explained and understood in more mental terms. A coffee bar can function as a social place because the customers consider it as inviting and friendly. In other words, there are various levels of social life – there is a difference between socializing and appreciating the surrounding social life. As mentioned above, Kristine pointed towards the inherent social qualities of coffee-drinking and said that: "Coffee is more of a social drink than tea. Tea seems to be more egoistic, egocentric and self-centered. Coffee is just like cigarettes, it's a social thing that creates a sense of community." Many of those who I have interviewed have emphasized that coffee bars in general seem to be spaces that are warm and welcoming; for instance, Ingun, a regular at Evita said: "I like the friendliness of the coffee bar."

### 7.4.1. Friends and dogs

I visited the coffee bar for the first time one day in November at a quarter past two:

It is nearly empty, with only a few customers. However, this is only to be expected during the hours between lunch and dinner; I find a place at the window, order a coffee and cake, and find some newspapers. A young boy comes in; he is perhaps between 18 and 20 years old. He orders a cup of regular black coffee, and goes outside once he has been served – even though it is about zero degrees and rather chilly. He finds a chair, lights a cigarette,

and sips his coffee. A dog approaches him; a noisy small dog; from my position at the window, I can see that the dog and the man know each other. After some hugging and playing, the dog licks him in the face and the boy seems to enjoy it. A tall skinny girl in her twenties shows up, obviously the dog's owner. The dog seems equally interested in her, and after an enthusiastic meeting between the dog and girl, she gives the boy a hug too. They are obviously friends, but there is not enough intimacy in their communication to look upon them as a couple, but what do I know? She enters the coffee bar, goes to the counter, orders a double latte, chats with the barista, and once it is served in a tall glass, she takes it with her back outside.

After ten or fifteen minutes a woman turns up. She is obviously older than the other two, perhaps in her mid-thirties. The dog, in the same overwhelming fashion, also welcomes her. She also goes inside, picks up a double latte and moves outside again. The three of them now arrange their chairs around the table so they can sit opposite each other. They talk and laugh a lot. The girl with the dog is the main talker. The boy smokes intensively; the woman is a little more relaxed than the other two; she seems more at ease and probably is; age gives her a gravity the others do not have. They are in my opinion a little lightly dressed for the weather; the girl seems to be freezing, but shows no intention of going inside. In the meantime, another customer has arrived and found a table outside. He is dressed for the weather conditions: he has a thick down jacket, hat, scarf and gloves. He is probably in his late-forties, with a rather large, bearded face. He nods at them, they nod back, and the young boy says something I can't hear, but they all laugh a little.

The above describes the scene on my first visit to the coffee bar, Evita, in Smalgangen in Grønland, Oslo. I decided to come back and observe more. In the next three months I was there on a regular basis, sometimes several times a day. I became the regular "chronicler", and I soon got to know people: Eleven days after I first visited Evita I was sitting outside, drinking coffee, occasionally exchanging a sentence or ten with the neighboring table. I had got to know the young boy, Kjell; the girl with the dog, Ingun; and the woman Anne, who was more reticent. They hang out at Evita because they like to meet and talk most days, early in the day; Ingun said:

> I have to walk Gisell (the dog), and somehow we've made it
> into a routine, to meet here, since we all work at home; we
> don't call, or arrange anything, but we all manage to meet here.
> Well that's not really true; I've known Anne for… let's say
> five years, but it's only through our meetings here at Evita that
> we've developed a closer friendship.

Anne, Ingun and Kjell all work on their own. Ingun is a translator; Kjell operates a web studio; and Anne is a graphic designer. During the last two years they have created a daily routine, a routine that their work is adapted to. Their life is interwoven into this routine; their daily experiences, ways of thinking, understanding of the world and their own environment is colored by their mutual discourse on the big questions in life and by their understanding of their own roles and contexts. Kjell, Ingun and Anne are connected through this space; the six outdoor tables function as their social roundabout. They are visible as a social unit.

However, there are also other people who use the coffee bar for social contact, but in a more specific and perhaps more instrumental way. Helle, a hairdresser, who lives in the neighborhood, appreciates the coffee bar's ability to be a place where new friendships can be tested and matured:

> A coffee bar is a perfect place to meet, especially when people don't know exactly where you live. And it's also much less intimate than your own apartment. And having a coffee also makes conversation a little easier; I mean, you can say things like: "What kind of coffee do you prefer? I always drink double latte, but lately I have started to develop a preference for cortado. You see?

Caroline is another regular – she is in her mid-thirties and she also uses the coffee bar for many different purposes; both for spending time in solitude and for social situations:

> It's really an easy place to meet; it's a kind of public living room. It's extremely practical when you don't want to invite people to your home. And it's also inexpensive, which matters of course.

Caroline said that this is only the case when you meet a single person. If you meet a lot of friends then this seldom appeals:

> I think it has to do with the space; you seldom get a table in
> the coffee bar, except when you're sitting outside. If you're
> sitting at a window, then two persons is the maximum number
> if they want to talk to each other.

For Caroline the coffee bar is helpful also in situations when a friendship is in its beginning stages. Olga has a similar view:

> It is a form of ritual, or a thing you do together with others,
> also with people you consider as close friends. And if it's new
> acquaintances, then the coffee bar is a nice place to deepen that
> relationship in shaping it towards a more real friendship.

This understanding suggests the notion that the coffee bar, to a high degree, can be interpreted and experienced as a room that shares many qualities with private rooms. It is a room for intimacy, close relationships, quiet communication, and noisy chatting between friends and acquaintances.

### 7.4.2.   The "social-glue" guy

Important to this social environment are those regulars who socialize. If you visit Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien a little past eight in the morning on a working day you will probably see a man, aged about thirty, sitting in the seat near the window talking to a couple of others. And he will immediately give you the impression of having an extrovert and energetic personality. This is Peter. He stays for about half an hour each day and always orders same: a double latte; he talks to the others in the coffee bar, other regulars he has got to know. Peter made an immediate impression on me; it is difficult not to like him. He is a person that quickly establishes contact with you. I visited the coffee bar on a regular basis as part of my fieldwork, and after nine continuous working days, I got to know him. He is what I might describe as 'a person with a professional sociality'. Not in the sense that he has a commercial aspect to his sociality, but rather that he knows how to tune his social abilities, so they are inviting rather than demanding. He masters the fine balance between being open, friendly and personal with being serious and private. He knows the fine line in the sand between too much and too little.

Peter relates to the other guests in a social context, and thrives on social interaction; he is the kind of customer every coffee bar depends on. Many of

the customers who avoid this kind of social interaction, such as my informant Olga, also profit from this. People seeking solitude can have a preference for one special coffee bar due to the fact that it is an arena for people like Peter.

Peter does not meet his best friends every morning at Kaffebrenneriet. That can happen too, but that is not the rule. Instead he talks to the other regulars, who few, if any, are as talkative as him; but they are there and take part in the conversations and the chatting. Peter is a driving social force; at least that is what I have observed.

And of course, he is more than just nods at the baristas. During quiet periods he will chat with them, quickly making small jokes or funny observations about this and that. His tone is usually light and ironic, but never sarcastic. He seems to be interwoven into the rhythm of the place with an almost perfect tempo; when customers approach the counter, he will quickly end his conversation, and it seems that the baristas have the feeling that he does not interrupt them in their work.

> I start my day here. Always, at least almost always. That's to say, I eat at home, take my coffee here. I fuel up with caffeine and nice people, and read the newspapers. This is my routine. You can set your watch by me. Ha Ha.

Perhaps Peter is the perfect regular: a person that warms up a place by just being there. The baristas appreciate this type of customer; the owner of Java said:

> A good coffee bar attracts this type of customer; good regular customers are proof that you are a good barista, and that the coffee bar is well organized.

As commented on above, regulars make up more than seventy percent of the customers in most coffee bars. Consequently, the foundations of small and big coffee bars must be built on this large part of the customer base. Apart from the economic stability that this ensures, and the recognition of craftsmanship, the regular customers are essential for the social quality of a coffee bar. One of the baristas formulates this in the following way:

Regulars – socially good regulars – are important because they produce an environment; and for us baristas it's much more pleasant to work in an environment where so many of the customers are people you know. It gives you a feeling… a feeling of something familiar. It becomes friendlier, a little bit warmer.

### 7.4.3. Looking for new friends

Ole is sitting at the bar facing the street in his regular coffee bar, Java at St. Hanshaugen. He is writing on his laptop while sipping a cortado. He is in his mid-forties and a regular here. Two or three afternoons every week, at about four 'o' clock, he comes in, orders the same, finds a barstool in the window, and opens his laptop:

> I started going here in the mornings; maybe four years ago. My intention was very clear. I wanted to make new friends, as I was newly divorced. I found myself without as many friends as before. After the divorce, what I had thought were our friends turned out to be mainly her friends. So I had to do something.

And this "something" is the coffee bar. Ole is the only one of my informants that has said this so bluntly, but I also find that some of the other people I have got to know are motivated by the same intentions. When life changes, then the need for new anchors, for new relationships become apparent. The customers who are open towards meeting new people often said that a coffee bar is a place where you can gradually get to know people. The coffee bar represents a "soft" introduction to new people that makes it possible for them to explore the potential for new friendships. If you are a regular, you are somehow a part of the same modus operandi, as Ole puts it:

> … after three days you start to nod; after a week you might exchange a few words, and after two weeks it's possible to develop more regular conversations; and then the rest is up to you. You can actually find new friends, people that you take a serious interest in, and that you have something in common with.

Ole has made new friendships, some of which he calls high quality friendships. People he goes on vacation with, people he goes to the cinemas with and people who are now a part of his social network. "It works for me at least" said Ole.

> But I don't think it would work everywhere. I like this coffee bar. There are a lot of people here of my age group and in similar professions.

Ole is a designer, and finds that the regular Java customer is very often in the creative industries, people he can easily relate to. Ole is probably right about the cultural profile of the majority of the customers and this can be easily observed if you visit the coffee bar. Not only are many of the guests more or less well known to the public due to their work, such as actors, architects, designers and academics, but also their conversations and appearance provide evidence that they come from this segment.

Ole operates his very small laptop, and the reason why he has brought it with him is not only due to the fact that he has things to write but because he is also online and logged on to Facebook – a community network:

> Before I leave work I sent out a message to my network (on Facebook) that I will be sitting here today for an hour or two. That makes it easier for my friends – let's call it my network – to drop by.

He checks to see if other people in his network have answered, or if there is anything else of interest going on. By combining digital and physical space, Ole is able to enhance his interface with his friends, and said that this is one way of making the coffee bar into a more convenient place to chat.

> The coffee bar profits from people like me; you can be alone without experiencing any discomfort; but you don't have to be alone; if someone comes along, there's always room for one more. You don't experience the feeling that you do in so many other places; in a café for instance, you will often feel awkward, if you're occupying a table on your own, and if you

see a group of three or four people desperately trying to find a table.

Ole is not the only one pursuing a new life by combining Internet and a physical location; he probably represents a growing group of customers for the coffee bars, although in my study I have only have met two such people who use this duality of tools.

Ole may be defined as someone who is looking for friends; and it is easy to see that his ambitions can be realized in a space where people of his age group and with similar perspectives on life can meet; however, as mentioned above, very few state this aim explicitly.

For instance, Trude is in a similar life situation to Ole's. She works as a media planner; she is also single, a little younger, and looks after her two kids every second week; this means she always has one week when she is totally free from commitments; and that lack of obligations makes her a little nervous:

> For a long long time I've been totally locked up in the atomic family structure. It's very strange... very … you feel a kind of insecurity when you're suddenly out there on your own." She explains that the coffee bar offers her a space where she can develop a feeling of having control with the new life she suddenly has been thrown into. "Even if the divorce was my choice, I never thought that I'd have to establish a new life. Our little family had its own borders and its own crops, its own rhythm. Now that's gone, I have to find new spaces.

Trude is a morning user; she is a frequent guest at Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien, and places special significance by the fact that the coffee bars are open at hours when the rest of the commercial world is more or less closed:

> "hen I drop by here every day, every other week, a little after eight, sometimes only for a coffee, sometimes for a whole breakfast, it's a way of ensuring that I get a good start to the day; it's like someone is hugging you and saying: 'hey, life isn't that bad after all'.

Her way of describing her mornings and allocating them a position in her everyday life interests me; it is as if she has understood something. She said:

> There's a morning-world in there, a world of coffee and newspapers. I like that universe. I didn't really know it existed. But it does.

Trude likes to draw attention to her own understanding of the use of her mornings in the coffee bar: The coffee bars are for people like her – who have lived many years with the routine of family life – they help her at a vulnerable time:

> It's a ritual that I like because I'm able to interact with new people. I won't say I'm desperately seeking contact, but rather someone I can chat to; I'm open to new situations… new people.

Trude finds life a little bit difficult after the divorce. The longing for a social morning procedure; because the need for a life in a social setting is always there:

> It's nice to be without them; I can sit in my kitchen, drink coffee and read the newspaper in peace and all that. But at the same time, it's a little bit too peaceful. In the coffee bar at least I'm in the same room as other people. All we regular customers share something.

Trude has thought a lot about her new morning relationships; some of them have expanded into relationships she also nurtures when she is not at the coffee bar:

> I think a woman of my age is somewhat disturbed by that fact that she can't make new friends so easily anymore. For instance, when I was studying, it was easy to make new friends

quickly. I have some old friends, but only a few. I suffer from a
kind of 'single-life after broken-up-family syndrome'. Not only
do I have to find new friends, but also new ways of building
and maintaining friendships.

For several years Tina was a regular customer of Kaffebrenneriet in
Ullevålsveien. She finds that coffee bars, and especially this one, have been a
social connecting point for her:

> When I settled in Oslo I was in my late twenties; I was
> educated elsewhere and had no friends here, absolutely none.
> But I came because of a job, and although I was introduced to
> very kind and interesting people in the company (she works for
> a law firm), it was in the coffee bar that I made my first
> friends... well maybe not friends for the first half year, but...
> that feeling, the feeling of knowing someone, somehow a place
> I could describe as mine, out there in the big city all alone. I
> was comforted by the inclusive feeling in that coffee bar.

Tina said that it is important that coffee bars are constructed in such a way
that they welcome you even if you are on your own, or perhaps especially
because you are on your own. The ability to be both one and two and at the
same time and having the feeling of being equal; the feeling that you are a
one hundred percent worthy person when you are on your own is in her
opinion the most important feature of a coffee bar.

> That's what made me a regular, and after a year I even made
> real life friends there… and even found a lover[18].

she said, laughing. Now Tina has moved out into the suburbs and is married
with twins:

> At the age of thirty three, life is very different than it was four
> years ago. For instance, I didn't meet my husband in a coffee

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[18] An incident I will return to later.

bar – he doesn't have time for that kind of life. But the coffee bar gave me, for a limited but important period of my life, a kind of protection and a feeling of belonging. God knows where else I could have gone.

### 7.4.4. Love

Sølve, one of my informants, is attracted to the idea that a coffee bar is a place where you can experience everything, even love. This is Sølve's opinion, although his own experiences do not support that thought.

> For instance, I think it's a much better place than a nightclub. It's quiet and you can talk."

Sølve has – due to his single life in the last year or so – a lot of knowledge about dating and how dating has changed with the introduction of Internet, affecting many other dating rituals. He believes that those who can free themselves from a more formal dating procedure and be more direct with their dates will benefit from the existence of coffee bars. From his perspective, the coffee bar is underrated as a place for dating; it has not fulfilled its potential.

> It's there; people just haven't started to use it for such purposes. That's a shame.

Sølve's observations are probably right; I have not met many people that have actually started love relationships in a coffee bar; however, one of my informants Tina has. She said it was something that could only happen because she was looking for it:

> There I was every day at the same coffee bar, doing the same thing every morning. I remember I had a small crush on one of the baristas; he was a very handsome, skinny, kind of athletic, tall guy. He was not very nice, polite yes, but nice no. He made great coffee, but never ever gave our daily exchange of words any kind of personal touch. Maybe it was because of his

physical attractiveness and because he seemed to be a shy
person that I got a little "lost" in him. He became a theme in
my daydreams. But I never managed to ask him out; never
managed to make any personal contact with him. But he made
me ready for something to happen. And then, right here, one
morning, standing in the queue, there was this guy, I had never
spoken to him, never seen him, and then he started to talk to
me. It turned out that he was only there by chance; he didn't
even like going to coffee bars. It developed very quickly, and
for a small period of time I was very much in love with him.
But he was into something else I think. He had no kids, but was
ten years older than me, and was always on a plane going
somewhere. He was, I guess, not very interested. Not really.
But it was a good experience for me, to be picked up by a guy
at quarter past eight in the morning, totally sober.
Unconventional, but good.

According to Sølve, the more common experience is the absence of sexual
relationships:

Some might think that places like coffee bars are highly
sexualized, but they're not. They might be playful places,
people might flirt, but it's always in a framework of a non-
sexual intention. That's my opinion.

Sølve hopes to see a change; he hopes that the coffee bars will "mature". But
until then, for most people, it is a place where intimate relationships are
seldom developed. Most informants support his argument. Flirting at a coffee
bar does not occur very often, and Olga points to a central factor:

The fact that they don't sell alcoholic beverages and are closed
in the evenings makes these places less attractive as lovers'
playgrounds. You don't go there with the intention of seeking
love; so then it doesn't happen that much either.

Olga tries to recollect the times men have approached her in a coffee bar; she
can't think of any.

> I think there is an invisible sign on the wall outside of
> Kaffebrenneriet: No pickups!

As these interviews illustrate, love is not necessarily in the air in coffee bars. The strange thing about this thought is that it makes sense. It is indisputable, statistically and mundanely, that most love relationships are started at work or during studies. In coffee bars, where the customers are sober and always on the way to somewhere else, love is probably usually unimaginable.

### 7.4.5. Common interests

People with shared interests are also an important coffee bar customer group; informal gathering places in the urban landscape seem to address a demand. Marginal groups, such as homosexuals, have traditionally used more shady spaces in the urban sphere where they could meet; have physical relationships or other forms of contact (Gavin Brown 2004, 93). The coffee bars in comparison attract other types of groups that share interests; interests that are subject to less prejudice and suppression. For instance, "normal" interests shared by people in the same situation, such as breastfeeding women strolling the streets with their newborns, who account for a large proportion of the customers. In Norway, this group's size is large due to the extensive maternity leave; family policies have also been amended, so that parental leave now includes men to a greater extent; consequently, men on parental leave now also make up a customer group.

In Norway, women with newly-born babies are established into non-compulsory post-natal groups organized by the child health clinic in their neighborhood. All the coffee bar owners are aware of the importance of these groups. Those who are on parental leave find the coffee bars suitable for many reasons. One is the design. The huge windows make it easy for parents to keep an eye on their strollers while they are inside drinking their coffee. If a child wakes up or moves in the stroller, the mother or the father can act quickly if necessary. This feature of coffee bars (the windows) means that parents are able to relax and use the coffee bars quite a lot. Another important feature of the coffee bars in this regard is that they accept breastfeeding women; this indicates the level of informality of coffee bars. Anne Line, an active stroller, who is breastfeeding her second child next to the window in Kaffebrenneriet, said:

It's important that you can meet other members in your post-natal group without a lot of complications, just for the need and the joy of meeting each other. The coffee bar suits these needs perfectly.

Ella, who lives in Tonsenhagen and is a frequent use of Kaffehjørnet, praises the coffee bar as a natural starting point for a walk: "What would we do without it? It's a natural place to meet for those of us who have kids and want to go for a walk together."

A coffee bar is also easy to use because of the lack of demands on the customers; this reason seems to be given by all kinds of customers, but especially the women on maternity leave.

Some informants also emphasize that a coffee bar is chosen not only because of its function as a meeting place, but for other reasons as well; as expressed by Anne Line:

Good coffee tastes incredibly good when you are walking around in a sleep-deprived state all the time! Bad coffee during the (child's) daytime nap almost ruins my day.

As mentioned above, Elisabeth Toth, the owner of Evita Espressobar, has observed that a group that contributes substantially to her business is the other shop employees in her neighborhood, Smalgangen. Before she opened her coffee bar they had nowhere to meet before they opened their shops at ten; Elisabeth Toth said:

Many of those who work in the shops and those who run them are my regulars. They were in fact the first defined group – in my eyes – that started to use Evita on a regular basis.

Today many of those who work in the surrounding shops in Smalgangen, and in Grønlands Torg, start the day with a cup of coffee and a friendly chat. This group of customers comes into the coffee bar from about nine o'clock. Many of them say that Evita has made a substantial difference to the small entrepreneurs and the employees in Smalgangen and Grønlands Torg. Evita has developed into a genuine meeting place, and the various people who work in the area have grown much closer, and got to know each other; and

friendship and business contacts have been nurtured. One person who owns a neighboring store formulates this in the following way:

> …it goes back so long ago, so you take it for granted; but it hasn't always been like this. If you look back, things were very different then. Evita was the place where we developed close contacts, where we got to know each other, and so managed to develop many good relationships; we have built an environment down here. Before, it was pretty dull here you know. (comment: 'here' means the business community of Smalgangen and Grønlands Torg).

It is ten to nine in the morning; I am sitting at a table drinking coffee, reading the newspaper, Dagbladet. Evita fills up with customers, at quite a pace – within 15 minutes the place is absolutely crowded, inside and outside. All the customers who are here at this time of day seem to know each other, as they nod or talk a little to each other. A group of Asians occupy a table; I have discovered that they have a preference for the table in the west part of the tiny space; so if you are a regular, you know not to sit down at that table at that time of the morning. Three women in their mid-forties also team up, and take a table outside to the left of the entrance; however, if this table is occupied when they arrive, it does not bother them:

> We got our table, but on the other hand we're not that picky. It's not the table that is the most important thing here. It's everything else. The little daily coffee with the girls,

said Rita who always sits outside, no matter what the weather. Cigarettes and coffee mean you can't sit inside. For Rita, Evita in Smalgangen is the social-glue for the shopkeepers in the street. It is here they have developed friendships, and it is here the first conversations about joint pursuits take place; it is here business and pleasure are mixed; it is here where informal social relationships develop, and to such an extent that it makes it more interesting to run a business in Smalgangen than it would have been without Evita.

Evita in Smalgangen is different to any other coffee bar I have visited in the center of Oslo. It is much more of a social place; the large majority of those who visit Evita arrive with someone else; on average 6 out of 10 arrive

with someone else, or end up in socializing situations. Because the place functions as a meeting place for the various commercial players in the neighborhood, it becomes very social, but also due to the fact that many of the other regulars seem to have a lot of time to spend at Evita.

Such as Leif, he has time. Lots of time. He does not work. He is on welfare and receives disability benefit. This is perhaps not unusual in this part of the city; in Gamle Oslo, disability benefit is more common than in any other part of the city (Bråthen, Djuve et al. 2007). Leif is married, in his mid-fifties, and his wife still works. Leif lost his job in a cargo shipment company a few years ago, and although it was during a period of economic growth, he found it hard to find new work; he has also had lots of problems with his back. After all he has been part of the workforce since he was 15 years old:

> I have paid my contribution to society; I don't owe it anything now,

he said, and gives a rather long and well-reasoned little lecture on the relationship between work, welfare and psychical pain. Leif is a talker. He talks with almost everybody that is interested in listening. Very often he sits in the shade under the trees outside the coffee bar, drinks his coffee, reads VG – a daily tabloid newspaper – and chats with those on the next table or those who sit down at his table. Leif is the kind of socializer who invites you into conversations. And he smokes. Cigarettes and coffee. A combination that seems to be dying out on the west side of town; but it is more alive and more integrated into the coffee consumption in the east.

Perhaps because smoking (outside only) seems to be just as much the rule as the opposite, the social character of the place is different.

Smoking tends to signify the social and cultural differences between these once traditional working class districts and the more affluent areas on the west side. Even if the gentrification is overwhelming in the streets of Grønland, there is still a distinctive flavor and fabric of another social reality. The presence of poverty, drugs, crime and social deprivation is not only to be found in the statistics for the district, but also in the visual appearance of the place. In Grønland things look different. The clothes people wear are less fashionable, and there are no real up-market brand shops; people on the streets do not seem to be concerned with fashion; and there is a great number of people dressed in ways which some may consider bizarre; the fashionistas are hardly ever seen. And then there is of course the visible traces of poverty. There may be few poor people with blankets draped on their backs (as seen in

other parts of the world); but you will nevertheless see socially deprived people wearing soiled clothes.

The population in Grønland includes a lot of ethnic minorities. This is reflected in the coffee bar's clientele: almost 50 percent of the guests at Evita belong to an ethnic minority. In other words, the diversity of the local community, Grønland, is reflected amongst the guests of the coffee bar. Although, coffee bars may be considered as being hallmarks of the emerging educated middle class, it doesn't mean that they are incapable of absorbing a more representative section of the cultural and social surroundings.

### 7.4.6. Connecting to the neighborhood

If we move out of the more central parts of Oslo and find ourselves sitting next to the window of a coffee bar in the suburbs, such as Kaffehjørnet in Tonsenhagen, it is obvious that this represents another kind of "reality". In the little stuffy room, where there are only two small tables and two windows with counters, there is a very talkative atmosphere. It seems like the people at Kaffehjørnet know each other; I later found out that they mostly do. In contrast to the kind of friendships developed by casual small talking observed in Kaffebrenneriet in Ullevålsveien, where Peter may be characterized as the "social-glue", the kind of friendships developed here are more connected to the local community. Those who frequent Kaffehjørnet often live nearby. Kaffehjørnet is the only coffee bar in their neighborhood and consequently it has become a "natural" meeting point for many people; and it is ideally located close to the bus stop. Kaffehjørnet is a place where you go when you want to keep up to date on the latest "news" in your local community. It also addresses the need for coffee and contemplation, for coffee and peace; however, to a greater extent, Kaffehjørnet epitomizes the idea of a neighborhood café:

> I like Kaffehjørnet, because it's a place where I can meet friends; but also because I know for sure I'll meet some of the people I like here at Tonsenhagen; people I don't necessary have any close ties to, but who I like to talk to. People who have kids the same age as mine, which I see now and then; people who are a part of this little small suburb,

said Hilde. She is in her thirties, is a mother with young children and works as a nurse; this means she often has a lot of time off during the day:

> It's kind of refreshing to come down here; very often I'm off
> work at 2 o'clock; I'll meet someone, engage in a conversation,
> pick up from where I left off with some people that I haven't
> spoken to for months. Just like that.

The first time I met Hilde, in a chance conversation in the coffee bar, she was getting information from "Trond" about the match schedules of her son's soccer club. The information could have been downloaded more accurately from the Internet, but somehow it is more accessible here at Kaffehjørnet. Trond (her son's soccer trainer) said:

> …you can have everything on paper, or on the Internet. But
> people like to get it in into their notebooks by talking to you
> here; and I'm often here – I often stop by after work for a small
> cup of coffee – people, you know, parents, people that are
> engaged in the soccer activities of their kids, they like to get to
> know you better. And they're never short of information it
> seems.

Trond stresses that this need for information seems to increase more and more over the years:

> Kaffehjørnet is a natural place for people to catch up on things
> in the neighborhood.

So the talking carries on and on, but does it ever get beyond chatter. "Oh, yeah," said Hilde, "but you have to be careful not to underestimate the power of chatter." Conversations usually remain fairly superficial in her opinion; but can nevertheless lead to a much deeper sense of commitment and attract people to the place. Trond expresses this idea:

> I'm conservative; I can know people fairly well without having
> "deep" conversations with them; that's something I reserve for

my old friends, the guys I grew up with. This is about
something else, it's about neighborhood.

There are some unwritten rules, some norms, which regulate the content of a
discussion between the coffee bar customers, which is Anne's opinion, at
least. She is a regular at Kaffehjørnet, and has – in her own opinion –
developed a distance to the activities that unfold in such a place:

> Sometimes you can feel that this is a kind of free space, where
> you can go and lighten your heart; where you are among
> friends; yes just like in the sitcom "Cheers", with the song
> 'Cheers – where everybody knows your name'.

Anne's point is that this is merely a myth; a coffee bar like Kaffehjørnet has
its norms, and one of them in her opinion is that you have to restrict the
theme of conversations to rather dull stuff.

> What from the outside may seem as a very friendly place is
> only inclusive and nice if you play by the rules, talk about kids,
> about the weather. You shouldn't be too liberal or have strong
> political opinions. If this place ever was anything else, if it was
> ever a truly liberal place, then it now more acquiescent.

This remark, on the other hand, does not mean that Trude avoids the place.
On the contrary, she likes it. However, she explained:

> Maybe I'm just a realist. If you have any big problems or
> anything serious you would like to talk to someone about,
> forget it. Find another place. This is a place where you'd better
> be ready to be nice. And that is after all not a bad quality in
> today's stressed society."

### 7.4.7.   In the mood

Harald, a regular coffee bar visitor, expresses his feeling of belonging to this particular coffee bar – Java – simply by stating that the coffee tastes better here than in other places; it even tastes better indoors than outside, he said. The experience of the quality of the coffee seems to be intimately linked to the room it is consumed in, and this trait actually appears to hold throughout my interviews. Monica, whose heart belongs to one of the many coffee bars in the Kaffebrenneriet chain, puts it this way:

> The various outlets of Kaffebrenneriet are very different from each other. For example, I don't really like the one on the corner of Frognerveien. The queue there is long and the staff isn't so friendly. Here, on the other hand, I like it a lot. The people who work here are very friendly and they are really good at their job. Because the staff is so friendly – and skilled – the place exudes a lot of energy. I have, for instance, experienced getting the wrong coffee at certain Kaffebrenneriet outlets. When I've asked for the strong coffee of the day I haven't been given it. And when I … realize it's the mild one – well, a part of my day is ruined then.

Alf, who swears by Java at St. Hanshaugen, emphasizes that this decidedly is his favorite spot, and that it has characteristics that puts it high above any other coffee bar, in his opinion. Alf, whom I have got to know during an intensive period of coffee drinking at Java, is directly negative towards other coffee bars. His loyalty is almost of a fundamentalist character:

> This is simply the best coffee in the city, and the mood here also suits me. It's relaxed and total quality in every detail.

He also stresses the fact that he is no stranger to the place when he enters at about eight in the morning:

> Well, I know the people who work here, and also usually nod to several of the other customers. This place is great; you can

just hang out here, and enjoy the morning. Read a newspaper, chat a little, eat, and drink good coffee."

Alf's statement about Java seems to be both clear and offers a substantial explanation of the attractiveness of the place: It is semi-private due to the fact the he feels he is in a familiar environment where people recognize him; at the same time it offers experiences for his senses.

The quality of the coffee and service seem to be deciding factors concerning the development of customer loyalty; and these factors seem to be vital if a coffee bar is to develop into a place which can function as a distinctive arena for relationships. One of my informants weighs the importance of being recognized against the ability of a coffee bar to provide a positive experience, even for customers who are not regulars. Sølve who sometimes visits several different coffee bars during the course of a week points out:

… well, it's kind of nice if they recognize me and say hi. Yeah, I like that. It doesn't have to be like you're a regular, and order 'the usual' or anything – that's not it – it's just a question of service, it means something. The service here is great though! Well, maybe I think good service is more important than most people … and I think the service is poor in a lot of places. It's all about how they make the coffee, how they treat me, and all those things.

The sense of the place thus also becomes connected to the professional service given; visitors should feel at ease and as if they fit in. Many informants place much value on the relationship between the staff and regular customers; such as in the case of Monica who has visited the same coffee bar every day for several years. In the next chapter, chapter eight, which concerns the baristas at work, it is shown how the regular customers are essential in enabling staff to contribute to the social relationships with all the coffee bar's customers; so that they are able to create the desired atmosphere.

Peter – the most vital and socially outgoing of coffee bar users I have come across during my research work – emphasizes that the pleasure he experiences in starting every morning at Kaffebrenneriet's outlet in Ullevålsveien is closely linked to the positive and friendly atmosphere that meets him there:

There is a kind of snug atmosphere in here, especially on cold
or gloomy days. The place itself has some warmth.

### 7.4.8.    Interpretation: socializing for many reasons

The customers I refer to in this section have in common that the coffee bar
for them often functions as a place for finding friends; or on a less intimate
level: establishing and nurturing existing networks. They all express that
some coffee bar environments promote and nurture social settings where new
friendships may emerge. The coffee bar seems to be a place not only where
people can order a coffee, but a place where people can address their needs
for developing new social relationships. When addressing the coffee bars as
being institutions where social relationships may be fostered, most customers
believe that this may be related to their level of informality and low threshold
for developing social relationships. The lack of procedures that place
demands on customers; the low price (compared to other commercial spaces);
the design which includes large windows; the opening hours (i.e. they open
early in the morning); the fact that they only sell non-alcoholic beverages; the
easy accessibility for customers who arrive on their own; all these factors
contribute to the coffee bar as being a place where social relationships may
be developed. It emerges clearly here: Many of those customers who seek
solitude in a coffee bar will also appreciate the same qualities as those
customers who are interested in developing social relationships; i.e. the
possibility of being alone without having the feeling of "being in the wrong
place"; while at the same time being positive about being in the "company of
others"; i.e. the other customers in the coffee bar. These conditions are a
prerequisite for the experiences that can unfold in a coffee bar; there is
consequently a strong connection between the "solitude-friendly
environment" of coffee bars and their capacity of being able to function as a
place where social relationships may develop.

   Most of those customers who use coffee bars to establish and maintain
social relationships are attracted by the overall friendliness of the places; the
easiness with which new brief conversations may be entered into; the relaxed
mood; the absence of pretentious behavior and also perhaps pretentious talk.
New friendships may develop, and the friendliness of a coffee bar may also
be interpreted by customers as focused on them in particular, i.e. "A warm
hello", which Trude remarked, illustrating this point.

   Coffee bars have light hearted environments; i.e. they are places where
people can meet for a chat, or exchange information on a rather trivial level.
The "deeper" discussions or debates about the meaning of life, love and the

other "big" questions seem to be less frequent. One of the regular customers at Kaffehjørnet puts it this way:

> … you have to be careful and not underestimate the power of having a chat.

Coffee bars often depend on a very sociable guest, such as Peter, who I have referred to above at length. He is more important to the coffee bar than most other customers, due to his ability to create a socializing atmosphere so that more people may be included. His talent in creating a positive atmosphere is a factor that can hardly be overestimated. One of the core ideas of urbanity; i.e. that it constitutes an attitude that includes holding out a hand to strangers; in other words, also defines strangers as being a part of the city; it is met here and created by these "regulars" and by the staff who create such an inviting atmosphere.

A coffee bar can also function as a good place to meet for people who have similar interests. For instance, parents on parental leave are a substantial customer group; they find that coffee bars are perfect as a place to meet. Many of the regular customers at Evita in Smalgangen are also groups who have shared interests, such as all those who work in the nearby shops, and meet every morning before opening time to have a coffee and a brief conversation.

There are also people who use the coffee bars for other reasons; for instance, as a place where they can find new friends; where they can develop relationships on a daily basis. Some even combine it with digital socializing, and through that media establish the coffee bar as a place to meet people who are connected digitally.

On the other hand, the potential for developing love relationships in coffee bars seems to be rather limited. The informants emphasize that coffee bars do not seem to function as places where sexual and intimate relationships can develop, probably due to the fact that they have early closing hours and do not sell alcoholic beverages. However, one of my informants, Sølve, hopes to see changes in this context. His hopes might turn out to be rewarded; the coffee bar functions well as a place where social relationships can be developed, even without the sale of alcoholic beverages and early closing hours. It might just be a question of time before Sølve can experience a coffee bar that has the capacity to develop this kind of friendship; perhaps it is a question of design. Nowadays, coffee bars have a rather fixed typology; but this may change. An ambitious entrepreneur may discover a niche in the market and exploit it.

## 7.5. SOCIALIZING AND SOLITUDE- A SHORT SUMMARY

The research question – *What features of coffee bars have made them into an important and growing phenomenon in our society?* – has been given several substantial answers in the empirical material discussed in this chapter. The coffee bars' ability to offer both a socializing space, as well as space designed for solitude are important for understanding the phenomenon. The informality of coffee bars is essential in making them useful for a wide variety of users with different needs and priorities. The need for daily routines; the "cup of excellent coffee as a reward"; the possibility of being able to sit alone and daydream; the possibility of being able to think about matters; the interest and joy in looking out at the street, as well as the possibility of being looked at are important. Also important is the possibility of being alone, while at the same time being surrounded and integrated into the buzz and life of others. This situation, socializing with no one in a social environment, is perhaps one of the strongest identification-factors of urbanity.

And those who socialize have found in coffee bars something that makes them use them with high frequency; they can meet their friends here; people who have the same interests; they can institutionalize informal chatting and small talk with those who visit coffee bars, or they can actively seek new friends and develop new social relationships.

# Chapter 8.    Baristas at work

The staff is essential to the success of any coffee bar. Consequently, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the coffee bar phenomenon, it is necessary to examine the staff's contribution to the smooth running of a coffee bar. When I first visited a coffee bar, I was struck by how much time it took to get served. The idea that a cup of coffee is something that has to be made cup by cup, and not only poured out of a coffee jug, was new to me.

> I serve coffee to people who come here because this is where they want to be. I don't see myself as a seller; but rather as someone who is concerned with making and serving coffee, serving the customers and as someone who is a part of this place. I provide people with something, which they might not be fully aware they really need. It's not as if I always feel very happy going to work, but once I'm there and involved, I see that I have a role; I'm the one who provides all these people with a coffee experience.
>
> *Einar, barista (26).*

## 8.1.   A SECTOR, A TERM, SOME STANDARDS

*Barista* is the term used in coffee bar jargon to refer to the person who makes the coffee – the man or woman operating the espresso machine. Since the beginning of the 1990s this term has been used in most European languages as a job title for the "bartender" of a coffee bar. An earlier, and more awkward, term was "espresso puller". The coffee blog Coffee Info believes

"The shift of terminology probably comes, at least in part, from the fact that most espresso machines manufactured since the 1980s no longer require pulling down on a big handle"(Coffe Info 2009).The world's biggest chain of coffee bars, Starbucks, uses *barista* as the official title of an employee certified to make espresso. The word has spread fast, and even though some might think the term is strictly Italian, it has now been imported into many languages.

In Norway, there is no formal education available for baristas; this is also the case in most other countries. The job title nevertheless represents a discourse, a community with its own rules of conduct, institutions of qualification and conferences, and with its own economic, social and cultural systems.

The Italian baristas were – and still are – bartenders in bars that sell both coffee and alcoholic beverages. The baristas specialize in making good espresso-based drinks. The espresso is therefore considered as something of a barometer of quality among the baristas. In the globalized coffee industry, the espresso has kept this high status; if you can make a good espresso – sufficiently creamy, with the correct proportions, and brewed under the right amount of pressure – then you are accepted by the industry (Lobowitz 2008).

The barista is a skilled position that has become more common since the late-1980s; today, the Italians are no longer considered to be in the lead concerning the development of coffee drinks. On the contrary, it is in the USA and the protestant parts of Europe that the baristas are most innovative, that is at least the overall view in the global specialty coffee environment[19].

Specialized institutions have emerged, and "specialty coffee" has become a recognized concept and industry. Through organizations, such as the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe (SCAE) and the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA), the business has built its own regulating bodies. These also cooperate in the arranging the World Barista Championship. In this event national champions from more than fifty different nations compete against each other; this far exceeds, for instance, the number of countries that compete in international sporting events, in events such as, cross country skiing, ski jumping and handball (disciplines in which Norway are often successful). The participating nations come from all the continents, and the geographical spread gives a good indication that we are dealing with a global phenomenon. Moreover, the World Barista Championship is not merely an isolated event; it forms the center of a cultural community of knowledge expressed through blogs, magazines,

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[19] There are many blogs on speciality coffee, and some of them are of importance in defining the field, as for instance Mike Crimmins' blog *Daily Shot of Coffee* (Crimmins 2008)or in Norway Tim Wendelbo's own blog *Tim Wendelbo* (Wendelbo 2008).

courses and seminars, "cupping" (the art of coffee tasting) and theme-trips to places where coffee is grown.

Within this culture has appeared a hierarchical system of quality. The standards are set by the world championship, and even though there exist divergent opinions regarding what makes a perfect espresso, the World Barista Championship advocates some overall preferences.

Since Norway has hosted the world championship on several occasions, and also continues to perform well in this prestigious contest, there is also a general agreement in the country – especially in Oslo – concerning which coffee bar is the best one, who makes the best coffee and what this coffee is like. The fact that there exists such a system, which points in one direction, contributes to the creation of a culture with prevailing standards of classification.

## 8.2. THE DAILY LIFE OF A BARISTA

They provide you and me with coffee. They carefully operate the espresso machines and make sure that we get what we order. It is in fact a comparatively challenging job – it demands physical strength, quick reactions and a customer-oriented and friendly attitude. On one level the baristas perform a type of traditional manual work; however, on the other hand they can be seen as part of a different kind of industry, which is not only there to supply a product, but also to create an atmosphere and environment.

The working day of a barista involves a series of complicated and complex tasks. Based on my studies of the inner life of coffee bars, I would claim that a barista has four main tasks at work: The first task is to make good coffee. This is a demanding craft, and not everybody has got what it takes. The second task is managing the queue. The barista must be able to structure the work around the customers in the line. Many of them – often around 70 percent – are regular customers, so the barista will know what they want long before it's their turn to order. Handling knowledge of this kind so that queuing time is minimized is one of the most important jobs of the barista. The third task is to have the internal, logical insight to manage the running of the coffee bar as a business. This involves being in control of the stockrooms, the movement of products; and making sure all the different parts of the business run like a well-oiled machine. The fourth task consists in being friendly and effective in customer service: to receive orders with a smile and make the customers feel welcome.

The four different parts of the job require three different types of traits in an individual. The first is technical competence, making it possible to perform the purely practical part of the job. The second is intelligence and a sense of structure, getting the job done quickly. The third is the ability to

perform a role and create a pleasant atmosphere. In other words: to be a good barista you must possess a combination of all these character traits. Only when all three are present and well balanced do we have a professional and successful barista. When interviewing baristas about their workday, it became apparent to me that most of them have a lot of professional pride. They see themselves as agents in a complex professional field, and consider managing this environment to be demanding. They all emphasize the technical insight and practical handling of the tools as the skills that are most essential to performing their job.

## 8.3.  WHO BECOMES A BARISTA?

The baristas I have spoken to are not a random selection of Norwegian workers; they have been sifted carefully by employers. Most of those who own and run coffee bars have started out as baristas whose professional goal – as we have seen in chapter 3 – was to establish their own business. When the business is up and running and they start hiring staff; they are pretty much in agreement when it comes to the criteria. All the owners with whom I have spoken emphasize the need for reliability, technical insight, a sense of responsibility, willingness to acquire new skills and knowledge, plus physical strength. One owner said:

> We put a lot of resources into training. Recently we have had around 60 people in for interviews, and we're only employing four. There are thousands out there who want to work in coffee bars, and we only want the best. If they say that they know how to make coffee, then we don't hire them, 'cause almost nobody does – you never finish the learning process. It's all about understanding the product in its entirety. You have to learn that coffee is a fresh foodstuff, that the details are important and that there are no exceptions.

He points out that serving coffee is demanding work. The staff needs to work systematically; inaccuracy and short-cuts are never acceptable, as it is the sum of all the details that make good coffee:

> We operate with a trial period involving an option on both sides to terminate the employment. If it doesn't work, we have to let them go.

Another coffee bar owner points out that girls in general are more responsible than boys, and that very young people usually are not suited to the job. They should be over twenty-three years old, and also have considerable physical strength, so that they won't suffer from repetitive strain injuries.

## 8.4. MAKING A LIVING OF IT

> When you have the most important factors: good coffee beans,
> a sharp mill, a decent machine, clean water, and then the rest is
> up to you. The quality is the responsibility of the barista.

Sylvia, barista.

This quotation illustrates the proportional emphasis on ingredients and equipment versus technical skills, and is symptomatic of the self understanding of the baristas I have become acquainted with.

Sylvia has worked for five years as a barista, and is very dedicated. It was quite coincidental that she started in the profession, but in her own opinion she is well suited to the job. She is now in her mid-thirties, and well settled in the line of business. In addressing what she perceives to be the most important characteristics of a barista, she said:

> You need to have a genuine enthusiasm for coffee to succeed.
> That enthusiasm is your tool to access all the other skills. It
> isn't sufficient on its own, but it's the one basic trait you have
> to bring in from the start.

Sylvia has worked in various different coffee bars and chain stores, and common to all of them is the fact that the position as barista demands many skills. She emphasizes that a barista can never cut corners in the quest for good coffee making skills:

It does take time to learn how to make great coffee, and in addition it is important that a barista has a talent for administration. You have to be observant, constantly keeping track of who is lining up in the queue, so that you can calculate the orders of all the waiting customers into your operations.

Sylvia is a good example of how a woman can succeed in the coffee business; in actual fact they often outnumber men in coffee bar staffs. As mentioned above, some owners also consider women to be more trustworthy, harder working and in general better suited to being baristas. Sylvia, on the other hand, does not agree with this description of the situation. In her opinion it is much simpler than that: "Some are made for the job, others aren't!"

Viggo represents a large sub-group of people employed in coffee bars: those who work part time and for a limited amount of time, rather than as a career. He is somewhat uncertain about his reasons why he became a barista at the age of twenty-two:

I lived in the neighborhood and was a regular customer at the coffee bar in Thereses gate – the first one, and the nicest by far. I was just in need of a part time job, and I asked the friendly guy behind the counter. He told me to go ahead and apply, and I was employed almost immediately.

Viggo went through what he calls "a normal job interview", and after he had got the job he was given training. Learning to make coffee, i.e. high quality espresso coffee, takes some time and requires skills. He was also instructed in customer management and the daily routines and procedures. Initially, Viggo was looking for part time employment, not a full time job, but he nevertheless ended up working around twenty hours a week:

It was real fun! I enjoyed it very much. I really liked it. It's a very nice experience to sell people something they really want. I've never had that experience in a sales situation before; it was different to many other sales-related jobs where you have to convince customers they need something they probably don't need at all. And another appealing aspect of being a barista is supplying your customers with a high quality product. As a

barista you have to become a perfectionist. And you realize it
when you go out shopping yourself that you appreciate
competence in the sales staff.

Viggo adds that the barista circles are rather nerdy. They include people who
seem to exceed each other in their extreme enthusiasm for coffee. They can
talk for hours about the details – essential details mind you – of the coffee
making procedure:

> The other most rewarding thing in this line of work are the
> regular customers. You know exactly how they like it. You talk
> with people, and after a while you know what your customers
> do for a living, or what they are studying. You might even learn
> more about them than you would actually like to.

Viggo originally comes from a small town and he was surprised to observe
the relationship between the coffee bar staff and the regular customers.

> It's a fascinating phenomenon: as a coffee bar customer you
> can actually be recognized after having visited a place only
> three times.

He sees a parallel in this to his hometown, and describes this instant intimacy
in the city as something of a mystery. Viggo reckons that barista work makes
you very attentive:

> You become very observant and service-oriented, and
> interestingly that also affects how you act outside of work. I
> might have embraced the role as service-provider a little too
> eagerly.

Viggo confesses that he became so service minded even in his spare time; he
became the provider of good service among his own friends as well. Viggo
claims that he did not enter into the coffee business because it has a stylish

and fashionable image. He was, however, attracted by the fact that the line of work has an official title; being a barista was valuable to him:

> You have a title; and you operate a machine that costs NOK 100 000 (about 16 000 US$).

But the machine is not enough in itself. At the end of the day, even the most perfectly engineered coffee machine is no guarantee for a perfect result:

> Some people can make good coffee, and others just can't. Some seem like hopeless cases – they just never get up to standard. I'm not saying coffee making is an art, but it's a craft. One thing is to make a good espresso every now and then; quite another to get a perfect result again and again.

It is the ability to maintain high quality over a very long period of time that is both so demanding and so important, according to Viggo; to always be accurate, never slipshod. He emphasizes the importance of finding a technique that fits your personality and your abilities. Even though there is a specific procedure that needs to be followed to ensure the correct result, there is room for individual differences. There is more than one way to make the perfect cup of coffee, but it is important that the barista is on solid ground; that is, he or she must have a firm understanding of what it is to be a barista, in order to be ready to experiment to enhance the coffee. "I'd say that that many baristas are a little bit lazy," Viggo said. In his view it is much better to make a new cup of coffee if you have produced a mediocre one. Sometimes it is easy to think that it is not a big deal, but this is a big mistake, according to him:

> Especially when you're serving a pure espresso the quality has to be top notch. In general, very few customers can be bothered complaining, and when they do, it's usually the temperature they've found something wrong with.

Viggo adds that in certain coffee bars your ear will reveal to you that the baristas are doing something wrong:

> ...the sound of an espresso being made can sometimes be rather similar to that of a cat being killed!

Viggo finds the concept of championships rather out of place in a coffee making context, but recognizes that the status of the profession is rising, and for good reasons.

> Working in a coffee bar is higher up in the professional hierarchy than working at Seven Eleven, and obviously the work is better. As a barista you're making something, not just putting it on a tray. Also the relationship with the customer is very different.

He values especially the relationship with the regular customers, and those that he calls "good customers". What he didn't like about the job was the tediousness of having to constantly tell people the difference between a double and a single latte, and things like that. "The majority of customers are such clichés."

Viggo has given up his job as a barista, which is easy to understand from the point of view of an outsider. It was only ever meant to be a part-time job, and he is still studying. Sylvia, on the other hand, has no intentions of quitting. Being a barista is her career, and she intends to grow old in the business:

> I feel that I still enjoy the working day and the pay is decent. I do notice that a lot of my colleagues disappear from the profession and move on; many of them are young and are just doing the job for a short while. I don't want to do anything else. Not yet, anyhow.

Sylvia said that sometime in the future she might consider leaving the city to run a small hotel somewhere, but in the here and now, that is not an option.

Another barista, who shares the point of view of Sylvia, is Martin. He works full-time, and is devoted to his job, but the start of his career was a mere coincidence. On the look-out for work, Martin was lucky enough to be

offered a job in a little downtown coffee bar. The store – which was very limited in space – had just had its concept radically changed by the owners. Before it had been a regular café, but now the store in Lille Grensen was the first to carry the logo of Stockfleths – today a well known chain of coffee bars. The café had originally been established in 1895 by founder Astrid Stockfleth in a nearby street, and it was moved to its present location in the 1970s. When Martin started working there complete chaos prevailed in the little coffee bar. Nobody knew how to make a proper espresso, and Martin and the two other employees had to learn everything from scratch:

> We didn't have a clue; we just had to start performing. I guess we made a lot of horrible coffee in the beginning, but it only took a little while before I realized that we could get really good if we just kept working at it. The main problem is to make good coffee every single time you try, not just every now and then.

Martin and his co-workers had to learn by experimenting, reading and by copying what they could see. They made use of what means they could find to compensate for their lack of experience. According to Martin it took him three weeks to be able to make an acceptable cup of coffee, three months to be able to make good coffee most of the time, and six months before he had mastered the procedure that gives you high quality every time. He learnt that there are no short-cuts to good coffee; some basics just have to be right – like the temperature of the water and the time you allow to make each shot of espresso:

> That's why it is so important for a barista to have talent, a keen interest in learning new techniques, a willingness to improve – and a solid routine! I do think that some people are more made for the job than others. Some have a talent for coffee. But not everybody has got what it takes.

Even before Martin started working he expected to enjoy a certain social and cultural credibility as a good barista:

> I thought being a barista would be get me the chicks, you know
> – I thought it would be a good way of attracting members of
> the opposite sex,

admits Martin, and laughs wholeheartedly at the hopeful novice he was. He has since realized that although the credibility of a barista is considerable, it is not necessarily your technical skills that increase your pulling power. Martin explains that the response of the regular customer can enhance the routines and processes:

> The regular customers are essential to me, and I say that both
> as a professional and as a private person. They are the ones that
> spur you to improve yourself and produce high quality. Their
> constructive criticism and interest are indeed driving forces in a
> coffee bar.

## 8.5. FRIENDS AND LOVERS

In a coffee bar there is always a certain potential for human relationships, and Martin has in fact made several friends among his customers:

> In the first coffee bar I worked in we would always listen to
> jazz. Some of us staff had more than an average interest in
> music, and of course this attracts a particular kind of customer
> – customers that you already, without knowing it, have
> something in common with. So you start off by discussing the
> music and the coffee and move on to talk about other essential
> things in life, and you become friends. That's pretty much how
> it goes – it's fairly common.

Most baristas have experienced the same thing; various forms of friendship develop between baristas and customers. Einar – a full time working barista in his early thirties – reckons the reason for this is that:

> …you sell them something personal, and so the whole setting
> becomes intimate.

For him the profession has always been a very personal thing, and this opens up the possibility of making new friends.

> But it's also important to maintain a kind of professional distance, and most of the guests aren't there to look for new friends among the staff – it would perhaps be more natural for most of them to strike up a conversation with other customers. However, I have noticed that contact among the clientele is often only continued after I get them started. I provide the opening through small-talk at the counter, you know …

Einar too emphasizes the importance of the regular customers; they represent both an economic cornerstone and the social-glue in the coffee bar:

> Regular customers make a place work. You might ask how regular customers are created, and I suppose that is rather up to us.

Sylvia agrees that you get more attached to some of the regulars than others; but that it can sometimes be easy to attribute a fictional life to the many people you deal with on a daily basis:

> I believe I have even been quite infatuated with some customers, hoping that they will come in each day. And then there's the opposite situation, when a customer suddenly asks you out – that's more difficult to handle I think. If you accept it, it's a little unprofessional, but on the other hand it might be that there is actually something there worth pursuing, and then you have to … well, do something about it, you know.

Sylvia has previously been in relationships with people she met in the coffee bar, but that was a few years ago. It is something she thinks it is best to avoid now that she has been in the business for quite a while:

In the beginning I think you are more open to it, and searching
for it. I mean, when you are twenty-five and new in the job,
you tend to follow a different set of rules.

Anyone who has frequented coffee bars will have noticed how the good
baristas can make intricate patterns in the coffee cup or glass. When the
steamed milk is added to the coffee in a latté for instance, they can create the
shape of, say, a tree or a heart. Sylvia explains that she likes to make a heart
for customers who she immediately likes. Nothing much is implied by it
though: "Maybe an innocent flirt, or just a friendly gesture." Martin is not
such a fan of the "patterns":

The only one I try to make is the tree; because it communicates
that the milk is prepared and added correctly. There are other
and better ways of sending private messages, and there is
something incredibly tacky about those hearts. Oh God, it's
pathetic.

Most baristas see their social function in the coffee bar as an important – but
not vital – part of the job. In all the interviews I have conducted, the baristas
reflect on their own position in the coffee bar as a public space. One of them
said:

Of course we influence the customers continuously – in a
positive or a negative way. But sadly, it's also true that we have
very little time to actually talk with them. Also, there is the fact
that we are on opposite sides of the counter; this is a difference,
which defines the relationship between us.

The baristas see themselves as staff, not friends, to the customers. Their
identity and loyalty lie within the establishment and the profession – more
than with the social implications of the profession. One might argue that the
friend-like role of the barista is a result of the lack of strict formal rules of
conduct in the job. The way I see it, however, this is not how it works – not
even from the point of view of the customer. The fact that friendships occur
between staff and customers at a coffee bar, is rooted in an explanation on a

more structural level. As I will discuss here, it seems as if the service economy depends on the blurring of social boundaries.

## 8.6. A DISCUSSION

The baristas do manual labor, work that is occasionally both stressful and complicated; a queue demands not least that you can increase the speed you work at without decreasing the quality of the final product. On the other hand – and perhaps more importantly – the studies that I have conducted display that the barista's ability to make customers feel welcome is central. The work of a barista is therefore a combination of manual work with high standards of quality – we might even call it a craft – and a service. Such professions have always existed; craftsmen have held this type of position since antiquity, when specialized independent professions with complex tasks were established. In the course of industrialization, however, the process of separating the performance of a job from the customers increased, and many workers were completely removed from contact with anyone but their colleagues (Sennett 2008, 84).

Even so, all along there exists professions that combine craftsmanship and services, for instance in the health sector and in various crafts. However, from the early 1800s, a strong service industry developed in all the major cities in the western word, and the process of increasing individual consumption – which is part of the urbanization process – also produced new approaches to customer care and innovative service techniques[20]. The new cultivation of service – as well as sales and customer care – opened for the type of classifications (and qualifications) that I have mentioned in this chapter.

What unites the baristas is their emphasis on technical skills as the most important part of their work. To be a good barista you must master the craft, and be able to execute the processes involved in making good coffee quickly while maintaining high quality. The baristas also stress that the equipment needs to be in order; you need good raw materials and good machines. The professional pride of the baristas is rooted in the quality of the coffee beverages they make and the speediness of the processes, and these are also the measures according to which the baristas are judged in the formal barista contests.

It is, however, worth noting that baristas that reach the final rounds of national and international competitions also have to compose a personalized espresso-based drink. He or she has to show that they are able to create a

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[20] For further reading see for instance Rachel Bowlby's book *Carried away: the invention of modern shopping* (Bowlby 2001)

variation of a drink, using coffee and milk as their main ingredients. In other words, the creative side of barista work is also significant in competitions.

In gastronomic competitions, innovations, and being able to put together a new menu, is seen as essential. The creative side of cookery has high social status, and is therefore also emphasized in the formal education of chefs. This has long been the case in France and central Europe, but innovation in the chef profession is today also spreading to countries that are adopting the French approach to raw materials and creativity. Innovation in the restaurant business is also about returning to traditions, injecting new life into them, and thus creating better opportunities for creative chefs and the profession as a whole to develop (Aguilera 2009, 320). Because gastronomy also contains a touch of avant-garde, at the same time as it exists within an aesthetic universe where craftsmanship is the essential principle, some might claim that we are in fact dealing with a kind of fine art (Hegarty and Barry O'Mahony 2001).

The barista's ambition to be creative, however, is timid in comparison. Perhaps the barista discourse of the future will go further in recognizing and rewarding creativity; the increasing number of publications on the theme of espresso-based drinks might be an indicator.

Most customers claim that they frequent coffee bars that serve good coffee and most also think that there are differences in quality between the various coffee bars. One customer said:

> Before, I didn't consider it much, but the more coffee I drink the higher my standards become. I'm not as obsessed with coffee as some people are, but over time my knowledge of flavors has developed.

This claim is pretty representative of the opinion most coffee bar customers have. They develop their competence over time, and eventually become able to tell the difference between good and less successful coffee.

Important to almost all the customers, however, are the non-material characteristics of a place, such as the mood and atmosphere, as illustrated in the previous chapter. That does not mean they would go to a coffee bar even if the coffee was awful, but it indicates that as long as the quality of the coffee is high, which it is in a majority of coffee bars, other factors that are not directly concerned with the drinks served will be decisive. As shown earlier in this chapter, an atmosphere is created in the meeting between the barista and the customers. The barista's ability to make the visitors feel welcome, and to create a positive mood, provides the customers with an experience they will wish to have repeated, and is thus essential.

Given that this mission is accomplished, positive and lasting customer relations are created. The people who return again and again become regular customers, and they return to the coffee bar with expectations of an experience. One barista said:

> People who come here are generally very nice. I mean, they don't *have* to come here; they come because they want to, and that is a very positive foundation to start from.

As this barista precisely concludes, the meeting between clients and staff is characterized by motivated choice, not forced necessity, and therefore the ability to create atmosphere is important if a coffee bar is to prosper. Most baristas accept this situation; however, the baristas who I have spoken to, without exception, place more emphasis on the technical aspects of their work. They are clear when it comes to the perceived value of their work; they maintain that it is important and they genuinely believe that making and serving espresso-based drinks of high quality is a respected profession. They do not feel that the work demands of them any sort of superficiality – it is not "just a job".

Returning to my research question, it is relevant to ask: to what degree do the baristas, and their way of operating, explain why coffee bars are an important feature in our society? I think I am able to discover several factors worthy of interest. The fact that the baristas regard themselves as craftsmen, and that most of them are passionate about coffee, ensures that they are able to produce and serve high quality coffee; this in turn results in returning customers, and an enlarged interest in coffee at this level. What many of them in more limited ways seem to acknowledge is that their ability to perform as first-class service workers, i.e. provide atmosphere, is just as essential.

This appears to be a paradox: the baristas do physical work that does not demand any formal education, but they are still very interested in the technical aspects of the job, and they posses great professional pride. On the other hand, maybe it is not a paradox. Maybe the baristas signify something else related to the coffee bar phenomenon: The baristas enables and nurtures the development of atmosphere that attracts customers and make them comeback. They are contributing to mood in coffee bars, and thereby being representing essential features in the current urbanity.

# Chapter 9.    Soft urbanity

In this chapter I will propose and discuss a new term, "soft urbanity". The term arises out of the dissertation, and results from the discussion and questions I find embedded in the different layers of the coffee bars I have studied. Soft urbanity is a term that can refine the use and understanding of the term "urbanity", and bring to the forefront knowledge and perceptions that will in turn expand our understanding of how and why practices in the urban landscape are changing. Soft urbanity is a term that captures many of the essential qualities I have found, and can be used to describe urban life as a whole.

Soft urbanity can represent a way of understanding and seeing, and is therefore a term that can be used to establish a perspective. One of the more ripe fruits the many debates on postmodernity of the last 30 years provide us with is the openness for new interpretations. Theories equipped with a terminology intended to describe changes, also offer the possibility of replacing old perspectives. That mechanism is containing a possible intellectual trap, since a reality that has undergone only minor changes might be observable as brand new. But the same mechanism is also opening up for richer interpretations and more insight, new instruments often creates new substantial findings. I walk into this landscape with open eyes, and I like to underscore that drawing a too strict line between the description of a realty and a new view at an established order, belongs to the more utopian methodological claims in the social sciences[21].

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[21] Here I like to refer to some of the reflections made in chapter 2, where I quote Norman Denzin who writes: "All observation is theory laden. There is no possibility of theory-free or value free knowledge". (Denzin 2003, 108)

I owe the invention of the term "soft urbanity" to Jonny Aspen. It was formulated by him in his office, during a discussion on the altered fabric of urbanity, and immediately it made sense, and made me throw out the other terms I was struggling to make relevant. Earlier I had seen the expression "Soft City" used by the English travel writer Jonathan Raban. He called his first book Soft City (Raban 1975), and here the term "soft" is used to describe how individuals creates their own city through the construction of personal narratives. Through the use of memories, of belief, of poetic visions, a private universe with a private meaning is created. Rabin finds that the magnetism of cities like London and New York can be explained by these metropolises' ability to be the subject of individual interpretations. He argues that that is how each urban dweller builds their own city, the "soft city". Raban never uses the term "soft urbanity", and his use of "soft" is confined to personal experience alone. However, the term 'soft urbanity' appears to have many of the same connotations, but it is also a much stricter term. Let me explain.

By soft urbanity I mean that the present type of urbanity has become soft. The categories that where – and still are – so important in the emergence of modernity, are in a sense weakened in the coffee bars. The categories are softened; the distinctions are blurred between solitude and sociality, high and low culture, economic classes, production and consumption, the local and the global, and the public and private.

However, this does not imply that distinctions between these oppositions are no longer valid; instead, it implies that a coffee bar is characterized by a "both/and" situation. They are both softened and not softened. For instance, coffee bars are places where the employees are on a more even "level" with the customers than, say, in a restaurant; but of course, the baristas still serve the customers, and the customers do not help the baristas with the dishwashing! In other words, the boundaries between them have not disappeared, but the culture through which they are mediated has been softened.

The softness in coffee bars, emerge as a soft practice. There is a correlation between the blurring of distinctions and the quality of the atmosphere in a coffee bar.

What the empirical material has brought to front is both the softening of categories, as well as the softening of practices, (and that categories are softened in correlation with softening practices.[22])

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[22] I will not undertake a discussion on the casual relation here, but that is a task asking for an elaboration.

The question then is to explain why the categories and the practices become softer, and I find a trace in the term "de-differentiation". In the debate on postmodernity and the postmodern, several works have emphasized how the current societal situation is characterized by processes that dissolve and redefine central aspects of modernity. I do not intend to elaborate on this debate, but I would like to refer to Scott Lash and his book *Sociology of Postmodernism* (Lash 1990). In this book, Lash advocates a perspective on postmodernity as a process of cultural "de-differentiation". For Lash, the process of modernization produced the process of differentiation (Lash 1990, 11). Differentiation is understood here as it is in sociological theory, i.e. that increased complexity of society produces new subsystems, so-called system differentiation, in order to enhance the function of the system (Luhmann 1977, 31). Lash declares that postmodernity rolls back these processes and creates a cultural mélange where there exists "a postmodernist refusal to separate … the audience from the performance", and that there is a "postmodernist transgression of the boundary…between high and popular culture" (Lash 1990, 173).

When I argue that coffee bars represent soft urbanity; I find that they are arenas for the processes of "de-differentiation", and the emergence of less rigid distinctions in a variety of fields. The soft urbanity is also marked by another feature, interwoven with the mentioned process, and that is the existence of an informal culture.

An informal culture appears to be a central aspect of the appeal of coffee bars; noticeably the informants are pinpointing that aspect. When informants refer to informality, they are describing a feature of the coffee bar that is important to most of them. The idea that informality is central is also shared by most people when that concept is applied to society as a whole[23]. Since the 1960s, informality has been regarded as one of the qualities necessary for a well-functioning society. In the context of the West in the post-1945 period, "informality" is a characteristic that encourages more open and free societies, and, amongst other things, can contribute to the autonomy and liberation of minorities and discriminated groups[24]. Informality has not only achieved a role as an undisputable greater good in Western societies, but is also described by many (albeit using other terms) as being important in making local communities function well (Oldenburg 1999, 32). Similarly, in the field of urban planning, it is accepted that informality is an important aspect of urban life. Physical manifestations of informality are pursued by city

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[23] See for example *Values in Western Societies* (Moor 1995), a report on The European Values Study which is a longitudinal survey on human values in European countries.
[24] For a more comprehensive argument and a detailed history of how informality has played a role see e.g. Barbara Misztal, *Informality: Social Theory and Contemporary Practice* (Misztal 2000); for a detailed account of how one specific group made informality their religion, see Micah Issitt, *Hippies: A Guide to an American Subculture* (Issitt 2009, 62).

planners and policy makers in most urban areas in most Western countries. Since the 1970s, the idea of informal meeting places is often described as a central element of urban life. *Life Between the Buildings: Using Public Space* (Gehl 1987), by the Danish architect Jan Gehl, has had a remarkable influence in the West, especially in its focus on urban design as a tool for enriched social life.

Indeed, the idea that public spaces such as parks and squares play an important role in determining how cities function is discussed in a wide body of academic literature. It is not my intention to give a comprehensive overview of this field, but it is worth noting that social science theorists are sometimes critical of some aspects of this development, for instance describing it as a kind of "architectural determinism" (Hillier et al. 1987). For example, design and architecture can hardly be expected to solve the problems created by poverty, illiteracy or drugs. Nevertheless, when used in an academic context informality can be understood as referring to something quite different; for instance, it is a term often used in development studies to describe the informal aspects of an economy, the labor market, planning procedures etc. in developing countries. [25]

Informality, as it is described here, is a term that may be used for several purposes; and as my case has demonstrated, informality is also a descriptive word that may be applied to the social reality discussed in this dissertation. Informality is a vital element for people when they meet other people in certain circumstances, as my informant Anne Line expressed:

> It is important that you can meet … without a lot of complication, just for the need and the joy of meeting each other. The coffee bar suits these needs perfectly.

However, an informal culture is wider and has a more penetrating effect. This quote describes this culture and suggests that informality saturates the whole field I am studying. Isolated as it is in this small study, it is observable in the inner social life of my informants, in how people relate to one another, how people relate to the baristas, how they use space and how they interpret the setting. Many informants and my observations underscored that a lack of formal manners and stiff rituals enables the coffee bar to attract a large amount of customers.

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[25] See e.g. *Informal Settlements: A Perpetual Challenge?*(Huchzermeyer and Karam 2006) or the descriptions in *Planet of Slums* (Davis 2006) of how cities in much of the developing world grow and develop through the expansion of informal institutions.

In sociology, informality is a term that has attracted some interest, mainly through the works of Michael Maffesoli and Norbert Elias. *The Civilizing Process* (Elias 1978) (published in German in 1939, but not in English until 1969) is a work on the character of Western civilization. Elias uses the terms "informality" and "formality" to define two aspects of social systems, both necessary for survival. In *The Times of the Tribes – the Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (Maffesoli 1996), Maffesoli pursues an argument that perceives contemporary urban life as being dominated by "metropolitan tribes" (Ibid., 23) that worship informality. Maffesoli extrapolates the ideas brought to forefront by Elias and applies them to contemporary life style practices, such as the fashion world etc.

Soft urbanity, I will claim, is defined both by informality and the "de-differentiation" processes. To understand the contemporary coffee bar is to understand that urbanity has become "soft". Soft urbanity is an absolute prerequisite for a well-functioning coffee bar; conversely, it also helps to explain the lasting appeal of the coffee bar in modern urban areas.

Urbanity, as was illustrated in Chapter 3, is an urban culture defined by codes with a specific set of social norms. It is the existence of a common but non-explicit value system that ensures openness towards strangers, individual autonomy and harmonious relationships. In conclusion, I use the term "soft urbanity" to describe situations where the social norms are less stiff, which make possible an environment where many distinctions also appear less rigid.

## 9.1. LONELINESS AND SOCIALITY

When I parked myself one morning on a bar stool by the counter-window in a coffee bar, I had commited myself to carrying out the same actions and behavior as the majority of the other visitors. As illustrated earlier in this dissertation, the options are privacy or community, solitude or socializing, or both. Returning to Georg Simmel, and his perspective on urban life, I am able to observe that the coffee bar phenomenon represents a potential for widening the scope on how urbanity may be understood. Let me explain:

Simmel (and also Benjamin's) approach to the characteristics of urban life is built on how the urban personality develops through the conflict between intimacy and distance. The fate (or the state) of the human psychology, when settled in an urban context, is full of contradictory experiences. The metropolitan life they describe produces freedom, but also loneliness that appears to be an inherent, unavoidable and painful part of it. Simmel writes in his essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life", first published 1903, (Simmel 1950, 414):

…the bodily proximity and narrowness of space makes the mental distance only the more visible. It is obviously only the obverse of this freedom if, under certain circumstances, one nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd. For here as elsewhere it is by no means necessary that the freedom of man be reflected in his emotional life as comfort.

I suggest that when so many of my informants say they visit a coffee bar to be alone, it is not the loneliness described by Simmel they seek. Many of those I have interviewed openly admit that they seek the inner life and dynamics of a coffee bar. This is the prime motivation behind their visit, i.e. solitude. As referred to in Chapter 7, Ingrid aptly expresses this sentiment:

It may not be silent here, but the sounds you hear are produced by people who drink coffee; who turn the pages of their newspapers; the sounds of the milk steamer; the making of the coffee and the words that pass between the baristas and the customers. In fact, none of the people inside this room are actually talking to each other, at least not at the moment. You just have a bunch of people who do not know each other, but who all use the place. As a place to be, you know…

In our culture, solitude, in contrast to loneliness, is often characterized as a positive experience. For instance, in her autobiography (with the instructive title *Journal of Solitude*), Mary Sarton discusses the differences between solitude and loneliness; she explains it this way: "Loneliness is the poverty of self; solitude is the richness of self" (Sarton 1992, 33). In her book, Sarton reflects on her life, and work as an artist, and embraces the combined joy and melancholy of solitude and formulates a poetic but also pragmatic defense of the ability to stand alone.
Similarly, Henry Thoreau (1817-1862) in his book *Walden,* first published in 1854, (Thoreau 2002), takes a positive stand on solitude. Very few of the coffee bar customers I have met have a naturalist, philosophical view and explicit longing for the simple life that Thoreau advocates; however, many of them share a similar will to embrace solitude.

> I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To
> be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and
> dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion
> that was as companionable as solitude. (Thoreau 2002, 124)

In *Walden* solitude is described as the true state of human fulfillment, as
offering a better and more unspoiled perspective on human life. In the
contemporary world, solitude is not only seen as an ideal form of existence,
but also as a pragmatic and important tool for managing stressful work and
everyday life. There is both a psychological and a lexical difference between
solitude and loneliness. The psychologist Hara Estroff Marano formulates
this in the following manner:

> Loneliness is marked by a sense of isolation. Solitude, on the
> other hand, is a state of being alone without being lonely and
> can lead to self-awareness (Marano 2003, 8).

Marano sees solitude as a necessity, human beings "…need to maintain some
semblance of balance and some sense that we are steering the ship of our
life." She believes that we must construct this sense of control to avoid
feeling overloaded, especially in environments where things happen at an
ever increasing speed. She argues that although there is a resemblance
between solitude and loneliness, this is only on the surface. Loneliness is
when "…one feels that something is absent, that even with the company of
others, the sore feeling of being lonely is there." But solitude, Marano argues:

> …is the state of being alone without being lonely. It is a
> positive and constructive state of engagement with oneself.
> Solitude is desirable, a state of being alone where you provide
> yourself wonderful and sufficient company.

Like Thoreau, she looks at solitude as an opportunity to reflect on the deeper
layers of one's personality. She also finds that it is not only reading and
studying that requires solitude, but – contrary to modern belief – "thinking
and creativity usually do too."

> Solitude is something you choose. Loneliness is imposed on
> you by others. We all need periods of solitude, although
> temperamentally we probably differ in the amount of solitude
> we need. Some solitude is essential; it gives us time to explore
> and know ourselves. It is the necessary counterpoint to
> intimacy, what allows us to have a self worthy of sharing.
> Solitude gives us a chance to regain perspective. It renews us
> for the challenges of life. It allows us to get (back) into the
> position of driving our own lives, rather than having them run
> by schedules and demands from without.

Marano views solitude as a clear choice, made to achieve a greater good –
solitude becomes an action that can only be explained from a rational
perspective of human behavior. Is it really so? In my empirical material I find
many who seek solitude and use it strategically to regulate their burden of
work, their ambitions and need for time off (from the rest of all these
structures and people that consume their time). As referred to in Chapter 7,
one of my informants expressed:

> …. my visits here are intentional: I insert them into my
> schedule and inform my colleagues… … the coffee bar is a
> place … where no one expects anything of me... I won't say
> it's a meditative experience, but I like to protect my energy.

Most of the coffee bar visitors I have talked to seem to support Sarton and
Marano's descriptions concerning solitude; they feel that the solitude in a
coffee bar can be a pragmatic response to the pressures of contemporaryn
society. This is the rational approach: people visit coffee bars because it
fulfills a variety of essential needs for being alone. However, many people
are also alone involuntarily, and urban environments are sadly full of lonely
people; this is not just a media-constructed experience based on the stories of
old people dying alone in their apartments. In a Norwegian context loneliness
appears to be more common in larger cities and the countryside, than in
medium-sized towns (Thorsen and Clausen 2009, 74).

Marano and Sarton's perspective, where solitude is an intentional state,
widens the perspective established by Simmel, and is thereby helpful in
understanding why solitude is an important feature in modern life.

The narrative of the urban flâneur – a person that manifests the paradox of spatial intimacy and psychological distance still has relevance – and represents interesting descriptions of life in an urban context. But it is also possible to challenge that perspective; the coffee bar phenomenon also illustrates that solitude as a voluntary state of mind is a strategic tool – at an individual level – that enables the normal man and woman to cope with the contradictions of urban modernity.

Even if loneliness exists in reality, also among many of my informants, it is in the coffee bar, and through the coffee bar, possible to transform that feeling into solitude or sociality. When many of my informants mention that they experience the coffee bar as a place where they can go to be alone among others, it is not the loneliness that Simmel describes. On the contrary, it is a state where they profit from the pure existence of other visitors, socializing or operating on their own. Many of them refer to this experience as that which defines urbanity, or they use the phrase *the urban feeling*.

Without exaggerating my point, the issues raised by many of the first generation of sociologists are still present, and the coffee bars I have studied appear to soften the painful problems of too much privacy, unintended distance and borderless autonomy.

Can it be that an institution like the coffee bar helps to mediate some of the problems embedded in modernity?

That claim is of relevance to the question I formulated in the first chapter of this dissertation: What features of coffee bars have made them into an important and growing phenomenon in our society?

It appears that a central component in a broad and interesting answer must include the coffee bars' ability to harvest the unintended fruits of modernity and cultivate them into a shape that somehow can be described as a reconnection to a sort of community life. In Chapter 7, there is a description of Tina's (an informant) experience of the coffee bar where she became a regular after she moved to Oslo, a town where she did not know anybody; her description is similar to the quality "community life" described above:

> …it was in the coffee bar that I made my first friends... well maybe not friends for the first half year, but... that feeling, the feeling of knowing someone, somehow a place I could describe as mine, out there in the big city all alone. I was comforted by the inclusive feeling in that coffee bar.

There is a feeling of community inside a coffee bar, not a strong organic community such as at a workplace or in an organization, but a sense of

community and a set of norms that structures the space the customers share. As referred to in Chapter 7, one informant expresses:

> There is something social, but also anti-social about the coffee bar. People sit on their own, drinking their lattes. It is a very ego-centered thing. But they all have something in common – like a theme. They share something even if they do not speak. You trade identity around the coffee, something like that…

Clarifying my point: The coffee bar phenomenon mediates some of the basic contradictions in modernity – as it plays itself out in the urban scene – and thereby refines the perspectives established by Georg Simmel. The coffee bar becomes an institution that softens the distinctions between loneliness and sociality, and builds a bridge between them, and that is the bridge that transforms loneliness to solitude. This specific meaning appears to be important for many of those who use coffee bars.

But I have a further claim, embedded in the coffee bar are qualities that can expand our understanding of some of the theories on individualization. As seen in this description, a coffee bar can be a place where a sense of community is fostered, and that sense of community is of a quality which allows individualized practices.

## 9.2. INDIVIDUALIZATION, REFLEXIVITY AND COFFEE BARS

The degree of individualization offered at the personal level in a coffee bar is remarkably high compared to most other suppliers in the food and beverage business. The empirical material shows that coffee orders are tailored exactly to the customer's taste, and no matter how complicated the request may be, it is not considered to transgress the norms. The baristas not only offer a great variety of coffee drinks, they also let the customer instruct them. It is evident that the level of personal service offered by most coffee bars indicates individualization at a pragmatic level. It is individualization defined as the ability to demand refined personal service (Leslie H. Brown et al. 2007, 780). The individualization in itself seems to foster even more demanding customers, as Sølve demonstrates with this remark:

> Sometimes I get the feeling that the barista should show a little bit more care. It might seem like I'm getting to a state where I'm too interested in the coffee quality, but let's face it: that

> coffee is for me, not for that guy behind me. Often I just want
> to scream: "Don't fuck with my coffee".

In coffee bars, personal service is at a level that appears to be the direct opposite of what customers experience in many other retail and shopping environments. A coffee bar offers its guests service that conflicts with the traditional discourses of mass consumption, where standardized products and services are essential. The customers choose between varieties of espresso-based beverages, and also have the possibility to order individualized versions of the type of drink they choose. They can choose between low fat milk, normal milk, and soya milk; they can order a latte foamy or less foamy; they can decide whether a cortado should have a little milk or a lot of milk etc. The element of individualized service defines the coffee bar as a type of business with its own distinct characteristics (Gerst 2004, 27).

Therefore the interpretation of the coffee bar as a place for individualized consumption is appealing and seems fruitful. Here the postmodern individual seeking self-fulfillment and control over his or her consumption can address that need by ordering a tailor-made coffee. My observations in the coffee bars support the perspective on these spaces as entities where individualized production is an essential component; also the interviews reveal that the ability to serve people exactly what they prefer is considered to be an important quality. As one informant says:

> You get what you want, exactly what you want. Not too much
> foam, not too hot milk. Others get what they want.

However, individualization at a service level is not identical with individualization at a societal level, even if there might be a relation. Embedded in my case I find another source for discussing individualization (in contrast to distinctiveness of the service). Many of my informants use their coffee bar as a place for deep conversations – with themselves – on the many issues in life, both the small and the big. They are in the coffee bars in situations where they find a suitable environment for elaborating on small prosaic questions as well as topics that are interwoven with the experiences of everyday life in contemporary society.

Some are quite open on the purpose of their coffee bar visits; many of my informants directly and indirectly address the questions of how they picture themselves in the current societal structure, and how they understand the potential and limitations of their own autonomy. These observations shed

light on aspects of the theories developed by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. They both describe contemporary society as being identified by what they call "reflexive modernization" (Giddens 1990, 36) (Beck 1992, 14). The term is an attempt to grasp one of the central mechanisms in "late modernity" as Giddens describes this period. The term is meant to describe how an agent – an individual – will react to change in the external environment:

> The concept of reflexive modernization does not simply imply reflection, but a self-confrontation created by the dynamics of modernization. (Giddens 2002)

Reflexivity is not an alien part of tradition, the process of reflexivity – of the ability to ask questions to the standard procedures of life – is a basic component of all human history and development. If reflexivity did not exist, change would not happen. Giddens argues that in pre-modern societies reflexivity is basically repetitions of a known script, but the reinterpretation of this tradition is an important and vital part of the tradition itself. Reflexivity in itself is there as a part of the survival kit every tradition is dependent on for continued existence. But with modernity this conceptual understanding of the individual's role in society is undermined. With modernity, reflexivity becomes the essential psychological response of individuals, both in everyday life situations and when the so-called big questions are raised (Giddens 1990, 38).

Therefore, reflexivity represents much more than the monitoring of one's own actions and virtues, it addresses a more thorough questioning of the meaning of life itself, and the codes and ideas connected to daily existence. Reflexivity in this context is therefore the ability to be accountable to oneself, not to a formal structure in society.

Also Ulrich Beck emphasizes that "reflexive modernization" is something much more radical than reflection. It is first and foremost self-confrontation (Beck 1992, 5). Several of the customers I became acquainted with, with varying emphasis, touched upon this theme; some used the term "self-interrogating"; and one of them formulated it like this:

> You know, most people wonder about life, the meaning of it.

As illustrated previously, coffee bars are places for contemplation and reflection, where people *do* very little, except letting their thoughts wander. Solitude has a meaning. That meaning is reflexivity.

Beck argues that today's modernity must be understood as a social construction where society has gradually lost its texture of being formed by class and social layers. These structures are step by step substituted by individualized inequalities, where the individual's role in society is reduced to the individual choice of life forms and life styles (Ibid., 93).

Beck divides modernity into two periods, one "early-industrial" and a "later-risk". By "Risk Society" he does not imply that there has been an overall increase in risk in society, but that there is a constant discourse that emphasizes the handling of risk. It is a society that not only deals with the future as a permanent agenda – that is an essential feature with all modern societies – but also with the downsides of the future. He underlines that in the earlier stages of modernity, risk could be related to the class structure, but that this is now less relevant. Global warming or nuclear war affects society as a whole and is insensible to social hierarchies. However, these types of risks all share common criteria: they are a result of modernization itself (Ibid., 21).

Beck therefore argues that the risk society is a state of the obvious, and that the risk society is our modernity. It is not a choice, but an intrinsic part of modernity of the post war period and a result of the autonomy of technical modernization. Beck argues that the side effects of technical or organizational inventions often bypass the intended effects – and by this they cause large instability and vast disturbance.

Beck divides the phenomenon of individualization into three parts. First and foremost, he adopts the view that the discourses of tradition have been reduced as powerful institutions; here he is close to Giddens' perspective on today's society: it is not so much a postmodern society, but rather a post-traditional society. The power of the grand narratives of traditions – the ability to instruct and form the lives of the individuals in a society – has been seriously weakened. What he terms as "liberating dimensions" are so formative that they outplay the discourses of tradition. Beck argues that an essential feature in "second modernity" is reflexive modernization.

In agreement with Max Weber, he speaks of the "disenchantment dimension". The disintegrative forces of individualization attack the traditions and the practices they are associated with.

The cracking of the traditional code does not imply that all kind of order is gone or destroyed; it rather implies that new forms of control are established. These paradoxes of the emancipation of the individual are seen in new regimes of control. He identifies a more personalized or embodied control mechanism; he defines them as "reintegration" or "re-embedding

dimension" (Ibid., 128). He is particularly aware of the forces of the market systems, and even if this is a less visible, and more indirect governing of the self, it is not any less effective than a direct use of force or traditional power.

When Beck writes "Individualization means market dependency in all dimensions of living" (Ibid., 132), he is also in tune with the ideas of Max Weber and the Frankfurter School. In his view, modern mass society reduces the possibility of private autonomy, and the market creates mass consumption, and this consumption pattern does not in the end result in emancipation, but rather mass conformity.

The new individuality also influences the private sphere and results in more insecurity, which also affects the individual's interface with society in larger contexts – such as at places of work etc.

A central point for Beck is that the process of individualization – for the individuals – also brings to the forefront a larger dependency on one's own contribution. The mark of success becomes a market connected to the individuals, and not the class position. Under the bright sky of individualization all men are free, and responsible for the outcome of their actions (Ibid., 127-138). When Beck argues that the structures in the old class society have been weakened, he does not mention that the process of emancipating "agency from structure" is the outcome. Beck sketches out a new position where the relationship between human agency and structure is blurred; reflexivity becomes a process whereby the two analytic entities are woven together.

> I don't do much here. I just sit in the window. Look out on the street, wonder about small things, and big things. I tend to become melancholic, and maybe a little bit sad, so this is life, me stuck inside a coffee bar watching the world passing by.

says one of the informants; and this view is shared by many of those I have talked to; and to me sounds like a poetic version of Beck's argument. This informant uses time, and seems to have a lot of it; and time in itself appears to support the idea of reflexivity. The fact that drinking a cup of coffee for some customers can take two hours is a point worth noticing; I would therefore like to quote another informant:

> Coffee has a kind of time perspective. Just like cigarettes. You can sit with a cup of coffee for a pretty long time.

This "time perspective" is appealing. There is something comforting in doing nothing, and a coffee bar is maybe one of the best spaces for thinking and reflecting. It takes time to contemplate and the coffee bar customers can consume time without any negative sanctions. The actual practice of customers in coffee bars, where the majority of the customers sit in solitude, can be recognized as a supportive argument for this conclusion.

When Giddens and Beck define the term "reflexive modernization" they open up the possibility of the agent's control over their own destiny; and in Beck's definition "reflexive modernization" is as mentioned above a process of self-confrontation (Ibid., 5). When a society embarks on a technocratic journey as the one described by Beck, not only is reflexivity on a personal level in demand, but also the longing and need for the non-instrumental places in life. In this context, the coffee bar can be understood in terms of being a waterhole for those who contemplate over the criteria for their social reality. Here self-confrontation can take place, or as Anders, a regular at Java says:

> I don't appreciate the company of others when I'm at Java. I'm there because I like to be in my own company. There are so many things in my own life I'd like to understand; to come closer to; and for me it's a very existential experience drinking coffee, looking at the street scene, looking at nothing really.

These few sentences can hardly be described as anything other than reflexivity and self-confrontation; they are indications of how a coffee bar for some people has a specific purpose in their life. When Beck writes that reflexive modernization is given, I think of another informant, Finn Christian; his use of coffee bars is highly strategic, and it serves a psychological need, as he stated in Chapter 7:

> I won't say it's a meditative experience, but I like to protect my energy.

When he explains that his visits to the coffee bars are not far from being "a meditative experience", that the coffee bar is a room where he can "protect his energy", I see a parallel to Beck's claims that a risk society is

characterized by a situation where reflexivity becomes the norm of understanding and thinking. Culturally entrenched in each one of us, "permanent critique" not only addresses society but also the self, always observing, always discussing, or as Finn Christian says:

> There is something in being alone, where you don't have to relate to others. Just being someone who observes.

I have asked myself many times while working on this dissertation if Beck's statement, "Individualization means market dependency in all dimensions of living" (Ibid., 132), is a sentence that reflects any of the qualities to be found in a coffee bar? It may be true that a coffee bar is a commercial enterprise, but this does not necessarily mean that they merely sell a lifestyle product with no deeper qualities than that of the latest commercial fashion. As already demonstrated several times in this dissertation, the coffee bars have qualities that seem to resemble those of many non-commercial institutions. They deliver social and cultural realities that are much more nuanced, and as many of the informants emphasized, and as many of the observations support: coffee bars are complex spaces with a wide range of activities; used for other purposes than just exhibiting success, wealth and life style commitment. The life style aspect – the pure fact that specialty coffee is a sector with these types of connotations – is hard to find as a practice inside the coffee bars. Representation is representation, not reality. Beck seldom grounds his perspective in cases, and if he had done so he might have reached the same conclusion; that a coffee bar also explores the potential of individuals involved in self-confrontative work.

In Beck's view, modern mass society is in direct conflict with the emancipating potential that modernity promised; mass consumption is mass conformity – as noted above. Therefore an interpretation – in agreement with Beck – of the coffee bar would be to picture it as a perfect illusion of private autonomy, and this illusion only covers the reality of mass consumption.

However, I rather tend to view it as the opposite; by being spaces for reflexivity, the coffee bars *also* represent the inversion of mass culture and mass consumption. For most visitors, coffee bars primarily offer customers "atmosphere", more so than the actual coffee. The coffee bars become therefore as informants elsewhere have pointed out "an anchor" in their daily life. The process between the transformation from space to place – from a non-inscripted to an identifiable locality – is possible only because the visitors, the customers, the users, invest meaning.

As illustrated above, life in coffee bars is often characterized by regular customers performing the same procedures every day. Repeating is confirming. Thereby the process of investing meaning becomes even stronger.

The coffee bar also exemplifies actions that are distinctly different from the picture often drawn of uncritical superficial mass consumption; in this context, Beck's construction is a noteworthy argument, when he addresses how the process of individualization forces individuals in a society to trust more in themselves than in social layers.

In many different arenas, more individualized systems have developed[26]. Such changes – due to the emphasis on the agent's own responsibility for their own destiny – opens up the possibility for reflexivity, for self-confronting questions, and these practices are in need of localities. As this description has illustrated, one important feature of the coffee bars is that they supply spaces for solitude, since many use the solitude for self-confronting inner work. In this way the coffee bars can illustrate the relevance of Beck and Gidden's narrative of reflexivity. However, the coffee bars I have visited are not supportive of a vision of powerless human agents, left to the forces of the market. Quite the contrary, I would suggest that the coffee bar phenomenon may be related to Beck's theoretical approach: if reflexivity is an inherent part of the contemporary social context, then market forces do not necessarily determine all aspects of individual life. The relationship between individualization and intensified market forces is more complicated. The various coffee bars discussed in this dissertation demonstrate this complexity, and there is overwhelming support in the interviews and the observations of how delicate this balance is. This view is also underlined by the liberal attitude towards the actual consumption of customers. Obviously coffee bars aim to sell as much coffee as possible, but at the same time they do not throw out customers who sit in a window seat hugging the same cup of coffee for two hours. In this way, coffee bars differ from similar institutions such as bars, cafes and restaurants. In other words, coffee bars are institutions marked by softness also in their practices, and customers that experience this softness also respond positively. As one of the informants remarked:

The staff leave me alone...that makes the space more mine.

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[26] One example is the change in the wage bargaining systems in Western Europe and even in the Nordic countries (Iversen 1996, 401); another is how education and health systems have developed to more individualized systems based on a customer approach. (For further reading see for instance Bent Sofus Tranøy's book *Markedets Makt over Sinnene* (Tranøy 2007), or Peter Leonard's book Postmodern Welfare: Reconstructing an Emancipatory Project (Leonard 1997).

Institutions such as coffee bars with their ability to produce an environment where reflexivity – in the radical understanding of the term – finds fertile ground illustrates one alternative outcome to the one Beck sketches out: Increased individualization and thereby increased reflexivity might lead to the growth of institutions that supply space for contemplation. Coffee bars are at this level institutions that are characterized by being "both/and", not "either/or".

Coffee bars are at one level identifiable as commercial institutions, but at another level they represent a deeper and more complex reality. Thereby they can also function as the habitat for processes that are distinctively non-commercial in their core, and represent a softening of the distinctions between the market and the customer. What might be easy to identify as the existence of enlarged market forces is also producing spaces where these forces are if not aborted, at least questioned, or made less relevant. I would by this suggest that increased individualization can also lead to an amplified need for a refuge from the most apparent forces of the market. A coffee bar is often a noticeable demonstration of this phenomenon.

## 9.4. LOW AND HIGH SOFTENING

A coffee bar – if it is normally successful – represents a space, which is hard to identify as high brow or low brow. In other words, as a cultural product the coffee bar is not easy to locate in a cultural diagram where opera and fine-dining represent the opposite of football and fast food.

However there is one aspect of coffee bars that are unmistakable high cultural, and that is the so-called "coffee culture". This "coffee culture" is the internal culture produced and uphold by the baristas, the owner and the sector itself. The jargon of the different types of espresso based beverages as cappuccino, latte and so one is clearly representing a much more refined language than what earlier was used in describing coffee. Also the advanced technical expressions, describing different stages in the production processes and the descriptions of the coffee beans themselves, are upholding this "coffee culture".

As I earlier pointed at, the coffee bar industry is a culture refining and developing techniques, terms and preferences based on an international system of competitions, evaluations and different types of journals. I would suggest that the connoisseurship is an element responsible also for configuring taste and bringing a touch of high cultural attitude into the coffee bars. The language adopted by the specialty coffee sector is the language of

the connoisseur. This language certifies the users and the members of a high cultural practice through the knowledge of a field[27].

High culture in a coffee bar is represented by the existence of this "coffee culture", and many of the baristas and the entrepreneurs in the sector are holding up wine as a relevant comparison. It is also worth to mention than not only the baristas have brought that conclusion to front, also Howard Schultz have stated "Coffee is the new wine" (Schultz 1997, 246).

The idea that coffee is a rich and diverse arena of tastes and qualities is true, even if only two of the more than 60 genetic varieties of coffee are grown commercial – Robusta and Arabica – the quality of the coffee differs in accordance to the soil and the climate it is exposed to. Therefore the variety in taste and caffeine content is substantial, and even more unskilled coffee drinkers will register rather clear variations.

Wine bars are similar in their approach on qualities, but wine bars are distinctively high in the cultural diagram. Coffee bars on the other hand is harder to locate. You can enter a coffee bar and being rather ignorant in regards to coffee, and most coffee bar customers are also never asking questions or discussing coffee with the baristas. Some are, and they are – as referred to earlier – essential for the baristas, they are giving them valuable feedback and ensuring that the high end coffee market is developing, and thereby also resulting in a high overall quality for the rest of the customers. In wine bars, unskilled customers will probably appear, but I guess – and I emphasis that this is a guess only supported of my own experience – they will try to behave like they are knowledgeable in the field of wine, and the bar tender in a wine bar will also act in accordance to the fact that a lot of his customers act as they know the difference between Barolo and a Barbaresco. In a coffee bar the high cultural aspects are visible, but they are there as one of many elements, and they are not dominating the space.

Firstly, drinking coffee is very common; the habit in itself does not indicate any social or cultural level in Norwegian society. Most people drink coffee; Norway has a very high consumption of coffee, both at home, at work, in restaurants, cafes and almost everywhere. However, drinking so-called specialty coffee is often considered to be emblematic of a more refined

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[27] In sociology there is a long tradition for discussing private consumption in relation to social and cultural positions in society. Both max Weber, Torstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu represents this tradition. Pierre Bourdieu's book *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (Bourdieu 1984) is a classic in this field, and emphasize how skills and knowledge is used (often unintentionally) to determine the location in a diagram on high and low culture, and where the term cultural capital is used for illustration the dynamics (or the lack of it) in this game. There is a broad debate on both the relevance and the implications of Bourdieu's perspectives, and for an informed reading see for instance *Pierre Bourdieu: a critical introduction* (Lane 2000)by Jeremy F. Lane, or Bridget Fowlers book *Pierre Bourdieu and cultural theory: critical investigations* (Fowler 1997).

cultural attitude. When cappuccino became popular in Great Britain during the 1990s it was often called "posh coffee;[28]" in the West, the mediated representation of these coffee beverages, as mentioned previously, is often associated with a certain kind of lifestyle consumption, i.e. often so-called "shallow" people over-indulging in personal consumption in contrast to people with more "moral" lifestyles.

But in reality cappuccino, caffee latte and espresso have also penetrated the mass market during the last ten years, and more than fifty percent of the population over eighteen years of age consume modern coffee drinks occasionally (GFK Norge 2006). These coffee beverages are not only found in the coffee bars, although the coffee bars first introduced them to the market. However, these days most cafés and restaurants have an espresso machine; and automatic espresso machines have taken the home market by storm, and are also found in gas stations and kiosks. Consequently, these coffee beverages do not segregate people so distinctly on a cultural axis; however, this does not rule out the fact that coffee bars are radically located in a cultural diagram. However, as I have observed, coffee bars are not easy to identify as places only for the educated middle class, even if that claim has some substance.

Even if there is some imbalance in the use of coffee bars, i.e. even if there is some evidence that indicates that the educated middle class are over-represented (an argument I will return to later), the coffee bars are as places not distinctively "high cultural". The activities performed by guests and the staff are rather prosaic. People read newspapers, socialize or sit in solitude. These types of activities are in their context not an indication of a blurred line between high and low culture; rather, soft urbanity is here illustrated by a culture where the word "atmosphere" is often used to describe the appeal a coffee bar can have. On that basis I would like to return one of the informants I have previously cited:

> Atmosphere, now that's important, I think. This place, I might call cozy. Very cozy, even! On the other hand, it isn't a place you can hang out at for a long time, as they only have bar stools to sit on.

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[28] The Swedish art curator Sune Nordgren was the Founding Director of BALTIC, the Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead in England between 1998 and 2003. In a conversation with the author in December 2007 he reflected about what happened when the new coffee fashion arrived in Newcastle area in the late 1990s.

The idea that a real interest in the atmosphere of a place is of importance illustrates that soft urbanity also is characterized by an ethical upgrading of what is often labeled as the "banalities of everyday life" as Scott Lash describes it (Lash 1990, 175). Here contemporary society is characterized by situations where normal prosaic practices are considered as a vibrant and interesting source to an enriched life and relevant producers of meaning. Such a perspective not only opens the window towards popular culture in its most limited way, such as cultural products, but also in a broader sense. The interest in the daily life, in the practice at street level, in the non-political landscape of civic life, in consumption practices, in the variety of everyday life for everyday citizens, has been an essential component in the postmodern approach to culture.

The coffee bar phenomenon seems not only to reflect such a change in contemporary society, but also to reproduce it. The users of coffee bars are in many ways taking part in the "banalities of everyday life" and the signifiers from this universe. Meeting over a cup of coffee, reading the newspaper while looking out at the street scene, talking to no one, but listening to the totality of voices and sounds in the coffee bar; all these small things belong to the "banalities of everyday life". Coffee bar customers tend to value these expressions of human activity as interesting and valuable. They tend to interpret these "banalities" as deep and profound elements of daily life. Trude, who was referred to previously, has used the coffee bars during a difficult period of her life characterized by sadness and vulnerability. She said that the coffee bar for her is a place that makes her life more meaningful due its ability to embrace her, to give her that warm hello every morning:

> When I drop by here … a little after eight, sometimes only for a coffee, sometimes for a whole breakfast, it's a way of ensuring that I get a good start to the day; it's like someone is hugging you and saying: 'hey, life isn't that bad after all'. … There's a morning-world in there, a world of coffee and newspapers. I like that universe. I didn't really know it existed. But it does.

These banalities of everyday life, this number of small actions following one after the other, are at a certain point signified as a meaningful entity. They soften the environment and make it more accessible and useful. A coffee bar is for Trude, and for many of the other informants I have met, an institution that responds to their need for respect and care; it is a phenomenon that

signifies the importance of the small prosaic things that aggregate into a social and cultural phenomenon, a ritual with the effect of softening the social sphere:

It is a ritual that I like because it makes me into a kind of person that interacts with other strangers.

She thereby addresses the underlying potential coffee bars have to create spaces where individuals can relate to a greater social complex through their ability to take part in "the banalities of everyday life". The coffee bars I have visited to a strong degree do not accommodate a division between high and low cultural levels. Many restaurants and bars are rather skillful in creating an atmosphere that relates them to this duality, but coffee bars seldom do. Of course there are people who believe that a coffee bar represents high cultural consumption, and will therefore either avoid them or be attracted by them. However, so far I have not met informants that appear to be attracted to coffee bars on the basis of this quality; there might be several reasons for that, but my qualified guess is that the atmosphere in most coffee bars does not support a high cultural perspective. It is like the whole schema is becoming irrelevant; the softness in the atmosphere is a subversive contribution to such a development.

## 9.5.  SOFTENING CLASS?

In the popular media, films, newspapers and magazines, coffee bars are often portrayed as being the domain of the white upper middle class, closely related to gentrification and the emergence of a new social strata labeled the "creative class". Dominant postmodern theories also produce similar claims[29].

At one level it is easy to find empirical backing for the claim that this emerging class is a dominant user of coffee bars. Both statistics (Allegra-Strategies 2007), and many of my observations support the claim that users are segregated on the basis of social stratification, at least in an interplay with their location in the spatial structure of a city. It is nevertheless also important to observe that the same white middle class area can have two neighboring

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[29] Lash's claim is that the producers and the relevant audience of modernist and postmodernist culture are found in particular declining and emergent social classes and class fractions (Lash 1990, ix). His perspective appears to have a wide range of followers: A study of consumption and gentrification in Sydney, Australia, illustrates how consumption practices signify gentrification, and described as a collective middle class project (Bridge and Dowling 2001, 101). A rhetoric analysis of Starbucks describes the way coffee is consumed in Starbucks as a "…ritual ….to cover the sins of postmodern consumer culture."(Dickinson 2002, 277)

coffee bars that attract different types of users. Java as I mentioned above is more oriented towards the so called creative workforce, while a lot of the customers at the neighboring coffee bar, Kaffebrenneriet, are professionals such as academics.

In this context it is therefore at a larger structural level evident that specialty coffee, among other things, has been a watermark of the emerging culture-oriented middle class. But simultaneously, this situation is probably more nuanced. As my observations and questionnaires illustrate, many of the users of Evita Espressobar in Smalgangen do not fit into this schema. Leif who is on welfare, and distinctively working class in his cultural orientation, is a regular at Evita and in his own words describes his preference for the place like this:

> You know, this is a place where everybody feels welcome, and in fact, here you can meet almost everybody.

Leif's claim is not without support and Evitas Espressobar in Smalgangen appears to represent the variety of class and ethnicity at Grønland, and not only the middle class fraction that also exists in this area.

The dynamics of the coffee bar institution overrides the rigid order of social distinctions, and here the argument of softening lines can be reiterated. In my opinion, Evita represents a strong case for the idea that the coffee bar has the potential of being a social and cultural leveler; consequently, this strengthens the argument concerning the perception of the coffee bar as an institution that not only can be viewed in relation to emerging social and cultural classes, but also as a new place for a diverse use of urban spaces; thereby contributing to a new and richer urban life.

Another aspect of how coffee bars might soften the more rigid structures of class, that so many experience in the urban landscape, is found in the physical location of coffee bars and their qualities.

Coffee bars are often located on corners; corners often function as meeting places. The expression "let's meet at the corner" reflects the long tradition of corners as essential in social life. Corners are important in the structure of Oslo, although Oslo in spatial form cannot be considered to be a huge grid (like New York, for instance); only parts of the city have the formal structure of a grid. Even at Tonsenhagen and Årvoll – or especially there – the corner location appears to be very important. Java which is the only one of the four coffee bars that not is located on a corner does not have to be at a corner. It is located in a busy street. However, in the suburbs (Tonsenhagen and Årvoll) another location would probably be impractical; it would lose the

opportunity of being located at the most logical place. I would presume that corners in themselves have qualities that are not necessarily egalitarian, but they are at least embedded with some qualities that make class connotations weaker.

The informality expressed in design also softens the class aspect of urban landscapes. The large windows that reveal the interior signal openness; they also have the formal quality of revealing how many seats are available. The transparency is a formal quality, but it is also reproduced as a mental quality. As many of the informants express, these design aspects makes them more accessible; customers can look at the street scene, and the people walking by can look in at them, and some of do; this contributes to openness, and an involvement with the world outside. When visiting more typical working class pubs, the difference becomes more obvious; they have few windows, and thereby the street becomes "another territory"; the distinction between inside and outside is maintained. Similarly, many of the finer restaurants have the same structure: they shield the customers from the street outside. Design-created transparency provides qualities that make coffee bars stand out as examples of institutions that in themselves break down the class aspect of many urban facilities. Coffee bars in this respect are more like railway stations, shopping malls and parks, than for instance many of their competitors in the food and drink sector.

Another quality that might be said to exemplify the softening effect coffee bars have on cities is the fact that they are increasing in numbers. If one coffee bar exemplifies the production of a diverse, open space, characterized by egalitarian features such as informal culture – as I think the empirical material illustrates – what then is the effect of many coffee bars? The logic answer is that more coffee bars have more effect, and that the overall character of a city will change in correspondence to the increased number of coffee bars.

The aspect of class in a larger perspective is highly visible in most cities, and Oslo is no exception; the visibility of capital versus labor is manifest in urban landscapes through the exposure of corporate towers, advertising and other symbols and practices. However, coffee bars soften the divide between classes by offering a ground that different social classes and groups can access, and that embody ideals that reflect democratic and egalitarian values.

## 9.6. SOFTENING THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL

An intriguing fact among the coffee bar entrepreneurs in Oslo is that many of them took their inspiration from the US. When the coffee bar, Kaffebrenneriet, opened in Theresegate, it turned out to be the first in a chain of coffee bars; the entrepreneurs had taken the American coffee experience

with them from the US, when they established these coffee bars. Steinar Paulsrud and Thomas Pulpan had observed how Starbucks, Peet's and other coffee bars were all the rage in the most developed and urbanized parts of the US. Robert Thoresen, the founder of Java, had collected knowledge from the many coffee bars in Los Angeles. However, not all coffee bars in Oslo are so closely connected to the US, but two of the four coffee bars I have dealt with particularly are manifestations of the close link between the US and Oslo regarding coffee bars. Someone else would probably have opened a coffee bar sooner or later, but it is not just incidental that the first coffee bars in Oslo were established by entrepreneurs with experience from the US.

When Starbucks decided not to open any coffee bars in Norway, it was not necessarily an indication that Oslo is a city that is hostile to this retail concept, on the contrary: Oslo was considered to be city where the coffee bar market had already matured; at least this is a description I have frequently met in conversations with many in the coffee bar sector[30]. Also in this sector, globalization was characterized as being ripe. The term "globalization" has achieved a central place in the discussion of the enormous cultural and economic transformation of the globe in the last thirty years. Globalization is a term that describe the creation of more global markets; it describes how national states – often willingly – deregulate their financial markets, labor market and open up most economic sectors to international competition. Saskia Sassen has defined the term this way:

> … globalization consists of an enormous variety of micro-processes that begin to denationalize what had been constructed as national — whether policies, capital, political subjectivity, urban spaces, temporal frames, or any other of a variety of dynamics and domains. (Saskia Sassen 2006, 1)[31].

In Thomas Friedman's book *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Friedman 2007), he argues that the world is becoming more and more flat – more accessible and open – due to the radical impact of

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[30] My speculative hypodissertation is that if Paulsrud and Pulpan hadn't been so gifted and skilled in building up Kaffebrenneriet, Starbucks would have arrived. I have no intention to discuss this contra factical hypodissertation, and neither is my dissertation a business case; but the success of Kaffebrenneriet is remarkable. Their ability to adopt a globalized business concept to a local framework, to grow incrementally and with profit, without compromising the coffee quality is an achievement waiting to be researched.

[31] Her perspective is that not that the national state has withered away but that it is repositioning itself. In her view the "…national-state capabilities that were themselves complex reworkings of medieval assemblages have not now been destroyed and deterritorialized but rather denationalized and reterritorialized as state practices have increasingly come to serve global economic interests." (Sasskia Sassen 2003, 4)

telecommunications, financial instruments, trade agreements, globalized policies in general, and the extreme increase in globalized trade. One of the arguments made by many scholars in the field of globalization studies – and especially by Friedman – is that globalization creates a world where many phenomena become more and more identical.

This idea of "flatness" seems to be shared by many in this field, even if they belong to those skeptical of globalization. The idea that also local culture becomes a victim to globalization is widespread. The idea that political globalization also creates cultural globalization due to its ability to produce a transnational elite that are detached from local, regional and national cultures, became strong at the beginning of this century. Naomi Klein has been an advocate of this view where globalization, with few exceptions, is understood as the triumph of a new and more brutal capitalism, as described in her book *No Logo* (Klein 2000). Here she discusses how the advertising industry and international brands now have a defining effect on western culture, and where many of these companies primarily are suppliers of symbols and images. In her view a worldwide homogenization of culture follows in the footsteps of ideological and technological globalization (Klein 2000, 116).

Klein is obviously right on one level. The coffee bar typology represents a globalization of design, and of interior taste. Also the coffee menu and the assorted beverages are imported from the US. The terminology is Italian, but as this dissertation illustrates, the American coffee bar – at least Starbucks – is an adaptation of the Italian coffee bar. Oslo has its own classical Italian coffee bar; symptomatically it arrived several years after Kaffebrenneriet opened its first outlet. And coffee in itself is one of the world's largest commodities, and perhaps the commodity with the longest globalized history on the planet.

All these arguments appear strong and fully backed by empirical observations. However, do they still fall short of being able to explain the success of coffee bars? Is the emergence of the coffee bar phenomenon rooted in local demand and local social and cultural reality?

As this study illustrates, coffee bars are in their function very local. Not only in the obvious way, i.e. that they are physical entities localized at a place in the urban terrain, but their existence is also local in a social context. The four coffee bars I have studied all have customers that refer to them, and use them, as local places, where they pursue their daily rituals. Evita in Smalgangen and Java at St. Hanshaugen are distinctively different both in regard to design and customer base, but they both share the same function of being locally grounded. The customers at Evita consider the coffee bar as "their place", that is also the case at Java. The regulars are a continuous proof

of this situation. Very few coffee bar customers are "unfaithful" in this sense, i.e. they "stick to their place".

A coffee bar is in this way is a more important producer of localized identity than for instance a restaurant which in most cases is not used on a daily basis.

These perspectives are indirectly discussed in the later works of Manuel Castells – not least in *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, (Castells 2000a)(Castells 1999)(Castells 2000b) – where a grand narrative of globalization is established[32].

Castells argues that a new type of space has been created. "The space of flows" is Castells' name for this space, which is created and organized with a view not just to move objects from one place to another, but also to maintain a permanent stream of objects, services, capital and labor. There is no point of arrival or exit in this space, as Castells puts it:

> Our societies are constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interactions, flows of images, sounds and symbols. Flows are not just one element of social organization: they are the expression of the processes dominating our economic, political, and symbolic life. ... Thus, I propose the idea that there is a new spatial form characteristic of social practices that dominate and shape the network society: the space of flows. The space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows. By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors" (Castells 2000b, 442).

Castells claims that the space of flows is created by real-time social actors who are present in the space, which is defined not by a physical boundary, but by the people who participate in it. His arguments build on the theory that modern information technology eliminates as good as all the classic spatial

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[32] He describes three independent processes that took place from the late 1960s until the mid 1970s, and out of these processes a new type of capitalism emerged. The first process is the breakthrough of information technology as a force which structures society and contributes to globalization. The second is the economic crisis that occurred in capitalism, and what he refers to as "statism" (communism) in this period. The third process is the upsurge of social movements such as feminist and environmentally concerned groups. The combination of these three processes of change, bring about a new economic order, which Castells calls "a global informational economy". It is a culture of "real virtuality" and a new social structure, which he labels the "network society".

limitations. The creative force in this type of organization is almost hegemonic, and it is within the space of flows that all major decisions are made. The space of flows thus becomes the most globalized form of contemporary capitalism. This organization then influences both material structures, such as the physical development of cities, and immaterial structures, such as our ideas and schools of thought concerning the nature of our world. So consequently we can see that the space of flows is both a morphological and an ideological concept. But does this necessarily imply that the little place, the local spot, must disappear? It is not possible to find this conclusion in Castells' texts; neither is it his aim to dismiss the materiality of the physical world, but to prove that capital and technology together are in the process of moving power out of the politically and physically defined territories which we refer to as nations, parliaments and so on. The new networks to organize our macro-world he calls "the Net", and it replaces the integrated, hierarchical organizations that used to maintain the governing of society, the distribution of political and economic power, and the control of citizens.

On the contrary, we can read Castells as being oriented towards local variation and relations. He claims that the singular human being represents an opposition to large structures: "Our societies are increasingly structured around the bipolar opposition of the Net and the Self" (Castells 2000, 3). Can life inside a coffee bar reflect this conceptual understanding of the relation between system and locality?

> …you feel …insecure when you …suddenly are out there on your own… I have to find new spaces.

This quote, which belongs to the newly divorced Trude, illustrates how Castells perception becomes relevant; the pressure on individuals increases when the space of flows make changes occur more rapidly than earlier, and thereby individuals experience a loss of the sense of meaning and belonging. Consequently, they will feel an urge to strengthen aspects of local attachment or create new identities. If we read Castells in this way, a picture starts to form where lifestyle choices, attachment to political or/and cultural organizations, are seen as an integrated part of globalization. When the management offices of your workplace are moved to a city you find it hard to relate to, then perhaps you look to the local football club with renewed interest! Or you start to use your local coffee bar on a regular basis, and with every visit you invest meaning in it; and day by day it becomes more important in your life, and also in the lives of others, since you contribute to

its existence. These kind of collective uncoordinated actions characterize market systems and indicate that globalization at an economic level produces an increased need for a cultural and social reality connected to local resources. In essence, this contributes to a softening of the global forces at work. I find it important to describe a picture in which the coffee bar in its social and cultural practice softens the boundary between "local" and "global". Thereby a coffee bar can manifest what Castells identifies as a space for "the Self" in opposition to "the Net", as it is on a structural economic and in a macro cultural meaning, an integrated part of "the Net". However, important in this description; the coffee bar does not only formulate an opposition, but it is also a part of "the Net", of the globalization. The coffee bar is "both/and", not "neither/nor". Castells pursues this idea, when he emphasizes the term "flows" as mentioned above in "By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjoint positions held by social actors". The coffee bar as a business confirms this script, bringing coffee from the other side of the globe into the daily lives of the coffee bar customers in Oslo. Although, in my dissertation the qualities of the coffee bar as a local institution are more important, and many of the informants have emphasized their need for a local place. One of those I interviewed underlined that she validates her local coffee bar as one of the more important places she visits in her daily life.

> I will say… I find this coffee bar is a kind of anchor for me;
> it's the kind of a place that I return to on an almost daily basis.
> There aren't so many places that have this quality; your home,
> your job, yes of course, but I seldom use the butcher next door
> or the kiosk. That makes it "a little bit of me", if you know
> what I mean..?

The expression "anchor" is a precise metaphor that describes the mental connection between the coffee bar and the individual, and I would suggest: the relevance of a local place becomes stronger the more globalized the general system becomes. The variety and diversity in local places become nodes of resistance and simultaneously confirmation of the ongoing processes of globalization. The coffee bar can be viewed as a physical example of Castells' argument: the need for a protected space for "the Self". The coffee bar can function as an entity that can contribute to the idea that he pursues at an abstract level; and the use of the coffee bar as a shelter against the system seems to be a valid recognition of the need for local attachment.

And then there is another aspect of the relation between globalization and an increased local identity market that is visible in the local discussion in Oslo concerning Starbucks. Starbucks is American and for many in the Norwegian coffee bar sector Starbucks is associated with rather ruthless values. This attitude is common among the entrepreneurs, but also many of the customers that have been in the US seem to express some of the same sentiments.

Monica who has spent a few years in the US, and learned to love specialty coffee and Starbucks, finds Kaffebrenneriet as being related to Starbucks in many ways; but she also finds it rather different:

> It is more Norwegian, less choices, more modest and I
> personally think the coffee here is even better.

Monica provides support to the observation that a chain business does not necessarily mean all the different coffee bars in a chain have to be identical; it is not a "chain coffee bar" she visits, but rather her "local coffee bar":

> OK, it is a chain (Kaffebrenneriet), but I prefer this coffee bar
> to most of the other coffee bars that belong to Kaffebrenneriet.
> The coffee is better here, and they recognize me when I arrive.
> It's not too big either, and … well it is my place.

For Monica her preferred coffee bar is something she considers as her own place, "my place", and her statements exemplify how the local attachment softens the manifestation of a globalized business. But even if Kaffebrenneriet is a chain business that seems to offer its customers the experience of a local place, and even if the financial results they deliver every year also seem to confirm that assumption, there are customers that have a rather critical approach to Kaffebrenneriet.

Among those who use Java, a little longer up the same street, there is a general attitude that Java is simply better, with better coffee and better service. The customers at Kaffebrenneriet's branch are not very interested in the topic, but some of them find Java too snobbish.

The negative attitude towards Kaffebrenneriet among many Java users cannot be explained by any objective measures of quality; for most people it is hard to recognize any distinct differences, and even if the service level at Java is excellent, it is not observably any worse at Kaffebrenneriet. During

my observation periods, I have never experienced bad service or bad coffee at any of the places I have visited. Of course this might be due to luck, but it seems that the overall coffee quality and service is rather identical. However, it may be possible that others might have a more refined taste than I do, and are able to identify nuances in taste that I am not aware of. In a larger context, compared to the coffee at home or in a regular café – even when it is made on an espresso machine – the quality of the coffee is superb in all the coffee bars I have visited.

The negative attitude of Java customers towards Kaffebrenneriet may be viewed mainly as a protest against chain businesses in the coffee bar sector. Many of the Java customers call Kaffebrenneriet "a Norwegian Starbucks", when they are asked to describe it. An interpretation of this phenomenon may be that Java is strongly perceived as a local place. I find the same attitude among the users of Evita in Smalgangen. Even though Evita Espressobar is a chain business, all the three outlets are in the same district with only a few 100-meters distance between them, and the customers appear to perceive Evita as a business with a strong local identity. However, many of Kaffebrenneriet's customers seem to a much lesser extent to perceive the coffee bar as a business with strong local identity. Many of the customers at Kaffebrenneriet – even if they praise the service and quality – identify themselves in a more detached way towards the company. The image of being authentic and original is much weaker among Kaffebrenneriet's customers than among the customers at Java and Evita.

This may of course be interpreted as a weakness of Kaffebrenneriet. It has more of a corporate image – due to its establishment in a number of locations – simulates in one sense the corporate image of a big multinational chain. Consequently, the customers are less intense when they describe their relationship to Kaffebrenneriet.

This detachment dimension may on the other hand be interpreted in a positive light. Kaffebrenneriet is more globalized in its attitude, and those who become regulars at Kaffebrenneriet may be attracted to the greater degree of "de-localized image". Many customers find places like Java too demanding; they are in search of places that are less localized and more relaxed regarding the local dimension. In others words: coffee bars appear to relate to both strong localized identities and more open globalized perspectives; and as a phenomenon also represent how the global aspect is displayed in a local context; and that there is a real intimacy between the two. The coffee bar phenomenon appears to demonstrate that the coffee bar is a "both/and", and not a "neither/nor" phenomenon. The coffee bar softens the boundaries of both the local and the global, and brings insight to how localized activities of this type are a true inversion of the theories of a flattened world. Globalization does not with any automatic reflection produce

identical results everywhere it is at work. There is also another argument that may be related to this: the division between "global" and "local" can appear at street level, between two rather identical institutions – which both are a result of the globalization of fashion, lifestyles and ideas. This observation brings actuality to the discussion on globalization, and enriches it with the following argument: the local is not only produced by a widespread and deep globalization, but the local also produces narratives of globalization from the point of an idealistic understanding of what the "local" is. This is an example of soft urbanity; the coffee bar phenomenon mediates the two identities and thereby adds nuance to the fabric of urbanity.

## 9.7. SOFTENING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

The lessening of the boundary between production and consumption in the coffee bar is highly visible in the relationship between employees and customers. A noteworthy aspect is how the creation of friend-like relationships softens the distinctions between baristas and guests, and is indeed a necessary quality in establishing an informal place. As the observations in the coffee bars illustrate, there is a mutual dependency between the regulars and the staff in the creation of a relaxed atmosphere. As several of the informants have pointed out, a barista who recognizes the regular customers, though without being too "intimate", is essential to the coffee bar culture. Sølve, one of the informants, expressed this in the following way:

> … well, it is kind of nice if they recognize me and say hi.
> Yeah, I like that. It doesn't have to be like you're a regular, and
> order "the usual" or anything – that's not it – it's just a
> question of service, it means something.

The informal culture of most coffee bars is not free of "rituals", even though the coffee bar culture may be interpreted as the opposite of a formal culture – such as, for instance, the culture of fine cuisine (an example several of my informants have mentioned). In this context, by "rituals" I mean established procedures and routines, which will be recognized by the customers; they may be considered as "soft" rituals; one example of such repeated behavior is when the barista draws a heart or a tree in the foamed milk in a cappuccino.

One argument that has been brought to forefront in the discussion on postmodernity is that the audience is inseparable from the performance; I

have referred to Scott Lash above, and his discussion on this topic (Lash 1990). The relationship between staff and customers illustrates how "softer" distinctions create a "softer" practice. When claiming that baristas are important to a culture of informality, I also argue that the baristas are important figures in the development of modern urbanity in the context of coffee bars. This becomes evident when you return to the same coffee bar, day after day. Without being made welcome, without being met with good service, then fewer customers would return on a daily basis; even if the coffee is excellent, it is doubtful the place in question would attract as many guests.

Baristas are by definition service workers, and in the literature on service management, service workers are described with sentences such as, "Service employees are part of the product" and: "Service encounters between workers and customers are intangible, continent, spontaneous and variable" (Price 2007, 357). These descriptions are sensible enough, but do not wholly reflect what occurs in most coffee bars. Thorough my observations I have seen that the baristas through their performative work contribute substantially to the culture of informality[33]. Performative work is a term that covers work which involves both aesthetic and emotional aspects; in the context of coffee bars, it is not the ability to make great coffee that is the most important, but rather the ability to create atmosphere. The baristas simply produce the atmosphere as well as the coffee.

Performative work is a manifestation of how the more traditional formal aspects of being an employee in the service industry has been substituted by "softer" qualities. The barista role is an example of how "softness" emerges as an essential feature in the present labor market. This perspective is also productive when applied to Starbucks.

Starbucks owes a lot of its success to the fact that it in the US, within certain sectors, the relationship between the employer and the employee has been redefined, so that now more emphasis is placed on the performative qualities of staff. The staff at Starbucks are not called "employees" but rather "partners"; and they are always paid more than the minimum salary (Simmons 2005, 48). The staff also receives health insurance, something that is not common in work places in the US, unless the employees are highly specialized or have higher education. For a long period of time, and also perhaps today, Starbucks represented a more humane working environment than for instance McDonald's (Simon 2008, 195). However, in a Norwegian

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[33] In his book *The Disneyization of Society,* Alan Bryman describes how the Disney corporation in their various theme parks – such as Disneyland – builds on the service workers ability to use their performative work capacity (the combination of aesthetical and emotional skills) (Bryman 2004). Bryman's term "disneyization" is not used rhetorically, and his book is not a political pamphlet, but an investigation into the strategies of Disney and other major agents in the service economy.

context, Starbucks' policy in this field is not impressive, but in a larger context their policies indicate that the value of manual workers have been upgraded in the coffee bar sector. My claim is that Starbucks understands that their ability to survive is based on their staff's capacity to use their "soft" characteristics, i.e. their emotional and aesthetic skills, and that these skills are absolute necessary in an informal culture. The recession that began in the US in 2007 made Starbucks emphasize these qualities even more strongly. Perhaps it may be said that during periods of economic depression the movement towards a heightened sophistication of performative work is speeded up, at least within this sector. Consider the Starbucks' case: the company adopted a new primary strategy designed to refurbish and inject new life into "the original Starbucks' experience". Several analyses of the situation showed that Starbucks was losing its grip, and had lost the qualities that once characterized "the Starbucks experience for customers." (Timmerman 2008).

Starbucks' founder Howard Schultz, who for years had left the daily management of the company to others, decided to get back into it and what he found was, in his own words, a company that had "lost its magic". His recipe for getting the company back on track was to increase the emphasis on the staff's ability to create a more friendly environment (Wiggins 2008). This is no coincidence; the management literature produced around the period of the "Starbucks case" often refers to "friendliness"[34].

In 2008, when Starbucks decided to recreate the "Starbuck experience", the company's stores closed for three hours on March 2nd all over the US so that the staff could watch Howard Schultz give a video lecture on how to recreate the atmosphere the company used to be recognized by, and the purpose was:

> …to teach employees how to be more friendly, or more neighborly, or anyhow something warm and welcoming and cuddly, the way a ….coffee shop is supposed to be. (Carroll 2008)

In this process, Starbucks not only intensified the emphasis on performative qualities, but also the craft of making coffee. The skills once again became

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[34] See for instance John Simmon's uncritical but also insightful account on Starbucks in his book *My Sister's a Barista* (Simmons 2005).

important, which was exemplified by the reintroduction of the traditional espresso machines:

> The customers miss the old Italian-made La Marzocco espresso machines, with their levered coffee fittings, now replaced with the automatic Verismo 801s that dispense hot espresso at the touch of a button. (Wiggins 2008)

What Starbucks did at this point was to identify the connection between skills and performative labor. In a coffee bar context, an informal culture emphasizes the idea that the baristas are doing "real work", i.e. that they actually possess skills that most customers appreciate, apart from their smiling and chatting.

The baristas that I have spoken to are without exception clear when it comes to the perceived value of their work; they maintain that it is important, and they genuinely believe that making and serving espresso-based drinks of high quality is a reputable profession. They do not feel that the work demands any sort of superficiality of them – it is not "just a job".

The baristas regard themselves as craftsmen, and this is probably the main reason that they do not identify with the idea of superficial involvement in the work place and with the customers. Most of them are passionate about coffee, and also feel that they provide comprehensive information about their products. As several of them have pointed out to me, coffee must be understood as a complex and demanding experience of flavor – the way wine is.

In studies done on service workers, one central observation is that individuals differ a great deal when it comes to personal involvement in their work. One central text here is Arlie Russell Hochschild's study of the working day of air-hostesses, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Hochschild 2003). The distinction between "deep" and "surface acting" is introduced in this study (Ibid., 37). Many workers feel that they have to wear a mask and perform their work with as little personal engagement as possible. In this way they hope to avoid being "corrupted" by their work, i.e. it should not affect their individual constituencies, so they can maintain a strict separation of the self and work – which Hochschild terms "surface acting". Other workers, on the other hand, become genuinely involved in work situations and develop professional pride in their jobs. They do not strive to separate their private lives and their work to such an extent. Although they too are acting – "deep acting" – this acting is such that it does not allow them, for example, to develop contempt for the customers.

The employees in coffee bars – the baristas – fit into the category of deep acting workers. They absorb the part they play and *become* baristas; their mission is to make good coffee and expand their customers' knowledge of coffee. As opposed to other types of unskilled manual labor, which have been the objects of research in Norway (Elstad 2008), it does not seem possible to perform the barista profession using surface acting. The reason why the systematic superficiality is so hard to maintain as a barista is that the work involves a great deal of technical skill, which is connected to its own specific discourse. Although the non-material aspects of the job are very important, they are not seen as central by the baristas themselves. And herein, perhaps, lies the explanation why barista positions are occupied by people who practice deep acting. The culture of informality is based on an egalitarian perception of the relationship between customers and staff, and that egalitarianism is hard to create without workers who truly identify themselves with their work, and customers who truly respect that quality. The symmetric relationship between baristas and guests strengthens the informal aspect of a coffee bar, and this symmetric relationship is possible due to the fact that both sides respect each other, and even share a passion. One of the baristas puts it like this:

> Some customers are what I call coffee soul mates.

Many of the baristas emphasize the regular customers contribution to the situation. Many regard them as their peers. Another of the baristas expresses this in the following way:

> The regular customers push us further; we talk about coffee at an advanced level. Many of them are really skilled, and that common interest in coffee is important to my development.

The existence of a common theme, of a genuine interest in coffee, or at least a developed and trained taste for coffee, contributes to a culture of informality. It is impossible to develop these types of relationships without informality, and in contrast to, for example, restaurants, coffee bars are equipped with staff that both make the coffee and serve it. There are few transactions between the ordering and the consumption of coffee.

Since the motivation behind the decision to become a barista is often one of personal interest, enthusiastic employees characterize the profession. A

barista is – even though many are in the business only for short periods –
usually a person who is very concerned about the quality of coffee. This
common trait among baristas in the coffee bars in Oslo is also backed up by
the fact that they are paid reasonably well. That is to say, they have regular
wages, which make it possible to maintain a perfectly decent standard of
living. The biggest coffee bar chain, Kaffebrenneriet, pays its baristas a wage
that is more or less the same as the Norwegian average wage. Other coffee
bar chains probably pay similar wages.

On the whole, wages are comparatively low for manual jobs in the service
industry, especially in cleaning jobs. In this kind of job the contact between
the provider of the service and the client is minimal, and many employees
have a limited command of Norwegian. In such jobs many Norwegian
employers have been able to avoid the guidelines and rules of the Norwegian
wage bargaining system, and pay low wages (Elstad 2008). It is relatively
easy for unskilled workers to get a job as a cleaner, whereas, there are only a
few who fulfill employers' criteria for barista jobs; this gives baristas more
value in the job market[35].

It may also be the case that baristas become economically more important
to the business, because they represent the very essence of performative
work, where deep acting is one of the basic conditions for executing the job
in a satisfactory manner – for the business and the customers. In this context
this highlights the economic aspect of the culture of informality, i.e. it is
possible to suggest that coffee bars, as producers of informal culture in the
urban sphere, exemplify the economic potential of this culture.

Hochschild emphasizes that "emotional labor" not only demands that you
develop a genuine emotional relationship to your customers, but also that this
relationship is a mutual one – extending even to an emotional relationship
occurring between customers and the product or service. As has already been
mentioned in Chapter 8, one of the baristas expresses the relationship
between customers and staff:

> People who come here are generally very nice. I mean, they
> don't *have* to come here; they come because they want to, and
> that is a very positive foundation to start from.

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[35] Other studies show that being attractive on the labor market is in itself an important factor in how content
and happy individuals are with their professional situations (Brockner, Grover et al. 1993). It is certainly
plausible that people who are satisfied with their job since they receive confirmation that they are attractive
employees – not just from customers, but from their employers and from the general discourse in the labor
market – will be suited to emotional and aesthetic work that involves a great deal of personal engagement and
offers little surface acting.

Mutual relationships are developed and the relationship between the two groups categorizes the coffee bar and reflects the true spirit of many of them. By applying Hochschild's insights to the coffee bar, I am also able to illustrate why it is so important to understand these aspects as elements in contemporary urbanity. The coffee bars exemplify the relevance of the existence of performative work, and how the relationships between customers and staff seem to develop with regard to the emotional and aesthetic qualities of the staff. Performative work is "soft" work, which creates softer (more diffuse) boundaries between customers and employees. Baristas are more akin to skilled craftsmen; they are also examples of workers who through their capacity for deep acting guarantee an invisible contract between the customers and the coffee bar, between the individuals and the institutions. Thereby, the deep acting barista represents a "softened" category, and also ensures the "softening" of the category of customers.

Another aspect here is that the coffee bar through the skilled performative work of the baristas become places that produce human relationships that soften the façade of an economic system that is the source of both the deepest poverty and excessive wealth. The claim that coffee bars represent in the service sector the human face of capitalism is therefore perhaps not an exaggerated assertion. The coffee bar phenomenon illustrates that without some kind of personal relationships between employees and customers then capitalism would not function so efficiently in the service sector in some instances.

The coffee bar customers and the baristas both relate to each other; thus, the coffee bar may be said to be an institution where democratic egalitarian relationships based on mutual respect becomes vital. In the context of coffee bars, contemporary urbanity is difficult to understand without an emphasis on how baristas and coffee bar customers together build an atmosphere of inclusiveness and openness. There is an incisive softness in how informality is created in the spaces where the fresh aroma of coffee fills the air.

## 9.8. SOFTENING THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

To a certain extent, the coffee bars are places that are considered as "public"; although they are neither 100 percent private nor 100 percent public. Does this imply that they are something in between?

In his book *The Great Good Place* (Oldenburg 1999) Ray Oldenburg established the term 'the third place' in an attempt to describe the spheres in-between the private and the workplace. Oldenburg discovered that places often referred to as "hangouts" have qualities that goes much further than what first meets the eye, or at least what is normally understood as their common role. He finds that they have vital social, cultural and political

functions, and that they are essential for the creation of civic spirit and community-building processes. Oldenburg's "third places" are social and intimate, and serve the purpose of remedying the negative consequences of modern planning (in this case in the US).

A coffee bar may also be described as a third place, and it is indeed done so by many of the larger players in the coffee bar industry; the coffee bar is obviously neither home nor work, but it might be said to be the playground for subtle processes. Observations in this dissertation have shown that many use the coffee bar for the purpose of being on their own; these customers do not take part in community-building process, and even those customers who socialize in coffee bars tend to be rather different from the intimate neighborhood-relations described by Oldenburg. For instance, some of the customers at Kaffehjørnet describe how the friendliness and openness in a space like this has its limitations (as quoted in Chapter 7):

> What from the outside may seem as a very friendly place is only inclusive and nice if you play by the rules, talk about kids, about the weather. You shouldn't be too liberal or have strong political opinions.

There is a friendly atmosphere at Kaffehjørnet, but it is constructed on the basis of norms that actually exclude it from being a third place and maybe that is one of the essential aspects of it. The coffee bars I have studied are filled with practices that are rather different from the ones Oldenburg emphasizes; they contain a greater variety of practices, and the community-building aspect does not dominate. The whole range of practices plays itself out. There are different ways of practicing solitude, some guests do nothing, other guests read, or work. Some of those who are in the company of others are in the coffee bar because they take part in a business meeting, then you have those who are socializing actively with other regulars and also those who just are meeting old or new friends.

One of the informants at Java described his warm feelings for the place partly by saying that it was open towards strangers, and therefore "not a club". But the price for openness appears to be the absence of intimacy. However, as the many other examples from the coffee bars show, this does not necessarily have to be wholly true (or false). A coffee bar is "both/and", rather than "either/or". The distinction between private and public are "soft".

The idea of a strict division between public and private life is held up in many of the discussions on urban life, and there are different traditions and theories concerning public spaces, some normative, others more descriptive.

In general, I will argue that two main traditions dominate the field. One is exemplified by Habermas and his strong emphasis on the political liberal tradition as essential to the creation of public spaces. The other tradition is represented by Richard Sennett who focuses on how public spaces in the eighteenth century reflected openness and a broad inclusion of outsiders; but that since the birth of industrial capitalism this was destroyed in a marinade of privatized tales and the "tyranny of the intimacy" (Sennett 1977, 337).

What they share is the same idealistic approach to a situation far back in history, and a dystopian view of the current use of public space. The coffee bar in my opinion represents the practices that to a certain degree can question that dystopianism, and exemplify how a soft urbanity helps to create more inclusive and open urban spheres.

Habermas is perhaps the one who most successfully revealed the close connection between coffee consumption and the development of a modern, liberal democracy, and he has been interested in the effect the coffee houses of the seventeenth century had on the development. In his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas 1971) he points to a type of debate, which became common in British coffeehouses during the 1600s. All kinds of issues were discussed; however, participants would leave their social class and status at the door[36].

Today's coffee bars are as my case demonstrates characterized more as being spaces for socializing and privacy; the political and moral debates have other arenas, and it is only the common reference to coffee that alludes a familiarity.

This argument is strengthened by the fact that the so called penny universities referred to the price – one penny – which gave any man entrance to the coffee house and thereby an invitation and almost an obligation to join in the discussions on vital social questions.

When Habermas perceives the forms of debate used in the coffee houses during the Enlightenment in England as ideal practices, he nourishes the idea that coffee houses were crucial to western civilization, due to their ability to function as forums for ideas of the Enlightenment, and by broadening the spatial capacity of urban territories.

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[36] In Habermas' view this is the ideal condition: a type of communication which both creates democracy and in fact *is* democracy put into practice. Habermas' ideal is a non-hierarchical dialogue. This means that the debaters must not be motivated by economic aspects or private ambition, but they must be as clean and pure as their arguments, motivated only by the search for the best possible solution and intersubjective understanding. There is an extensive body of secondary literature connected to Habermas' theory, as well as his own work from the 1960s and later, among them the long and intense debate with the postmodern position in social science and social theory. I do not wish to elaborate on this type of debate, but it is worth noting how Habermas' ideas have significantly influenced almost everything that has been written on physical public spaces ever since. Although he treats the physical aspect only briefly, it seems to represent an ideal context to him.

In Habermas' thinking, a communicative action fosters both democracy – the rational debate is a basic tool for increasing the rationality of society as a whole – and an instrument in a more deliberative ideology. Habermas' ideal is a free debate without strict ties of a formal or an informal type; in the ideal communicative modus there are no hidden or open forces, constituted by economic aspects or the positions of others, that are given weight. The struggle for a rational deliberative discussion where the best argument gains support – because it is a rational argument – can only be successful if those who take part are free of any economic interest when they argue[37]. The expressions "public space" and "public sphere" are often used interchangeably; however, Habermas contributes to a more precise use of the expression when he defines the public sphere as:

> … a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. We speak of a political public sphere when the public discussions concern objects connected with the practice of the state. (Habermas and Seidman 1989, 231)

As expressed above: Habermas does not refer to "public space" but rather "public sphere", and defines it as the sphere of private people who unite to give shape to a "public". Consequently, according to Habermas' definition, the coffee bar today may not be considered as representing a public sphere.

In Habermas' view the bourgeois public sphere, as it existed in the eighteenth century, withered away due to the structural change of society – the more pervasive mode of capitalist production made a strict division between state and society less obvious and this led to the so called refeudalization of society. The refeudalization process describes a situation where state and society are interwoven, and the boundaries between them becomes if not irrelevant, at least very blurred. In a bourgeois society, the

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[37] I would like to add that Habermas and his thoughts about the public sphere are somewhat constituted through the belief in a certain historical event – the invention of the coffee houses (although he uses very limited space on this phenomenon).

public of property owners gives shape to the rational-critical debate, and thereby to the public sphere. When this system falls apart, then deliberative practices are substituted by leisure and intensified life style orientations (Habermas 1991, 160). Habermas weaves the apolitical with consumption, and describes how the once well-functioning division between private and public is "hollowed out" (Ibid., 162) by mass media, and thereby establishes a "pseudo-public sphere" (Ibid.,162).

Coffee bars might be interpreted as such shallow institutions, according to their ability to foster practices that are often understood as life style consumption; however, as I have previously exemplified, the quality of the inner life of coffee bars reaches deeper than what popular narratives describe. Deliberative thinking and political discussions are not the only alternative to hedonistic consumption. A typical coffee bar customer expresses how he / she use the coffee bar to lessen the burdens of a stressful workday:

…just to read newspapers and relax.

There is though one clear idea in Habermas' theories that is of importance here, and that is his "existence of neutral ground". A public space is constituted by the fact that no one has any substantial precedence there. If there is such a thing as private ownership, it is not used to restrict the use of the space, and the public space has the potential of being institutionalized as neutral ground. No one owns such a space; in other words, everyone owns it. This constitutes the core of what a public space is; this does not mean that it fulfills the ideal state Habermas sketches out – that social distinctions and ranks are washed away – but that it is a prerequisite for the qualities I have found to be present in today's coffee bars. For instance, when I visit Evita in Smalgangen I am on most occasions welcomed by a pluralistic reality. Leif (who I have previously quoted) is on social welfare and drinks black coffee and smokes; he is made to feel welcome there; the same goes for Rita the hairdresser; or the Vietnamese shopkeepers. Ranks and social distinctions are softened, and even if the coffee bar does not take the form of a meeting place for discussing social and political topics, it is a social environment that reflects a society – at least in this part of town – that is rather egalitarian. The existence of a neutral ground is a prerequisite for this reality, even although Evita is privately owned; it functions as "belonging" to the people who use it.

"Belonging" to everyone and no one is an advantage, and the core of what it means to be a public space. While it is not given that all social hierarchies and distinctions dissolve in such a place, they do however represent ideal arenas for non-hierarchical dialogue. Even if the inner life of a coffee bar

seldom is a pure conception of a non-hierarchical dialogue, the culture of informality represents an element of democratic atmosphere; on the other hand, it is seldom a space that fits into Habermas' social utopia of a classless space. Today, the coffee bar is on its way to becoming a universal phenomenon, and what it shares with the coffee houses of the eighteenth century is first and foremost its function as a public space with many different qualities, not a public sphere that manifests deliberative political aspects. Today's coffee bars are public spaces that foster another type of publicness, and that is the publicness a new type of urbanity has created. This urbanity is characterized by the blurring of a broad set of distinctions, the openness for both social practices and solitude. As illustrated previously in this chapter, I found that the ideas on reflexive modernization may be seen in the perspective of the coffee bar. The coffee bar creates spaces for self-confrontative work (what might be called reflexivity at an individual level), as well as for private conversations between friends or people who just share the same space in an urban landscape. This brings me (back) to another important work on public space, namely Richard Sennett's book *The Fall of Public Man* (1977).

According to Sennett; the balance between the private and the public characterized public life during the Age of Enlightenment. There was a certain social order where public life had a limited yet concrete task. Sennett writes in *The Fall of Public Man*:

> The line between public and private was an essential one on which the claims of civility – epitomized by cosmopolitan, public behavior – were balanced against the claims of nature – epitomized by the family. (Sennett 1977, 82)

According to Sennett, the easy accessibility of social interaction and communication with strangers was demanded by the new civilization – this was what defined you as a social being. In the home – which was considered "natural" rather than "public" – people would realize their natural potential as parents or intimate friends. "While man made himself in public, he realized his nature in the private realm,…" (Ibid., 18). The public person can only associate with strangers and differences as a kind of professional; it seems as if Sennett's public space is a spatial community where all participants are aware of the fact that they are actors on a stage. They are not supposed to be authentic and original, or say exactly what they mean. They take part in a social act in which the process is the goal, and where there is no desire to be

who you "really are", simply because this is not a relevant position to take outside of the private sphere.

In Sennett's view, three forces contribute to altering the relationship between the private and the public spheres in the 1800s. Firstly, there is an ambivalent relationship between industrial capitalism and its effect on public life in the cities. The relationship is ambivalent because capitalism pushes bourgeois society towards increased privatization. The family is given a higher moral status than the public sphere, and no longer serves as a pendant to public life, but rather as a place to seek refuge from the increased pressure put on society by capitalism. At the same time, there is a process of "mystification" of material life – especially concerning clothes and tailoring. Mass-production and novel channels of distribution change the meaning and message of clothing. There is a growing commodity fetishism, where mass-production not only means aesthetic uniformity, but also demands that clothes give intimate information about the wearer. There is, in other words, chaos in the public space, and confusion in its physical appearance. Sennett claims that public spaces in fact lose their position and legitimacy as a result of industrial capitalism, but this is not a sufficient explanation for the ambivalence he describes. There has to be further causes. A second explanation, according to Sennett, is a changing attitude towards the secular. In the eighteenth century there was a strong belief in a natural, sacred order. The code of the nineteenth century is immanence. There no longer exists a scheme to which the immanent in life has to conform – rather, the immanent in every human being, every phenomenon and every fact, breaks out of the scheme. This calls for a new system of immanent features, which do not operate from a transcendental understanding of the world. Sennett writes that it had become possible in the 1870s, to study "a feeling" as if some meaning lay in this feeling alone, which would manifest itself and find expression in various incidents and settings. This is an example of how the life world is made psychological, something which removes the ground from underneath the type of public life that existed 100 years previously. The need to express immanent meaning is relevant for people and objects. When things or people are seen as having immanent meaning, public life is changed; everything a person does in public is seen as an expression of his or her character. Behavior is therefore taken more seriously, and the public "game" disintegrates. It is as if the demand for authenticity undermines the freedom that was previously offered by the public space. The private as an ideal state displaces the masquerade, and thus the public space falls victim to what Sennett calls the tyranny of intimacy. The third force in this development is the paradoxical fact that a combination of a new secular order and a new economic order does not lead to a breakdown of public life. Public life prevails, but only through rituals and a formal society, which starts to

resemble a cookie cutter. Public life is maintained by the conception of tradition, but this conception can be likened to a body that is dying from the inside. On the surface, everything looks to be in perfect order, but from the perspective of the inner organs, death is near.

My empirical findings in this dissertation do not strongly support his perspective. First and foremost, socializing or contemplation are both types of activities that appear to be important to contemporary urban life. Urbanity in its current form is based on what Sennett characterizes as "tyranny of intimacy", where individuals act privately in the realm of spaces where coffee is sold and consumed. This so called tyranny might be said to enrich the coffee bar. Private matters do not have to embody a degraded public space; that is in my interpretation an underdeveloped and under informed perspective on how life can be lived.

When the stressed consultant Kai tells me that he uses the coffee bar for doing "nothing"; or when the stewardess Olga emphasizes that the coffee bar is both social and "anti-social", they tell a tale of coffee bars that can help to expand the public space through their ability to reflect a variety of practices.

The coffee bar is probably in the process of expanding the use of urban environments; and it is not destroyed by a "tyranny of intimacy", even if it is not formatted as Sennett's ideal space. Without these practices that Sennett judges so harshly, the coffee bars would not exist. Privacy expressed this way is a component in creating a type of public space, and Sennett's fear for the private as an opposition to openness – towards strangers – is hard to identify with. On the contrary, I would say: privacy does not rule out the possibility for openness.

Sennett states that "a public space is a space which has an impersonal structure" (Holm 2000). A coffee bar can hardly be described as impersonal, despite their status as public spaces. On the contrary, they generally come across as distinctly personal, with strong characters that set them apart from other similar establishments as illustrated in Chapter 3. McDonalds may perhaps be described as impersonal, due to the standardization of its outlets. Coffee bars tend to develop what many of the customers describe as "a personality" or at least their own distinctiveness; and, as the interviews with the owners illustrate, this is no mere coincidence; often the character of coffee bars is a consequence of careful planning and design processes. Even individual coffee bars belonging to the same coffee bar chains, as is the case with both Evita in Smalgangen and Kaffebrenneriet at St. Hanshaugen, appear to emerge as being rather distinct.

And also understood in a wider sense, they represent in general an atmosphere also of intimacy and connections, more than being rigid structures that impersonalize. They are "both/and"; they manage to supply a variety of needs, and therefore become what I would understand as soft

public spaces, and can therefore hardly be considered public spaces in the sense that Sennett uses the term. Rather, they are part of a semi-public urban concept, where the private and the public merge into what we might call a modern medium. The clear boundaries in the 1700s are mostly gone from our society. That is also Sennett's own understanding and one which he asserts in *The Fall of Public Man.*

But even if the open urban sphere where individuals put on "a mask" (Sennett 1977, 21, 160) as Sennett describes it, in an attempt to create an atmosphere of real civility, is gone (if it ever existed), his perspective can be fruitful in one sense: people do play roles when they use coffee bars. As illustrated previously: the concept of deep action explains aspects of the social fabric of coffee bars. People put on masks; but these masks have a potential for merging with the "nature" of the owner, as the example of the baristas illustrate. Also many customers are aware of how the social norms in the coffee bars can force them to stay less private than they would like to, as one of the informants expressed: "Never underestimate the power of chatter". Nevertheless: the coffee bar phenomenon is a manifestation of a publicness that is much more prosaic than that preferred by Sennett (and also Habermas). As described previously, the design of coffee bars with their huge windows and window counters contribute to another essential quality which I will discuss here, and that is the capacity to engage with the street outside. That ability is in my opinion hard to qualify, but important to observe. As previously explained, many of the informants feel that the experience of looking at the street scene outside, sipping a coffee, letting thoughts wander, is an important part of their "coffee bar life". This type of use of coffee bars has one essential side effect, and that is an increased involvement with the life on the street. I have one experience that illustrates this:

One wintry and snowy afternoon, I was sitting talking to one of my informants, Ulla, in a Kaffebrenneriet coffee bar. Outside the snow was causing chaos. Cars could not find parking spaces – a more or less permanent problem, made worse by the heavy snow – and drivers were growing desperate. To sit like this, looking out at the street scene, feels fantastic. It is entertaining, and the dysfunction of traffic becomes so apparent. It is as if we are cut off from the infernal scene out there, and can watch it coolly as if it was a documentary film. Then, suddenly, right in front of us, it happened: a woman in her forties was parking a slightly too large car in a slightly too small space; she was forced to infringe on the sidewalk to manage it. She got out of the car and hurried along the sidewalk. A minute later a parking attendant showed up. He immediately produced his pad and left a ticket on her windscreen, under one of the windscreen wipers. He was just about to move on when the "busy lady" returned. I could not hear what she said, but she looked very angry, and gestured wildly, shouting. The parking attendant

kept calm and carried on walking; the lady followed him but slipped on the icy road and fell when she tried to lunge in front of him. He politely extended a hand to help her up, but she apparently dismissed him, and got up on her own. As soon as she was on her feet, she continued the gestures and shouting. The parking attendant suddenly walked over to the coffee bar, and entered. He approached those of us who were seated by the window, and asked if we had seen the incident – which we confirmed. The lady, he told us, had claimed that he had pushed her over on purpose, and now wished to report him. As we were able to confirm a different version of what happened, he politely inquired whether we would be willing to give him our names, so we could be called as witnesses in court, if she actually pursued the matter.

Nothing ever came of it. I was never called as a witness. There was probably no need, and the woman was most likely discouraged from reporting him when she realized how many people had witnessed the incident and the fall. The audience was in control! Of course, it would not have been considered a major crime – no more than trying to claim part of the public sidewalk for one's own private use for a little while. The incident proved, however, that the role of the onlooker is an important part of the street's quality. An audience ensures that the place retains some of its status as public; it does not become a private area that can be manipulated by individuals to the detriment of the community.

It is here in the informal surveillance of a street – through the social life in it, and connected to it – that a generous urbanity is ensured. This observation paraphrases one of Jane Jacobs' claims in her famous book from 1961, *The Rise and Fall of Great American Cities* (Jacobs 1992)*, that well-functioning urban spaces are characterized by the ability to offer three distinctive character traits: a) there is some form of continuous activity there, b) there are "eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street", and c) there is a clear separation of private space and public space – a boundary that no one present will doubt (Ibid.,35). The relevance of point b is weighty. The concept "eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street" fits hand in glove to the little story told above. It is, in other words, the anonymous mass of individuals that together form the conscience of the street. There is a moral tale to this too, in that there lives a Peeping Tom in all of us. But a voyeur is also a participant – whether distanced or close – and this, I think, shows us how underestimated the "eyes upon the street" is as a criterion of a public space. It is a criterion, which constitutes collective, tacit community, which is part of the current, urban, public scene.

As seen in the little story above, the coffee bars existence contributes to passive surveillance, and therefore also to participation in the urban arena, effectively making them important arenas of public exchange. As elaborated

in this chapter; a coffee bar is not a public place in the most idealistic
Habermas narrative, but it is public in a more pragmatic manner, on a micro
level it is an institution that adopts the civic mode of urbanity and enhances
it.

Also, in relation to the use of coffee bars, both as places for solitude and
as places for sociality, they offer a low threshold for participating practices;
in this way, they are core institutions in a society where a soft form for
urbanity is developing.

Olga, one of those I have interviewed in this study, sees the coffee bar as
an important place in her life. As quoted in Chapter 7, Olga expresses that a
coffee bar functions as a place where solitude can be an integrated part of
experiencing a social dimension; for her that specific phenomenon is what
constitutes an urban feeling, or what we might recognize as the mentality of
urbanity:

> It's something urban and it's a bit of luxury. And you're
> alone in the crowd. A place like this is somehow dynamic.
> You feel like you're on your own, but then you can go out
> and get a slice of life. It's all about the urban life style.

The "urban feeling" is what makes the coffee bar such a significant place in
her life. It is the setting that encourages observation more than active
participation. It is her sensation of a dynamic place, and the way she feels she
gets a "slice of life" just by being there, that attracts her, not the possibility of
meeting other people.

Maybe this is a focal point for understanding the success of coffee bars;
that they are public spaces only when avoiding the more rigid connotations to
politics and deliberative democratic practices and in a strong sense spaces for
experiencing the sentiment called "urbanity". This mythos of a word used in
so many romantic and emotional ways, is significant for the development of
mentality and social practices. I would like to suggest that there is a
connection between the historical agora in Athens and the urban spheres of
today, and what characterizes this relation is a mental commitment to the
ideas of an ideal urban situation including openness and respect towards the
other users of this space, as well the ability to pursue private practices and
social relationships.

As mentioned previously, most of the customers very rarely go to a coffee
bar with the intention of participating in a larger public community, but
sometimes they do happen to get acquainted with new people. We do not find
Habermas' non-hierarchical dialogue in the coffee bars, at least not usually. It

has moved elsewhere; it has been formalized and given physical and virtual spaces of its own. The type of public space that Sennett talks about, and which he claims disappeared during the 1800s, is also rare. What we do find is places that allow a great variety of practices to unfold, practices that earlier perhaps were concealed in different spheres and spaces.

Urban semi-public spaces are characterized by their ability to facilitate "both/and", not "neither/nor"; that is what makes them so soft.

A constant theme, that is present through Habermas' concept of harmony and equal community to Sennett's demand for heterogeneity and differences, is the moral responsibility of the citizen. I believe that such idealism refuses to acknowledge that most urban spaces that are used with decency because they feel safe, are not, in fact, characterized by an ethical or political moral attitude. Rather, these spaces have a defense, because the spatial construction invites citizens to mutual observation of one another. In my view, this provides part of a broadened perspective on urbanity, and the greater the number of people seated behind windows along the sidewalk, the stronger this character. You look at others, and they look at you. But they are not affected; their looks are soft as if not intended or noticed.

# Chapter 10.   Selling the coffee bar?

While I in the previous chapters mostly have been focusing on the agents, I now turn my attention more towards how coffee bars are mediated through the senses – how they look and how they smell. I also look into how coffee bars often are used to signify urbanity itself, and discuss how that attribute is demonstrating the possible integration with an urban symbolic economy.

Coffee bars emerge as visually rich, and therefore contain qualities that might be of interest when the aim is to understand their attractiveness. The baristas in their aprons operating machines with almost old fashion mechanic rituality, the shelters full of bags of different types of coffee, the fine machines used in the production of each espresso shot - all these elements are components in a universe where coffee keeps the wheels turning?

The idea that coffee bars offer objects and services that connotes to wider universes of meaning is the theme of numerous articles, often with the Starbuck's chain as case focus. . Through the application of semiotic and rhetoric tools, often combined with post-colonial perspectives, Starbucks has on several occasions been portrayed as bearer of a colonial discourse and identified as a phenomenon interwoven with the European colonialism and imperialism[38].

I will not spend much time on discussing the deeper strength of these analyses although a few points should be made. It is worth mentioning that the international coffee market is characterized by rather inhumane conditions in the developing countries. This situation is a result of both

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[38] In the article "The Empire filters back: consumption, production and the politics of Starbucks Coffee" Michael D. Smith interprets the company as a propagandist for a discourse that exotify the asymmetric power relations between the coffee workers in the south and the consumers in the west in his analyses of Starbucks calls "third worlding" (Smith 1996, 315). In addition to Smith's article see for instance also Greg Dickinsons article "Joe's rhetoric: Finding authenticity at Starbucks" (Dickinson 2002) or Paula Mathieu's article "Economic citizenship and the rhetoric of gourmet coffee" (Mathieu 1999).

political regimes that in general have been suppressing the interest of land workers and the poor (Bates 1999, 163), and an international trade system characterized by asymmetric power relations. Never the less, the growth of the specialty coffee segment has proven effective in strengthening the bargaining power of producers in the global coffee industry, and empowering marginalized workers, even if it is still far from what is accepted in most consuming countries (Macdonald 2007, 795) (Bacon, Méndez, and Gliessman 2008, 99).



**Figure 31. Coffee at Evita. Photo: EDH. 14.03.2009**

The idea that uneven development and attachment with the colonial and imperial history is aestheticized by Starbucks is probably an observation with relevance when applied on the coffee bars in USA or Great Britain.

These countries' economies have partly been developed through imperialistic practices. The relevance becomes weaker in a Norwegian context, due to the lack of a similar history, and a more periphery situation in the imperialistic economic regimes of the 18th, 19th and 20th century.

It is not my intention to make a comparative study of Starbucks and the Norwegian coffee bars, but it is important to notice that Starbucks in many different ways represent a different project than the Norwegian coffee bars. Starbucks provides an enthusiastic marketing of the exotic experience ~~in~~ of coffee, and in a style that seems rather out of proportions in relation to how

marketing will function in Norway. Kaffebrenneriet, Java, Kaffehjørnet and Evita sell speciality coffee packed in small bags, some bearing logos implying that they are certified as Fair-trade or ecological coffee, some just stating the name of the coffee, the origin, and a moderate text explaining where the coffee was harvested, and quality of taste.

If these coffee bars had applied Starbucks' more American style marketing[39] Norwegian customers might have found this too pompous and direct "This is probably the words best coffee", "Made from 3 % of the words best coffee beans" , or "If your coffee isn't perfect, we'll make it over. If it's still not perfect, make sure you're in a Starbucks."(Claire Cain Miller 2009).



**Figure 32. Starbucks ads from the summer 2009 for the US market. Taken from the blog KellyHobkirk.com (Hobkirk 2009).**

Another critical point is that the idea that coffee connote to a long history of poverty and colonialism and imperialism: that coffee is an important international trade commodity, that is has a history and a current practice intimately related to exploitation of the third world. These connotations are similar to those of commodities tea, chocolate, cotton, soya, bananas and several other products in the Norwegian market. It is in this context relevant to ask why coffee signifies a universe of uneven development any more than the other types of products do? Even if that was the case, since Norway has little – at least officially meditated – history of colonialism and imperialism, the ability to play on those strings are rather weak. The case with Starbucks is that they make a good – too good – case for an examination between western consumer culture and exploitation of the south, and that it might be too tempting to embark on an analysis rooted in the visual explicitness Starbucks often offer. However, I do find it interesting to see if interpretations of the

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[39] In the marketing sciences marketing in USA is often portrayed as different from marketing in Europe. Even if there are many variations between European countries, there seems to be a large difference between how citizens in the USA and Europe receive and understand advertising and other marketing tools (Nevett 1992). In general marketing in the USA is more "loud" than marketing in Europe, and European marketing can also be more political, as the case with Benetton illustrated (Clark 2000).

visual vibrancy found in coffee bars – at least the ones I have visited – could be relevant to my purpose.

## 10.1. SIGHT AND SMELL

The visual richness in the coffee bars is hard to neglect. If you compare a coffee bar to an old fashion bakery outlet the difference becomes significant, and it is the visual side that is so distinctively different. The interior in a coffee bar is as mentioned previously, filled with strong visual identifications. T the use of colors, the light that shines through the huge windows, the prominent appearance and position of the coffee machines, a wide range of products for the coffee connoisseur, and the written information on the wall behind the desk. The amount of visual information of the interior to be perceived and comprehended by the customer overwhelming in comparison to the traditional bakery (and therefore many of the traditions bakeries tend to copy the type of visual appearance that is introduced by the coffee bars). Also seen from the outside, the difference is substantial. One of the major coffee bar design features is the windows and their size. Not only do they let light in, but as earlier described: they allow the inside to become a stage watched from the outside. The traditional bakery outlet is by comparison almost like that of a text to a picture. They are both created to tell the same story, but demands different skills. Even if they at one level offer more or less the same (baked goods and coffee), they are essentially different in terms of visuality[40].

In most cases coffee bars represent a complex visual experience and the design process has been characterized by a high level of consciousness and attention from the owner. As seen in the Java case, the entrepreneur clearly intended to create a particular visual experience. As seen earlier in this thesis – in chapter 5 – he argued that visual qualities were an essential part of his business idea. I repeat his argument here:

> So I decided to go for a very 'different' machine, I wanted a red one, but I wanted a Brasilia. I wanted to remove the brand name, this should be our machine! Red - and a 'different' brand. I wanted 'different' cups, other glasses. I wanted to present the beverage in another way. I wanted 'different' drinking straws. I spent a hell of a lot of time to find our visual identity, and by this I don't mean just the graphics. Of course,

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[40] Scott Lash elaborates on how postmodernity can be understood as "visual rather than literary sensibility" (Lash 1990, 173), and the coffee bars are in this context therefore possible to understand as representing postmodernity.

as an architect, I had a precise notion of the look of the interior.
For instance - I was very keen on designing the coffee bar with
a clear identity of being a bar.

Kaffebrenneriet has a clear policy on the visual field as well, they have been
following a path where their first 'home made' design approach has still been
the backbone of their visual identity. They have refined it, they have made
several minor changes, but they appear as advocates of a distinct visual
perspective. As Steinar Paulsrud explained:

Nice, circular shapes and colors that we almost could have
used at home, and colors that can be combined with all kinds of
colorful people. If you have green hair, it matches yellow, and
if you don't have hair - it fits with yellow as well. If you have
read hair then it goes with yellow, TOO. But most people tend
to be rather pale against white.

As mentioned in the chapter dealing with design issues, the packing of the
coffee and the strategies for blending the exposure of the raw material itself is
mostly a result of an comprehensive design language. Both at Java and at
Kaffebrenneriet, the packaging and exposure of the packed beans, are
derivations from the overall design strategy. At Evita, this is not the case.
They don't roast the coffee themselves themselves, the coffee they sell is
from another roasting company - so they don't brand it consistently – this is
not among their ambitions. But never the less, the aesthetic Evita's packaged
coffee represents does match Evita's overall design and image. The coffee is
sold in brown paper bags, and refers by this aesthetic to a universe of
authenticity, fresh goods and long traditions, and hereby underscores the
manual side of the coffee bar. Especially Kaffebrenneriet has extrapolated the
expression of an old fashion grocery store selling non-industrialized
commodities. This is not a coincidence, but part of a deliberate strategy, as
the entrepreneurs behind Kaffebrenneriet confirm.
    Seen from the street, many of the coffee bars come across as institutions
that have served the city for a century or so. I know that Kaffebrenneriet, in
the Ullevålsveien and Waldemar Thranes gate junction, has existed for a
rather short time, but this is hard to detect. Compared to many of the
neighboring shops, the chain grocery shops in the area, many of the
restaurants and cafes, Kaffebrenneriet has a façade, an interior and an
atmosphere that brings associations to tradition and a long history of urban

presence. The overall appearance of a coffee bar is therefore often signifying an old urban word, it might never have existed, but the coffee bars creates the impression of decades, even centuries, of vibrant urban street life.

The notion that the coffee bar is a "natural environment" for intense visual exposure is not one that I found explicit in my material. A more relevant interpretation is that the particular entrepreneurs represent people with skills, competence and interest in visual communication. They are to a great extent capable of building up a comprehensive universe of visual instruments in their coffee bars, and thereby creating a consistent design language profile?

Visual aspects are important, and in several established perspectives on postmodernity, this component is considered essential. When Scott Lash draws a demarcation line between modernity and postmodernity, he considers postmodernity as characterized of a visual rather than a literary "sensibility". Lash supports his argument with examples from the art field, but also from the more pragmatic fields of consumption. I have no intention of describing the coffee bar as a postmodern institution (or not), but if it represents a universe of visual sensibility – as I think it does – this element can be added to the other arguments explaining the attractiveness of the coffee bars. As argued here, some of the owners of the coffee bars I have studied, share a passion for designing coffee bars in accordance to their overall ambition - creating a complete and perfect environment for the consumption of coffee. The customers are less interested, at least they express this less explicitly. None of them seem to pick their favorite coffee bar on the basis of it's design features. As mentioned earlier, when asked to describe why they like their preferred coffee bar – they mention "the atmosphere" or "the mood". These elements – mood or/and atmosphere - are a result of many different features. Most apparent is the general informal culture, particularly created in the relation between the customers and the baristas.

However, the visual aspects are only one of the sensory components a coffee bar visitor will be exposed to. My case has identified another significant aspect of the internal design of a coffee bar – the feature that has been apparent all the time, but that I nearly omitted, perhaps of it's subtle, but pervasive sensory quality. Smell. The aroma of freshly roasted beans and brewed coffee. It is a smell that most people find pleasant. Coffee is an aromatic product, perhaps more than most beverages – compare for example to tea or wine. The importance of smell, of aroma, should not be underestimated. There are many articles in the field of marketing literature on how to improve sales through the use of aroma; it is called "smell-vertising". Bakeries and fresh food outlets are using smell and distribution of it, strategically, and as the literature on sensory qualities in bakeries illustrate,

exposed to aroma we normally identify as appealing, will in itself increase sales. Aroma has this effect in coffee bars, too (Sha Yang 2002).

When people talk about a superficial world, often the descriptions are salted with analogies "without taste", and as we know, smell is a substantial part of taste, in a biological sense. Smell, try, eat.

However, aroma might have another effect in a coffee bar; it confirms that the coffee bar belongs to the realm of the natural, original and genuine. This is an environmental quality, anchoring the coffee bar to the real world. Hardly anything can be perceived as more real than  olfactory perceptions. I tend to put my stakes in such an explanation, due first and foremost to the observations of coffee bar customers. Many of them actually – perhaps non-intended – sniff inn, it seems with pleasure, the coffee aroma, they literally inhale like trained smokers. Every coffee bar has customers in this category. Even if the customers don't intentionally activate their olfactory senses, they are of course all familiar with the particular smell of coffee. The smell is a part of the coffee expertise, like it is with most beverages and most foods. But the aromatic proportion is more substantial in this case.

It is interesting to observe that none of my informants, in any of the coffee bars, identify their favorite coffee bar as 'cold' or very modern. Is this because of the aromatic experience? They perceive their coffee bar as warm and personal. Those two words are identifying the coffee bars as partly places of nostalgic vibrations. Therefore, I would also claim that as long as the design of a coffee bar confirmed the overall coffee bar typology and supplied functional qualities, the importance of more detailed design features decrease. That is of course, hard to prove in figures, but I would definitively reflect over the importance of smell. The aromatic experience, combined with the performed craftsmanship in the production of the coffee, and the desk were all the support products and packaged coffee beans are displayed, together signify a universe where man and nature is interwoven, mutually dependent, and were the relation between what is seen and what is done, is intimate.

I like to suggest that the sensory qualities are one of the coffee bar's most basic qualities, and that aroma, not only visuality, is a quality that outplays a rigid understanding of the coffee bars as institutions only exposing visual quality. The marketing sciences have dealt with the question of smell for a long time, and now we see the how techniques in advertising and sales that include knowledge on these component are being used more frequently. Some call it "smell advertizing" (Lombard and Snyder-Duch 2001, 87). Also the individualized service and the whole idea of selling fresh roosted beans and coffee made from fresh roosted beans, contribute to an urban milieu where smell is important. Until recently the practice of removing unwanted smell from the city determined many aspects of urban planning. For example, certain industries producing intolerable smells was physically concentrated

[41].The inversion of such strategies can be seen on a micro level, where entrepreneurs both intentionally and unintentionally reintroduce smell to the cities, this time smells that sell….

## 10.2. URBANITY AS A SYMBOL

A returning approach, that also carries the inscription 'urbanity', is the explicit connection to urban culture. The empirical material illustrates the intimate relationship between coffee bars and the ideas of urbanity. As the founder of Java, Robert Thoresen, stated; "I consider Java an urban generator, it creates and fosters urban life". Thoresen picked up the idea to create an "urban generator" while he studied in Los Angles, USA. He considered a variety of businesses that could be an "urban generator" – among them a launderette – but ended up with the coffee bar; the less explicit and more latent idea of "urban culture" and "urbanity". Kaffebrenneriet's owners have also argued for a perspective where their coffee bars are a part of an urban regeneration project. Steinar Paulsrud considers his coffee bars to be significant to the local community, that they contribute to a more vital business environment, and a more vibrant street life. The entrepreneur of the more suburban located Kaffehjørnet, identified the need for a coffee bar in his neighborhood, because the coffee bar had become a significant urban signifier, and therefore should be transported into the suburban context to make it more urban. Elisabeth Toth has also remarked that her coffee bars – Evita Espressobars– play a part in cultural change in their environment. Smalgangen, the street where one of her coffee bars is located, has been influenced by the existence of this coffee bar, at least that's what people who frequent the area claims. They point at the strengthened sense of community, of more shared meetings, development / cultivation of friendships. As one of the informants said: "…before this used to be a pretty dull area...", and many of the informants in the different coffee bars are stating more or less the same - "this is true urbanity" etc, and especially the suburban coffee bars receive acclaim for offering 'urbanity': "I don't know what I would have done without it!" Like many of those I have interviewed claims, their local coffee bar is what makes them use that specific urban space, due to its many qualities, its informality, its atmosphere, its noise, its peacefulness. Therefore, coffee bars can be interpreted as signifier of urbanity, and by

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[41] This has been a strategy for almost all post-war planning in Europe, and already from the beginning of the 20th century in the USA, see for instance Mel Scott's book American city planning since 1890(Scott 1971, 161). Even today this policy is dominating, and when Bilbao redefined itself as a city within the experience economy in the 1990-ies, one essential tool was to move the polluting industry of the center for the city (Rodriguez, Martinez, and Guenaga 2001).

urbanity I refer to – as outlined in chapter 3 – an urban life where a common, but non-explicit value system operates ensuring openness towards strangers, individual autonomy, and norms ensuring a security system – the principles of public spaces. As mentioned in this chapter, urbanity is by my informants described as:

- A physically dense space
- Sharing the same space without being befriended
- A space open to strangers, not only formally, but also in reality
- A space where people can meet and talk without being in a closed club or a private sphere.

When Ole is emphasizing that the coffee bar is where "…you find true urbanity" adding that "…urbanity, that's the special feeling of a dense room, where people are coming and going, where there is always a buzz, -that's urbanity."

Anders, whom I also got to know during this research, points towards the coffee bars' ability to be open towards strangers. "When I see someone I never have seen before, entering our coffee bar, I feel comforted. Java is not a club, it is an open space. That's very urban."

The coffee bars in the streets of central Oslo are considered as "nature" by most of the audience. The coffee bars seem to be there by their own historical necessity and not by the serving distinct requirements .and demands. When moving out of the city center, entering the suburbia, that image has to be redrawn. In the Tonsenhagen and Årvoll area the coffee bar Kaffehjørnet seems to signify urbanity even stronger than in the urban center. Here many of the informants express that Kaffehjørnet is their connection to the city, that it is "creating an atmosphere of urbanity" etc.

Worth noticing in regards to Kaffehjørnet, is its ability to contrast the grand urban modernist narratives of the 1960-ies, where social progress and technological progress where supposed to merge into a new rationality. This modernist narrative was visible in the constructions of satellite cities, the bulldozing of classical urban centers and the emergence of new concrete buildings which paid little, if any attention to the existing grid and layout of the cities. As an underlying argument and base layer for the coffee bar customers, the coffee bars are seen as agents of a more intimate and sensible world than the one projected by modernism. In this suburban context the quality embedded in the coffee bars are becoming more highlighted than in the urban situated coffee bars.

The whole concept of manual service and the limitation of self-service elements are in itself referring to the world of yesterday. The manual side of the coffee bar is essential, and contributes to an atmosphere where personal service and face-to-face commitments are the organizing tools. High

frequency of personal contact between customer and baristas is not creating associations with a nostalgic perspective in itself. Many sectors have even more personal contact without evoking those connotations; just think of modern brokers in a wide range of fields. However, manual service offering products with so little pragmatism, yet so high ambitions, is a demonstration of wealth both in time and economic resources. This component creates an impression of "the good old days".

## 10.3. SELLING SYMBOLS?

The design language of Kaffebrenneriet is typically hinting at a long urban history. As one of the entrepreneurs of Kaffebrenneriet said; the ideal was "…the old grocery store with a counter and personal service". Kaffebrenneriet is built on the idea that all their products should be displayed at the counter, in order to create a personal relation between the workers in the coffee bar and the customers, and to enhance the customer perception of visiting premises where products and service procedures were performed in a old fashioned way, or like in the good old days, with authenticity, product knowledge and attention. Following his assumption, I would emphasize that the coffee bar as a symbol, is possible to understand in context of the discourse on 'symbolic economy', symbolic economy understood here as the consumption and production of non-material phenomena, or at least a situation where the non-material aspects are important. The societal quest for immaterial components is often described as an essential element in the emergence of a symbolic economy[42].

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[42] The maybe most cited article or text about the symbolic economy is the first chapter of Sharon Zukins book *The culture of cities* (Zukin 1995). Here she is using the term not by giving a large and fulfilling explanation of the term, on the contrary she is using it without any strict definition, but more as a self-explaining term. Zukin is constituting the so called culturization thesis by addressing:

> "The growth of cultural consumption (of art, food, music, tourism) and the industries that cater to it fuels the city's symbolic economy, its visible ability to produce both symbols and space" (p. 1).

Zukin recognize that the symbolic economy after the 1970ies has changed and now include "..the symbiosis of image and product…". The rise of the entertainment industry as the driving force of the economy (in her opinion), that happened during the 1980ies and 1990ies contrasts the industrial face down of the 1970ies, nurtures the ground for a more advanced symbolic economy where places are sold on a global scale through the image and the brand strategies.

The production of new theories in the business literature draw on some of the same observations, but often the culturalization is presented not as a description only, but also as normative state. One example is the book with the alluring title *The Experience Economy* and the even more titling tag "work is theatre & every business a stage" became a fashionable book that coined a specific type of economic development that was exceedingly visible at the turn of the century (Pine and Gilmore 1999). The authors of this business book based their interpretation on the deeper structural changes in the economy and the overall culture on how Walt Disney, Starbucks, IBM and Nordstrom among others, operated. Their thesis was simple: They argue that through strive competition, even more demanding customers, and technological development, services are transformed to experiences. In this logic, products are labeled on a scale from undifferentiated (referred to as commodities) to highly differentiated. In *The Experience Economy* each stage in the evolution of products is classified:

The empirical data collected for this thesis illustrate that a coffee bar is characterized by consumption where the material element are only a part of the commodity. The coffee bar visitors appear to search for quite other subjects than solely the coffee itself, and to extend that argument further would it be relevant to ask if there is something here that touches the reality by many scholars is described as *symbolic economy?* Based on that notion and in regard to so-called life-style consumption, it will be easy to assume that this is first and foremost consumption and production of symbols[43] as well. Whether one regards the development of a symbolic economy as progress or retardation of human conditions, they both identify the same core elements: the economy is driven by the application of symbolic values of both services and commodities at an increasing pace.

As demonstrated in this dissertation so far, I primarily identify coffee bars as spaces depending on the creation of a new type of urban sociality, what I label as soft urbanity. Nevertheless, I will not rule out the possibility for coffee bars representing aspects of a symbolic economy as well, and there is one case that can address this question.

When the property developer Pecunia started to develop a site at Grønland in East central Oslo, they were engaged in finding relevant marketing strategies, and they had indentified Evita Espressobar as a brand that they could link up to. They offered Elisabeth Toth to open a coffee bar in the not even finished project Grønlandskvartalene – in Norwegian context a rather huge project, with more than 750 apartments, surrounding a new square called Teaterplassen which was intended to be the jewel and the main

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If revenues are harvested from undifferentiated stuff, the company then belongs in the commodity business. If revenues on the other hand are collected from distinctive tangible things, the company is in the goods business. But if revenues are aggregated from the activities the company performs, then you are in the service business. The last and most desirable status, the experience business, is achieved by accumulating on the feeling customers have because of engaging you. This emotional character of business, where the immaterial side of consumption is emphasized, is also understood as a basic feature of the society as such. Pine & Pine does in fact not only build their assumptions on the culturization thesis, but in a broader sense also refine general postmodern theories and apply them as growth strategies for businesses.
A few years later Richard Florida published his book *The rise of the creative class* where similar cultural and economic understanding was exposed (Florida 2002). Although his arguments had a different approach, the message was more or less the same: the economy is now post-fordistic, and wealth is created by the process of breaking the mass-production spell: standardization. The future (and partly the present) will represent culturization of mass commodities, individualization, and specialization. The creative class – all those who spend their working days with production of images and experiences, – is changing society.

[43] If you buy a pair of shoes from Prada for 800 Euro, what you in point of fact receive in material terms is a pair of shoes worth about 300 Euro. Pradas investment in advertising and brand management, contributes to more than 60 percent of the companies value, therefore what you actually pay for is the non-material side of the shoes: the Prada brand inseminated through the field of popular culture (Salzer-Morling 2004). The speed of globalization since the late 1970ies has for instance changed the European fashion industry in its managerial and organizational practices, and made it more dependent on brand building strategies (Djelic and Ainamo 1999, 635). Some would argue that the concept of brand building is based on the possibility to exploit humans longing for identity, and that this is positive contribution to society (Kunde 2000, 144). Others would argue that these ideas have several problematic sides and that the emansipatoric potential in the aesthetic field is suffering by the shallowness of commercial approaches (Foster 2003).

attraction of the project. When Toth accepted their offer they immediately started marketing Evita Espressobar as an essential part the development.

The marketing campaign was aimed at was intend on illustrating for the potential owners of apartments that Grønlandskvartalene was a relevant and interesting location for the young well educated audience. By stating: "Evita *is* the coffee bar at Grønland – full stop." the message was communicated: the variety the ethnic diversity of Grønland is mirrored in Evita.

The marketing department in Pecunia saw the symbolic marketing value and potential in Evita. When I have asked visitors at Evita if they perceive this coffee bar as a symbol of Grønland and this part of the city itself, they will nod, and say, "Yes, but I haven't thought of it that way." In other words, when Pecunia identified Evita as an essential producer of the symbolic evidences of diversity they are also contributing to the creation of a narrative that most people never would tell themselves, and that appear as a distant description. That narrative is maybe not false, but it appears irrelevant. Claiming that "Evita *is* the coffee bar at Grønland – full stop." seems as an overstatement, because the rest of Grønland is rather diverse. But in the context of Grønlandskvartalene that statement becomes more relevant.

Grønlandskvartalene has being widely criticized for being a housing project of rather poor architectural quality, extremely dense and consisting of too tall buildings (Isdal et al. 2008). Another criticized feature of the Grønlandskvartalene is the deviation from the dominating grid layout in the district, and by this makes it into an unfamiliar urban construction. The immediate reaction from many visitors to this project is that it reminds them of satellite cities in the style of the 1960-ties (Holm 2007). Grønlandskvartalene is therefore in many ways the inversion of the more established idea of Grønland as an ethnic diverse area. By adopting Evita Espressobar the property developers produce a symbol that connotes to the diversity that by many standards are lacking in the Grønlandskvartalene. The symbolic economy becomes evident in this example, by applying Evita Espressobar as a marketing element in relation to Grønlandskvartalene. A connotation is created that can transport the overall qualities of Grønland into a project which in reality is an industrial produced housing complex with no reference to or respect for the diversity of Grønland. The profit made by Pecunia on Grønlandskvartalene was substantial. Even if is not possible to find out how much the marketing who exploited and cultivated symbolic aspects, partly produced by Evita Espressobar, contributed, the case illustrates the potential in applying these strategies.

This case displays a reality where the production of symbols are extrapolated and commercialized by forces far more financially empowered compared to the coffee bar entrepreneurs. The reason Pecunia's marketing is so immersed with the mere existence of a coffee bar, can be their interest in

attracting a customer base with sufficient financial resources. The property developers wish to detect and communicate through the symbols in which the new middleclass identify and value. The transformation of these values to cortado and cappuccino as the hallmark of a new social class, can be conceived as less sophisticated, or at least predictable and 'old news'. For example, the press has made this connection for decades. A quick search engine survey lists articles with headlines like "In Brooklyn's Badlands, the Coming of the Lattes" (Knafo 2007) and "Starbucks and the Resurrection of the Middle Class"(McIntyre 2009). Cappuccino and caffee latte is interpreted as marks of the middle-class "take over" – for better or worse, and politicians use "latte culture" as a description on urban population detached from the realities of life (Hamnes 2009).

In fiction the same pattern is visible. Sue Townsends books about Adrian Mole, typically absorbs the discourse when her protagonist enters his adult years. The title *Adrian Mole: The cappuccino years,* is symptomatic (Townsend 1999).

In these examples coffee bars represent style consumption regimes, and even if it doesn't have the internal economy of an Italian fashion house, it addresses its existence to the same economic logic. Thereby the coffee bar fits into the description of taking part in the symbolic economy. It is taking part in a universe crucial to the economy of consumption, and playing an integrated part as supplier in the economy of signs. However, an interesting and particular aspect of Evita Espressobar is that instead of, or perhaps in addition to representing an idea of slick, unmarked life style consumption, it represents multi-ethnicity. A coffee bar is not a coffee bar. The symbolic economy of a coffee bar seems to be local when investigated on a local level, but at the same time it connotes to a broader universe.

The terms 'cappuccino' and 'latte' have become emblematic; they connotate a universe of cultural and culturalized consumption. In advertising both 'cappuccino' and 'latte' are symbols pointing towards a modern lifestyle embracing young urbanity and cosmopolitanism. Cars are sold by the ad "The outback or a latte?"[44], apartments under the slogan "Latte with a view"[45].

The use of coffee bar beverage terms is penetrating into retail language as well. For instance, interior tiles have colors named Americano, Cappuccino and Caffee latte – in other words: black, dark brown, beige. A Norwegian prefab house manufacturer has a range of houses called the Trend-serien – the trend-collection (Norgeshus 2009). The various models in the collection

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[44] Advertising campaign for the Volkswagen Tiguan, a small SUV, i found it in several international magazines  the autumn 2008

[45] Dockland in Melbourne, Australia, advertising campaign for residential waterfront project. February 2009.

are called Trendy Americano, Trendy Barista, Trendy Americano, Trendy
Cappuccino, Trendy Coretto, Trendy Espresso, Trendy Latte, Trendy Lungo,
Trendy Macchiato and Trendy Mocca



**Hus i Trend-serien**

Trend er vår serie arkitektur som representerer det moderne og utradisjonelle. Vi kombinerer utmerket design med praktiske løsninger som gir dere en bolig med fleksible muligheter. Våre trendhus har eget walk-in-closet for foreldrerommet og egne oppholdsrom for ungdom/barn. Ta en kikk innenfor de spennende fasadene og la deg begeistre!

Trendy Americano   Trendy Barista   Trendy Cappucino   Trendy Corretto   Trendy Espresso

Trendy Latte   Trendy Lungo   Trendy Macchiato   Trendy Mocca

**Figure 33. Ad for prefab houses. Ill: Norgeshus. 2008**

In regard to the research question; what is it with coffee bars that makes them
so vital in today's cities, I find that this chapter highlights an essential factor
that has slipped my perspective so far: the increase in number of coffee bars
are at a certain time in history not only dependent on the coffee bar
entrepreneurs, and their ability to attract customers, but a demand created by
capital itself. To say that it is a market driven demand is to underplay the
financial aspect of the development. Pecunia is a real estate developer with
huge investments at stake, and their application of symbolic economy tools,
is pragmatic means to securing investments and increasing profits. Pecunia is
an example showing that property developers of this scale is in need of the
symbolic capital produced by the original small scale business entrepreneur.

By extrapolating the symbolic values of Evita Espressobar, by doing up to
date marketing, and thereby building up the image of their real estate project
as being part of an organic urban development, Pecunia demonstrates that
symbolic economy becomes an important part of the conventional economy
of cities.

I mentioned earlier that in general, the coffee bar customers seem to be
less aware of or interested in the symbolic aspect of coffee and coffee bars.
Most of them tend to describe the coffee bars as spaces without a strong
connection to the more fashionable picture that is often presented by the
media. The idea that coffee bars represent upscale refined consumption
motivated by pure aesthetic vanity, finds limited support in my empirical
material. Although this conclusion is valid, it should not be misinterpreted as

absolute irrelevance of individualized symbolic consumption. As one informant says:

> It seems ridiculous that something as simple as a cup of coffee, can have a price equivalent of a hamburger or a small meal. What you get is something more; the price you pay reflects something else… I don't really know how to describe it, but it is a sign of something. A latte is not just a latte… if you know what I mean...

These words, belonging to Renate, a regular a coffee bar customer, reflects the notion many of my informants have, that the coffee they consume and the coffee bars are representing not only a social reality, but a more complex situation.

Among all those I have interviewed most will reject the idea that cappuccino, caffee latte and the other versions of espresso based coffee drinks are functioning as symbols of an economic or cultural class, or as the prime agents of an aesthetization regime. But at the same time, as Renate expresses, there is something that touches the reality – described as *symbolic economy.*

# Chapter 11. Conclusions and speculations

In the beginning of this dissertation I asked: What is it with coffee bars that have made them into an essential and growing phenomenon in our society?

In this last chapter I attempt to answer this question, a question which I deconstructed in the first chapter into several under-questions. Firstly, I asked for a description of the historical context the coffee bars operate in. The historical context is rich; coffee bars are being produced in a relation to the classical European urbanity, where the consumption and the purchase of coffee has been an important feature. In chapter 4 this relation is highlighted, and I illustrate how the coffee bar of today has some parallels to the first coffee houses that sprung up in London in the 17th century - but also how different they are. The coffee bar phenomenon is also strongly connected to technological progress – as the invention of steam produced coffee beverages – and the dissemination of this technology. Another aspect that hardly can be overrated is the birth of the coffee bar culture in the USA during the 1980s, and especially the emergence of the coffee bar chain Starbucks. Howard Schultz is the single most significant person in the history of the speciality coffee growth, and his contribution to the coffee bar industry is beyond comparison. He was many years ahead his time, he understood how a new type of consumers where entering the marked, willing to pay a comparatively high price for the combination of great coffee and a suitable space where it could be consumed. As he writes in his autobiography "We were filling a void in people's lives."(Schultz 1997, 88). Schultz had an idea that customers were chasing qualities which not necessary were embedded in the product itself. His perspective was proven to be right /seemed viable to onlookers, and has spun off a lot management literature embracing his thinking.

In chapter 5 I investigated how the design of coffee bars affected the spaces they occupy, and it becomes evident that design is of significance. Coffee bars are not cafés. Coffee bars represent a typology, a distinctive design, and they are probably easy to recognize for most users of the urban sphere. The adoption of a standardized international typology differs from

coffee bar to coffee bar. Some have brought in sophisticated design competence, others have been more primitive in their implementation, and they too represent differences regarding style, even if most of them can be interpreted as variations over a modernistic theme. Kaffebrenneriet appears more rustic than Java, but even if Java has a more noticeable design, the appearance of fresh croissants, of coffee packaged in small bags, and the constant summing of the espresso machine, is creating an atmosphere where the design in itself is forced into the background.

This chapter is also describing the different types of customers, and the coffee bars examined in this dissertation tend to recruit a more or less representative share of the population in their areas. They discriminate on age -coffee bar customers under 50 years are overrepresented - but not necessarily on ethnicity or gender. The difference between two coffee bars that are located close to each other, are significant - Java has a much higher degree of customers from the so-called creative sector, than its neighbor Kaffebrenneriet. The design features might be responsible for that difference, but also the fact that Kaffebrenneriet are considered to be 'corporate' by many of the Java customers.

Coffee bars have another feature in common, namely that they primarily sell coffee. The variety of speciality coffee beverages and the wide assortment of different fresh roosted beans emphasize the focus on coffee. All other commercial activities in a coffee bar can be considered to be carried out to support the purchase of coffee. Coffee is the core.

Chapter 6 I focus on the entrepreneurs of the coffee bars, and their motivation and actions are discussed. A significant finding is that these entrepreneurs are extremely interested in coffee. Yes, they are surviving and thriving due to their ability to make good profits – and in the case of Kaffebrenneriet, to expand year by year – but the almost obsessive interest in coffee is an important factor in explaining their success. They have created a market for the consumption of high quality coffee, and that is through an intense interest, an enthusiastic and idealistic approach to coffee and coffee quality. Also the fact that both the founder of Java and the entrepreneurs of Kaffebrenneriet had experienced coffee bars in the USA and took the idea with them when they came back to Norway is noteworthy. The first coffee bars in Oslo are hard to imagine without this connection to USA. Robert Thoresen – the founder of Java – is explicit about his idea of creating an "urban generator", and thereby addresses the tight connection between coffee bars and their effect in the urban setting.

Knowledge of the coffee bar entrepreneurs illustrates how important the focus on agents are, and this case demonstrates that explaining the growth of certain phenomena demands a perspective on the agents. Even if there is a structural pattern that can explain the need for a certain type of institutions, it

is only through the work and engagement of individuals that such institutions are created.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the individuals who use the coffee bars and the question of what kind of every day practices that take place. The short answer is that a coffee bar can be the location for a range of activities, from drinking coffee alone, watching street life, reflection on life, others just gazing at the street, to socializing processes like meeting friends, making new friends, coming in the company of others, or just socializing with the other guests.

For some customers visiting a coffee bar this is a part of a daily ritual, motivated by a demand for the experience of being in a coffee bar for the sake of the coffee and the space it offers for contemplation. For others, the coffee bar is part of their daily schedule, here they find peace they need, they can "reload", as one of my informants who use the coffee bars in this strategic way says: "I like to protect my energy". There are many reasons for being a coffee bar customer, but one of the most important reasons appears to be the ability to enter a space with a certain atmosphere, an easiness in the social codes that makes it possible to enter the coffee bar alone, without experiencing loneliness. This point is crucial, and in my opinion, the most constituting of all the coffee bars' different qualities. The coffee bars I have studied are different concerning many formal qualities, but regarding the fabric of the atmosphere they come across as quite similar. The coffee bars examined in this dissertation have the capacity for both fostering social relations and for offering spaces for solitude. It is of crucial importance, though, to understand that solitude in a coffee bar doesn't imply the absence of socializing experiences; it is merely the absence of active socializing. This dissertation illustrates that many of the customers who seek to be alone in coffee bars are experiencing the social life in the coffee bar as meaningful and interesting; it gives them a connection to the life of the city, as many of my informants emphasize. "Being alone in the company of others, that's urbanity", as one of them says.

The employees in coffee bars, the baristas, are important in creating the atmosphere that let the diverse social life play characteristic for coffee bars play itself out, as described in chapter 8. The baristas are characterized by their technical skills and their interest in coffee, and they are recruited on that basis. But as the empirical part of this dissertation illustrate: A coffee bar is not only about coffee, but how the coffee is served, described, talked about and how the individuals that visit coffee bars are connected to the staff through these processes, through their social skills. The baristas are perhaps representing a breed of workforce, who combines technical skills with emotional and aesthetical capacity, and by this they epitomize the connection to urban culture. A good barista is an essential part of that fabric the coffee bar creates. The role of the baristas is vital in another respect than for

instance in a fast food café – or in a restaurant. The baristas are the only employees that serve the customers, and all work procedures are visible. They are in one sense therefore interacting with the customers at a transparent level, making them a part of the same community.

When explaining why coffee bars are so visible, and growing at an impressive pace in Oslo and also in many other urban settings, the empirical part of this dissertation has been illuminative. I would also like to draw attention to if the coffee bars represent elements that can broaden the ideas and perspectives of urbanity? Chapter 9 is a discussion on several themes that can have this function, and the themes are identified through the empirical work. In a sense they have been embodied in this part of the thesis and gradually worked they way up to the surface, and they have the ability to represent both/and realities, and to blur distinctions between consumption and production, solitude and loneliness, high and low culture, different economic classes, the local and the global, and private and public space. In this chapter I establish a term; "soft urbanity". The term soft urbanity can describe a situation where the distinctions are weakened, and also in describing the fabric that characterize the urbanity that is coming out of these processes. As mentioned earlier, the term therefore represents both the softening of categories and the softening of practices. Soft urbanity is describing a reality of change in essential aspects of contemporary society, and the penetration of more finely tuned social and cultural patterns are becoming visible. I constructed the term on the basis of two other conceptual understandings of societal change, the 'de-differentiation' processes and the growth in informality.

Perhaps the most apparent findings of the dissertation are how the softening of the distinctions between sociality and loneliness becomes the essential prerequisite for a coffee bar. The coffee bars I have studied are spaces where solitude is the most essential element, they have become spaces for solitude. Thereby the coffee bar phenomenon is brimful with potential insight that can broaden the perspective on urbanity and nuance the theories of Georg Simmel. Modernity produces not only freedom – in a variety of forms and constructs – but also gives birth to the basic problem of borderless autonomy. As Simmel observes, the essential problem in a modern urbanized word, is the one of the relation between the individuals and the masses. The evaporation of rigid structures is not only resulting in emancipation, but also in loneliness. The coffee bar phenomenon can be understood as a solution to this problem, it is in this respect also a demonstration of how important design can be. As the empirical elaboration illustrates: The coffee bars are through their design features and the specific social atmosphere corresponding with them bridging loneliness to solitude. I would therefore claim that an institution like the coffee bar crack one of the codes embedded

in modernity, and thereby also can contribute to an updated theoretical understanding of the term 'urbanity'.

In the coffee bar I also found embedded qualities that can expand the theoretical understanding of theories on individualization, as they are brought to front by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Bech. Individualization is a deeper phenomenon than increased individualized service, as an example the term has a wider reach than a description of the process and possibility to order tailor suited coffee beverages. Individualization is a description of a societal situation where the individual's needs and demands are given priority to the more collective interest in society. In an individualized society an individual is acting on the behalf of one self, while in a more collectively structured society individuals are representing their class or social and cultural position.

Ulrich Bech and Anthony Giddens understand and interpret the current societal situation as one where increased individualization generates more reflexivity, that is at the individual level, an intensified 'ontological insecurity' – more deeply rooted questions on the meaning of life, and the possibilities of creating a meaningful idea of one's own existence. Both Bech and Giddens believe that individualization and increased self-reflexivity is creating a climate for more privatized existences, a modus operandi where market forces are contributing stronger to the content of everyday life and also shaping the individuals ideological understanding.

In my work I have been arguing that reflexivity as an inherent part of the current societal situation not necessarily – at all levels – produces more dominant marked forces. Institutions that at one level are identifiable as commercial institutions, might at another level represent a deeper and more complex reality, and also be arenas for processes that are of distinctively non-commercial nature. A coffee bar is often a manifest demonstration of that phenomenon. Also in regard to high versus low culture, these coffee bars represent softening categories. Even if a culture of connoisseurship is promoted, coffee as a drink also fits into a more common culture, where it represents less of a highbrow activity than the fancy names of the beverages might indicate. Also in regard to class the softening abilities of the coffee bars become visible, and the coffee bar appears to mirror the fabric of its social and economic surroundings more than the often mediated picture of coffee bars as typical habitats for the gentrifying classes.

The blurring of high and low culture is in the coffee bar characterized by the emphasis of atmosphere and "the banalities of the everyday life". The blurring of different social strata thorough the coffee bars' ability to include people of almost every appearance and the remarkable absence of formal and stiff procedures is also a building block in this culture of informality.

In the discussion of local versus global attachments, many coffee bars are representing the both/and logic. The global aspects of coffee bars are

apparent - the typology is global, coffee itself is among the oldest globalized commodities, and still among the most important in terms of economy. The local aspects of coffee bars are never the less visible, they are localized in an environment that is local, and most of the customers understand them as "theirs". The softness is crucial here. The coffee bar emerges as a space that pays homage to both these attributes. The coffee bar exists in a both local and global sphere, the two categories not being contradictory, they are rather mutual prerequisites for each other, and thereby for their common ground; the coffee bar.

The contact between employees and customers is influenced by this type of softening distinctions, too. Baristas and customers are sharing a common commitment to coffee, even if most customers are less passionate and knowledgeable than the baristas; most of them share a wish for coffee of considerate quality. This does not by any means indicate that the categories they represent disappear, but it is softening them and thereby resulting in a common space for consuming and producing coffee.

The idea to broaden the perspective on urban theories is also hinging in another direction: Are coffee bars representing an area which could challenge influential theories on public space?

Two of the more dominant theories of public space and its role on a societal level, have held the signature of Jürgen Habermas and Richard Sennett. Habermas exposing public space as territories used idealistically for political and moral debates, intimately connected to the birth of the modern democratic states, and basic deliberative practices. The coffee bars are not matching Habermas ideas of a utopian social and political space, but his emphasis on public spaces as neutral ground is noticeable. The idea that an enclosed space is open towards general audiences, and doesn't explicitly segregate on the basis of formal qualities as gender or ethnicity, is important - and obvious, as well. What is not so obvious, is that their users consider the coffee bar as more neutral ground than many other types of territory. The coffee bars are in the sense of being public spaces generously equipped with qualities seldom found in other commercial spaces where food and drinks are sold.

When Richard Sennett state that "Wearing a mask is the essence of civility" (Sennett 1977, 264) he illustrates his point that the use of public spaces for private relations or private communication, is representing a degradation of the ability of public spaces to invite strangers in. The growth of a mass public during the 19th century, who emphasized not only formal but also informal codes of social conduct, destroyed in Sennett's point of view, the ground for a more human society. Hopefully, my dissertation demonstrates that this idea is unsupported by my empirical material. On the contrary, the interest in and the practices with deep rooted reflections on the

position of one-self, the existence of a reflexivity – of self confrontative work – is characterizing many of the users of coffee bars. The absence of the idealistic utopian interest for strangers and for formalized behavior doesn't appear to push public life back into the private realm, as Sennett suggests. I would rather say that a rich public space is not in any conflict with the pursuing of private reflections. However, it is worth noticing that coffee bars often foster roles that are supporting Sennett's perspective on the formal qualities as a prerequisite for making a place open to strangers, as well.

I would claim that the coffee bars enable development of a strong civility, through its capacity to foster and produce an untold contract between the street and those observing it. The useful emphasize on the connection between the users and life in the street outside , the element of a silent contract between the customers in a coffee bar and the surroundings strengthen the argument that the coffee bar phenomenon is, at this level, too, producing that certain condition I call soft urbanity.

Maybe the most important symbolic aspect of the coffee bar phenomenon is the intimate relation to the term 'urbanity'. The coffee bars are identified among the users as advocates of "urbanity", and these claims deserve to be taken seriously. They actually form a new idea of what is "urbanity", and that idea is a softer and less alienated version than the one Simmel describes.

The suburban coffee bar is a demonstration of how powerful the idea of urbanity and of urban identity can be. Even decontextualized, transferred from its original surroundings, the coffee bar constitutes a link to the dense city just by its mere existence. As a symbol of urbanity, it is a permanent reproducer of the idea of the urban fabric as an essential quality of life

The coffee bar is an institution that through this quality has contributed to an updated perspective on urbanity.

The coffee bar phenomenon is complex; a coffee bar tends to involve many paradoxes, and appears to transcend the more rigid interpretive practices so eagerly applied by those who eat structuralistic theories for lunch. Coffee bars are living proof of how agents at street level – visitors, owners and staff – are creating a new reality. They construct answers to questions and problems raised by the structure, both they act independently in regard to the material structure. In the first part of this text I explained the relation between human agency and structure, and even if it has not been my intention to discuss the structuration theory as such, I just like to point towards a few observations of my dissertation.

Giddens contextualize human agency as framed by structure, and finds that agents cause a weaker influence on structure than the structure is imposing on the agents. In my dissertation the relevance of this understanding is brought to front in the many examples of life in coffee bars. Coffee bars are a result of human agency – they are the result of a few

devoted entrepreneurs – although a prerequisite is found in the deeper structural fabric of society. My empirical work is supporting the relevance of Giddens perception; human agency is inferior to structure, but it is not in a deadlock. Human agency can interplay with structural forces and change them. The coffee bars have changed the urban situation. It has made it normal to utilize the urban sphere in a way which earlier was relatively seldom in Norway– it is now socially accepted to enter an establishment like this alone and without awkwardness –and a more deep rooted nuanced urbanity is born – soft urbanity. In my opinion the coffee bar phenomenon is exemplifying the interplay between agency and structure. The coffee bars are by their existence fostering a new code for behavior in public spaces, and therefore also changes the discourse on behavior in public spaces. This way they are reinforcing a broader and deeper change, enhancing the moral basis for solitude which again is a structural affirmation.

The research question I asked in the beginning of this thesis was: how and why have coffee bars emerged in the urban sphere, how do they function and how can they be interpreted at societal level? To sum it up: what is it with coffee bars that make them so successful in the contemporary society?

What I see when I examine both empirical findings and theoretical reflections, is one essential element, and that is the continuous reproduction of a reality where de-differentiation and informality is co-producing both softening categories and soft practices.

All the various elements that together form and uphold a well functioning coffee bar, and at a greater societal level contributes to what I label as the coffee bar phenomenon, is committing themselves to the daily production of a specific kind of meaning. Through their daily ability to repeat and to stand firm on their defining qualities they contribute to emergence of a soft urbanity.

The connection between this emblematic institution from our contemporary city and the city that Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel describe is visible, but as I hopefully have illustrated, the coffee bar of today's Oslo is in many respects a remedy for the problems Simmel and Benjamin focus on. Coffee bars represent capitalism with a human façade and offer an institution that use commodification as the answer to commodification. By commercializing the purchase and sale of coffee beverages the result is a de-commodified place where people can embrace both the states of solitude as the socializing situations. These spaces represent a loose form of community; due to their atmosphere of informality they are open to so many different people with so many different motifs. They have the valuable capacity to transform loneliness into solitude, and thereby offering people a setting which they experience as meaningful. The coffee bar visitors are often describing the coffee bar as a "place for urbanity", and

to claim that the coffee bars have become institutions fostering a soft urbanity, is hardly an exaggeration.

## 11.1.  A SPECULATION

It is viable to think that the findings in this dissertation have potential for being applied on a wider range of subjects, and with a highly relevant and almost instrumental attitude one field is asking for a contribution, namely the field of urban planning. As I referred to earlier, there is a long trend in urban planning for emphasizing informal meeting places, public spaces with social qualities. By transporting the term soft urbanity into the field of urban planning, two potentially productive outcomes can appear.

First and foremost, the understanding of the fragile relation between solitude and socializing practices can be applied to the design processes leading to new public and semi-public spaces of various sorts, both private and public. Shopping malls, libraries, town halls, parks, kiosks etc. are all institutions that would benefit from a reflected design answer to the basic questions raised by modernity.

Secondly, the idea that soft urbanity is a quality that is possible to create and to foster, can also be introduced at a more general planning level. When municipalities, towns and private developers draw the large structural frame – when they decide where housing should be located, in which districts industry should play a role etc. – it is critical that they reflect on the effects of their plans. It is of pressing importance that they comprehend the challenges, and formulate policy that can work also in a larger systemic context. By understanding the effects both of the 'de-differentiation' processes and the growth of informality, it is possible to examine the value of strategies, ambitions, plans and policies. What is demonstrated here is the transformation of a term on urbanity to a program for urbanism – the morphological process of planning and building urban environments. In other words there are normative lessons to be thought, as these two examples illustrate, and they could be applied to other fields of contemporary society with success.

These pragmatic readings are representing potential benefits both for authorities, private entrepreneurs, and the society as a whole, but I hope the findings in this thesis also can contribute to an enriched perspective in understanding central components in contemporary society.

## 11.2.  THE FLÂNEUR REVISITED

Here I could have finished, but I will visit Walter Benjamin one last time. I introduced him in chapter 3, and in my interpretation his perspectives are to a certain extent similar to Georg Simmel's. Although the parallel is highly

visible, there is also a potential in the flâneur character for being changed, for being softened.

The flâneur, Walter Benjamin's incarnation of modernity, is a person who never becomes integrated with the urban life he (or she) in such a poignant way represents. The flâneur's destiny is to take part through a distanced look. The 'blasé' Simmel describes is a permanent feature in the life of the flâneur, and is what constitutes the character. To stand outside and watch the inside, to operate with the surgical look, is a gift, but also a curse. The outsider position becomes destiny. Benjamin describes the flâneur as a person who moves with the crowd, but never becomes absorbed by the crowd – "The flâneur seeks refuge in the crowd" (Benjamin 2002, 2). Benjamin's flâneur is a character that not only embodies the contradictions of modernity, but also that becomes detached to the realties the urban life creates. It has two mighty consequences. The first is the impossibility of becoming satisfied with life itself. The flâneur is always alert, always absorbing, consuming and observing. The flâneur is detached, and finds it hard to commit to more organic relations, and therefore he also suffers from the absence of love and emotional commitments. Charles Baudelaire, the poet who gave Benjamin the term "the flâneur" and for Benjamin also represents the flâneur himself, demonstrates this fate with "his flight into the asocial" (Ibid., 895).

The other consequence is that the almost religious perspective on the crowd in turn of the time reproduces is self as support for fascism. Benjamin emphasizes that the crowd at a certain point becomes "nothing but appearance" ( Ibid., 345) and maybe it after all was "empty mold" (Ibid., 345). Benjamin sends out a warning: the flâneur was ahead of his time, he adored the crowd and provided it with a soul on its own, and thereby "he was the first to fall to victim to an ignis fatuus which since that time has blinded many millions" (Ibid., 345) – in other words the totalitarian Nazi ideology.

During the fragmented Arcades Project Benjamin develops a critical thesis: what starts out as an emancipating project slowly becomes outdated and unable to deal with the inherent power produced by the combination of a commodification of culture (and of the social) and capitalism. These two aspects have achieved modest interest in the literature on Benjamin, the focus on the flâneurs role as the emblematic figure of urban shopping culture has been more apparent[46.]

The idea that "We are all flâneurs now…" a sentence used by for instance by Steven Shaviro (in his writing on what he calls "postmodern emotions" (Shaviro 2004, 136)), is appealing, and might correspond to the often media portrayed latte sippers. But if we all are flâneurs now, then it is a different

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[46] This slightly unbalanced reading has is reasons. The reception of these texts corresponds probably with the present intellectual climate.

type of flâneur that the one Benjamin portraits. In current urbanity the coffee bars represent spaces for reflections and meditations, for solitude and watching the street. These features of urban life have with introductions of coffee bars become normal and social accepted activities, activities also shared by Benjamin's flâneur. But the coffee bar visitors also represent something else – the interest and often the longing for a more social arena. I previous stated that the coffee bars – by being a bridge that can transform loneliness to solitude – mediate some of the basic problems of modernity. In these environments also Walter Benjamin's flâneur would be welcomed. If the flâneur – in Benjamin's sense – still exists he is working overtime. He is exhausted. He has always been a character of both/and, but he has never been truly content. The crowd – his refuge, but not his home – is also a mosaic of millions of different destinies. The crowd dissolves when the doors to the coffee bars open. No one comes as a crowd. The facilitator of solitude is also an arena for understanding individuality. The coffee bar can offer the flâneur a different type of refugee, a refugee in to the soft urbanity. Here also he – or she – can find a space almost perfect for the flâneur's conventional activities, but also a space that offers something else: a community, or at least: the possibility of thinking of joining a type of loose community. A soft, but real community.

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