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Coffee and Class for the Swedes – as seen in the Millennium Trilogy by Stieg Larsson: Coffee as materiality

Åsa Ljungström
Independent researcher

In the Millennium Trilogy coffee and class express the paradox of the dream of a classless society denying the divisiveness of class affiliation in Sweden. Coffee is used to create affinity while the consumption of other kinds of food and drink is used to subtly mark social hierarchies. Swedish people like to believe that it is possible for anyone to climb the social ladder; equality is the ideal since the 1960s. Having a coffee works to level the communication between people IRL as well as in the novels. The author uses the coffee as a formula to get the storyline going, introduce new characters or forecast events. Not until the New York Times' columnist wrote about the pathological coffee consumption did the Swedes notice. The Swedes will have a coffee during a break at work, at home, with a friend, or whenever they open communication. The serving of coffee makes a self-evident statement in any group. Drawing on theory of materiality and presence the presentation aims to analyse coffee running through the human bodies creating chains of communication. Anything is possible with a coffee for Stieg Larsson's characters coping with the morale of good and evil, black and white.

“Mikael poured the coffee.” (I, 137)

“Mikael poured the coffee from Henry’s vacuum jug.” (I, 309)

They shook hands and Mikael put the coffee cups on the table.” (I, 189)

“Mikael poured a cup of coffee and asked him to sit down.” (I, 378)

“Mikael took a sip of black coffee – boiled coffee – and wondered where the story would turn.” (I, 86)

In the Millennium trilogy by Stieg Larsson a lot of coffee is consumed. The Swedish readers swallowed the coffee not giving it a thought, just normal. The readers abroad wondered. The author of a parody asked his wife “what she considered the most striking part of it”. She answered: “Well, they all seem to drink a lot of coffee...” (Roberts 2010, [311]). The coffee occurs among the imaginations due to the sudden death of the author. The New York Times’ columnist David Kamp concluded his review suggesting: “He poisoned himself with coffee”. David Kamp writes about the coffee of Stieg Larsson that “it is a tic that recurs so relentlessly that I don’t think Larsson realized that it was a tic” (Kamp 2010). When Kamp named it ‘*the pathological coffee consumption*’ (Kamp 2010) did the Swedes notice this peculiarity of the novel world by Larsson. This world is drawn in black and white, distinguishing between good and evil, so leading us to the morale and structure of the fairy tale. In the *New York Review of books* Tim Parks called it a moralistic fairy tale (2011).

So what part does the coffee drinking play and how does the coffee work in the Millennium trilogy? I will analyse how the coffee works in Larsson’s fairy tale about agency and gender, sex and violence, good and evil, how the characters use the coffee and what the coffee does to them; how do the coffee habits emerge in chains of relations between the human beings and the environment. I draw on the works of knowledge of sociology by John Law (1999) and Bruno Latour (1999). Inspired by their ideas of materiality, presence and habit I seek to understand how the coffee works beyond its impact on bodies coming together, the effects of the coffee habit. Food and drink must be included in the study of materiality, in actors’ chains of technology and environment creating consequences beyond the bodies spending time together (Damsholt & Simonsen 2009: 9-37). Especially, I draw on those who focus presence and sensory affects of physical phenomena like Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2004: 21-49) and Camilla Mordhorst (2009:121ff).

For the history of the coffee habit in Sweden I build on the foundation laid by Ingegerd Sigfridsson, who investigates the development of the coffee habits from the 17th century up to now in a gendered analysis, clarifying how the coffee invitation is the self-evident statement when people come together (2005).¹

As the moralistic system of the Millennium Trilogy shows there are traits of the fairy-tale world inspiring Larsson, so I also turn to the structural analysis of the fairy tale world (Propp 1984; Peterson 1976) in search for the impact of coffee in such a structure. How does this national drink work in the play of good and evil, agency and resistance? Is there a relation between coffee and class, or is there a classless coffee in the world of Larsson, as in the dream of the 1968 cohort? Do men and women have their coffee in different ways, gendered? Today they can have the same coffee but in the old days it used to be different. Ethnologists usually study how people use coffee, while I turn to see how the coffee works with us. How is it that something as common as the coffee might tell us anything of class, gender, habits and

¹ Due to space limit I have to leave out the outline of the historical background and parts of the discussions of food and gender. This contribution is a short version of the full article in the Swedish web-publication (Ljungström 2013).

resistance in Sweden – about good and evil – and if there is an overarching function? Is there any relevance to discuss class and gender in relation to the coffee of the Millennium trilogy? All this coffee, is it a personal tic of the writer? Unconsciously, as David Kamp suggests (2010)? Is it a ritually Swedish trait, a personal tic or maybe the writer's deliberate move for a certain purpose?

FOOD AND DRINK IN A MORALISTIC FAIRY-TALE

“Oh no... no, come in. Would you like a coffee? (I, 276)

“ ‘ That I want to discuss over a coffee. Now.’ “ (I, 538)

“She balanced two mugs of coffee from the coffee machine.” (II, 143)

The coffee is obvious but do the characters eat anything? I can think of some pasta, a few pizzas and sandwiches in the hands of Lisbeth Salander and Michael Blomkvist. Stieg Larsson is not really interested in food. It is said that Larsson imagined his characters as grown up issues of Pippi Longstocking and Charlie Blomkvist by Astrid Lindgren and other worlds of children's books, but his characters are adults and can choose to eat whatever they like. Kids cannot. They have to eat what they get which makes food immensely interesting in children's books (Bergstrand 1999). From his childish world of imagination Stieg Larsson may have kept another kind of inspiration, the moralistic view of the good and the evil ones.

In *The New York Review of Books* Tim Parks analyses Stieg Larsson as a moralist building an intriguing system of sex, violence, good and evil where the world is sorted through two poles, the sexual and the moral pole (Parks 2011). “Investigate sex abuse and you come across a sick family and a corrupt organization. Investigate a corrupt organization and invariably someone is involved in sex abuse. Every attempt by one person to control another is evil” (Parks 2011, 2). Perhaps Larsson is moralistic the way the folk-tale is, I associate to analysis by Vladimir Propp of the structure of agency and role characters. Fairy tales with supernatural traits will start with a lack or an evil deed and will have a happy ending (Propp 1984). In between the hero meets with problems, solving them with the assistance of magic helpers. In the novel a woman is missing since forty years, Blomkvist is assigned to find her. He needs help, quite a supernatural helper.

The moralistic view is easy to see but a system? Stieg Larsson painted a world in black and white, distinguishing between good and evil, clean and dirty. I take it that Parks can see that the morale encompasses that of class defiance, a struggle for egalitarian ideals and gendered equality. This may be included in “so on” (Parks 2011, 2). As for the sexual pole I restrict myself to notice that sexual abuse is exercised by the evil men, while delightful sex is for the good guys, male and female. So sexuality is ranged to the overarching struggle between good and evil. The family section of *Martin Vanger* is certainly sick. He is “the man who hates women” (the title of the novel in Swedish) exercising sexual abuse. But he has two interests that seem to be nice, food and music. In the world of myth and fairy tale there is a connection assumed between food and sex, perhaps also for *Martin Vanger*.

The good guys are invited to dine at the estate of the Patriarch Vanger treated the steak of hare with current jelly. This is where upper class, agency and wealth of past time is accentuated by the writer. To Larsson, the upper class is suspect by definition but its evil representatives must be possible to defeat, because the welfare society of his dream is to be egalitarian. It works, but only overtly as Johanna Niemi writes (2013).

COFFEE FOR THE SWEDES, THE 'FIKA' – THE GOOD THING OF THIS WORLD

“During the past days and nights Michael had had more coffee than ever before in his life but by now he knew that in the North it would be rude to say ‘No thanks’.” (I, 360)

“She got up to the garden table and felt the coffeepot – cold and empty as well. /.../ She took the pot and entered the kitchen.” (I, 491)

“She /.../ fetched a cup of coffee from the espresso machine that Dragan Armanskij had invested in – at long last realizing that Lisbeth would never make the coffee just because she was supposed to.” (I, 119)

In Sweden we have coffee the way Larsson presents it – all the time. To me there is no pathological coffee habit, rather a Swedish ritual – a habit of some two hundred years. How this came about would be another story to tell. How the expensive import that the king Charles XII (d. 1718) loved so much, sipped through every layer of the society, all the more thinned with hot water and the grounds boiled again and again to ease the hunger among the poorest. Then the curve turned upwards in the 20th century. Along with better rising conditions and equality it spread as a strong drink for everyone acknowledging the good worker – a well-behaved citizen of the welfare society (Sigfridsson 2005).

In the north of Sweden the boiled coffee used to be much loved. This is where the writer was raised. When boiling the coffee it was easy to add more water to make it weaker – and cheaper. Even as hot brown water it would still starvation. From 1855 it became the new national drink when the home distilling of vodka was prohibited (Valeri 1991; Bringéus & Rehnberg 1970). Coffee was the good of this world while the device of home distilling was represented as the dragon of evil. The vodka would lead to sin. The coffee would be the drink for the sober and well-behaved people.

As part of the system of good and evil, sin and purity, the coffee can be traced in the discourses of discipline that followed the modernization of Sweden. When Sweden was industrialised from 1870 onwards, coffee was much better than vodka for workers who were expected to be sober. As an alternative to the vodka coffee could even be attached to purity. At the time the temperance movement and the revivalist movement had great impact on the trade union movement. These movements raised the general level of education and virtue for temperance, morale and thrift. The virtues could be spelled out as goodness and purity, but not even the coffee consumption should be overdone. Wasn't it a bit sinful, this imported luxury – as compared to the clean, white milk from the indigenous cows that grazed the Swedish pasture? (Sigfridsson 2005).

Coffee is a the common drink when the Swedes come together but it is also possible to have it on your own, all alone in society. In pop culture combined with philosophy Eric Bronson analyses the characters of the Millennium trilogy as if they were persons alive IRL. With a smile Bronson undertakes to answer the question why journalists and geniuses do love the coffee and hate themselves? The coffee houses of Europe were water holes of loneliness in the 19th century, the poor-man's university. Coffee drinkers turned introspective and solitary, quoting Hemingway. The reason for being lonely is that the journalist and the genius are self-absorbed and socially awkward, not mastering the art of socializing, says Bronson (2012).

But not mastering the art of socializing cannot be the whole truth about the coffee habits in Sweden, for what does Bronson know about the coffee-breaks in Swedish work-places and what they can bring about? In order to understand and to verbalize the relational functions

between man and environment in a spatial dimension I turn to the interpreters of materiality, widening the perspective to discover connections, impacts and consequences of human agency in the physical environment (Damsholt & Simonsen 2009, 22ff; Law & Hassard 1999, 3-4), especially to researchers focusing presence and sensitive experience of the physical phenomena (Mordhorst 2009, 121ff; Gumbrecht 2004, 21-49). Studying materiality it is essential to encompass the chains of relations around people when sequences of agency comprehend technology and environment – and coffee – causing consequences.

When people come together customs of food and drink are signs of belonging to the group. The Scandinavian vodka or schnapps used to be regarded specifically Swedish but coffee is more widespread and the quantities larger. From the 1920s onwards more coffee was consumed in Sweden than in any other European country (Valeri 1991). But in the 21st century the Finnish people have more coffee per person. The Norwegians and the Danish have a lot of coffee too (Dunér 2012, 13-14; Kaffefakta; Livsmedelsföretagen). The Swedes will have three or four cups of coffee a day, i.e. around 153 litres in a year or 9.19 kilograms. The word coffee is Turkish 'kahveh' and Arabian 'qahwah', meaning wine or something stimulating. Lovingly and commonly, the syllables are rearranged from 'kaffe' into 'fika' that is both a noun and a verb. It is one of the first words we teach our guests from abroad. In writing it is known since 1913 (Zakrisson u.å; Dahlström 2011).

Coffee is for recovery breaks. A corresponding habit might be 'a nice cup of tea'. Swedish men have more coffee than women, at least once a day. The elderly have more coffee than young people. 42 % of us born in the 1940s have coffee twice a day – only 30 % of the younger people do so. The shared coffee break is most common at the workplaces in the North, twice a day. In Stockholm only 17 % share the coffee break and just once a day. It is common routine that you share the coffee break once in the morning and once in the afternoon (Zakrisson u.å; Dahlström 2011). The break is intended to create community, wipe out the hierarchy of the premises, among the categories of staff. Meetings are supposed to be smoothed by the coffee. This is the way Mikael Blomqvist and Lisbeth Salander use the coffee – not to mention the times when they need it to restore themselves. The meetings of the editorial staff cannot take place without the coffee. At home we do the way we do at work. Coming home it is nice to get something, preferably a cup of coffee. If the neighbour calls you are supposed to offer a cup of coffee. The offer must be made, but among equals it is all right to say: No, thanks. Coffee is one of the good things of this world – on a practical level but subjected to the system of good and evil.

Coffee worked as fuel to work for the writer Larsson as well as for his characters. Traditionally the Swedes use the coffee breaks to create community at the workplace while enjoying the recovery and the stimuli. It worked just as well in the woods, at the office and at the factory. The coffee used to be made by the person with the least pay, usually a woman. Lisbeth Salander would never make the coffee for the staff. With the feminist wave in the 1980s the making of the coffee became organized in taking turns at the workplaces. Even the chiefs took part so promoting levelled democracy. The coffee should be free of class divisiveness because everybody wants it.

COFFEE FOR THE SWEDES, FOR THE WRITER AND FOR HIS CHARACTERS

“They stopped to have a *caffè latte* in Old Crompton Street.” (I, 470)

“He was the only customer in the café and Susanne treated him to the coffee when he ordered a sandwich and bought a loaf of bread and a bun.” (I, 143)

“...she stepped into the cafeteria to be warm and have coffee.” (I, 109)

“...he got up to fetch the coffee pot and brought it to the conference table which was already set.” (III, 423)

Coffee with cookies is offered at all social levels due to economy. There used to be small dainty cups but today they are rare. Mugs entered the cupboards in the 1960s. In the 1980s the jugs grew large for *caffè latte*. Stieg Larsson had little time for the barista coffee before his death in 2004. He does not serve that kind of coffee until the last book of the trilogy. Himself he preferred the northern boiled coffee (Gabrielsson 2010).

Caffè latte is served to Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander for the first time in London in Old Compton Street. In the second novel Lisbeth Salander takes a *caffè latte* in Grenada. The first time that Lisbeth Salander offers an espresso to her employer it is a peace feeler. The next peace feeler comes when she turns the motorbike back to the hut in the north. She tests the coffee pot that is empty and cold. She realizes that she has to find Mikael Blomkvist – eventually to save his life in the cellar of the evil monster.

The coffee of the trilogy seems to be the brewed coffee that is common in the country since the 1950s. Larsson knows how the Swedes like their coffee and enjoyed his own. Readers of *The New York Times* of Scandinavian extraction affirm that Larsson describes a perfectly normal behaviour in Norway and Sweden. It is a ‘must’ that the coffee is always there and must be offered, not the author’s tic (Dixler 2010). Kamp answers that Larsson’s partner testifies that their amount of coffee by far used to exceed the Swedish habits.

So the coffee standard is easy to recognize for the Scandinavians. Coffee brings people together, bridges the social gaps. It becomes a marker of the classless society. As a social phenomenon it runs over all brims of class as if the distinctions were no longer there. It is an illusion of course, as the divisiveness of class affiliation is preserved but subtly marked. The Equality of the Welfare State stays on the surface of the Home of the People. The Swedish society is overtly egalitarian (Niemi 2013). The distinctions may be sharp in everything around the coffee – but for the very drink. Tables, cups, places and what is served with the coffee can be socially coded. Other drinks, dishes and food customs differ with certain social places of the trilogy, when Larsson characterizes his characters and their surroundings – in accordance to the capital of economy and culture of the model of Pierre Bourdieu (1993).

FREE CHARACTERS – RELEASED FROM THE CODE OF CLASS?

“... black coffee in a strange old-fashioned flowery cup of porcelain. ‘It used to be my grandmother’s coffee set’ Mia Bergman said /.../ I was raised by my grandmother for many years and this set is what is left from her – on the whole’ “ (II, 99)

“He stopped at a gate where a gang of sheep farmers were gathered around the bonnet of a jeep to have coffee.” (I, 473)

“Susanne had specialized in church visitors and coffee for burials and other events.” (I, 149)

From her unprotected childhood one could assume that Lisbeth Salander might be a child of the working class. More likely, Larsson coded her supernaturally without class, unprotected, defenceless like Pippi Longstocking, not been to school – education would be middleclass – but so talented that she became a hacker of the world. In Sweden hackers are regarded a middleclass phenomenon, not emanating of the working class. Salander without class code and economically independent is probably quite consciously the means by Larsson to let her emerge like Pippi Longstocking. Several of his characters can be regarded as middleclass. The ones we are supposed to like bear the left wing traits, having visions of freedom, equality, also gender equality. They will all have coffee.

THE MORALE OF THE FAIRY TALE: GOOD AND EVIL – AND COFFEE?

“ ‘Would you like a coffee’, she had asked. She had closed the door and handed him a mug from the espresso-machine of the lunch room.” (I, 47)

“When Michael helped her [the sister Annika] to lay the table for coffee...” (I, 79)

“After the meeting Michael went for a coffee with Christer Malm at the Java at the top of the Hornsgatan.” (I, 518)

The evil characters of the trilogy are ugly customers. When they get what they deserve, the reader can relax. The good ones made it again. Tim Parks is right that Stieg Larsson is a moralist. The heroes are supposed to manage and to live in every fairy tale. The boy and the girl shall succeed. In the trilogy Michael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander may alternate as the smart hero and the magic helper with supernatural means. The hacker talents of Salander reach the supernatural heights as does her bodily strength and boxing technique. Larsson does not seem to worry how this creature breaks the laws for protecting the integrity of others. Wouldn't it be petty to object when she has the chance to save the hero and herself?

If Michael Blomkvist is the hero of the first novel, i.e. the smart boy who finds and unveils the monster Martin Vanger, then Lisbeth Salander takes over this part when she saves the life of the smart boy and pursues the monster to his death. In the following she is the heroine as the girl fighting everybody who once suppressed her – by the way saving the life and career of Blomkvist. She gets unlimited resource of money by the adventure of the first novel, stolen ones, and he gets enough work to manage. To Larsson, it is not the money that is the root of the evil, rather the agency that leads to violence, sexual violence, which leads to control of power. The fight against the Evil is taken further. In the following Salander becomes a competent princess to be rescued by the help of Blomkvist.

Stieg Larsson anchored his unlikely characters and storylines in reliable environments by class exceeding coffee, food that distinguished the cohorts – like exercises of culture, exercises of equality. The good guys get the good food as reward from the writer. The good guys can enjoy their coffee even under stress. They need the coffee to get results. We are

seldom told of the food for the bad guys – beside the coffee and some scanty sandwich. It is the good guys we are allowed to follow while thinking alone or talking together. The man who is to kill the super villain, the father of Lisbeth Salander, he has just a sip of coffee and a piece of hard bread. Towards the end the information is given, a stomach cancer is the reason for his suicide mission. The morale is maintained.

It is true that Larsson attributes addresses, design furniture, fine dishes and wine as classifying means but it is not so simple as the good guys are the wealthy ones. But the reader can be sure that the good guys will have pro-leftist sympathies, like Erika Berger, at least liberal like Henrik Vanger. In the eyes of Larsson, the wealthy people are ranked by good and evil, not by their property and food. He wants them to be egalitarian. With the victims of trafficking it is every difference, victims of any sexual abuse, for instance the mother of Lisbeth Salander. There are no limits for Larsson's commitment and compassion with their misery, no limits for his violence against the evil guys. They may have it coming to them. He is moralistic, perhaps naïve. My attitude against any violence maybe just as naïve.

As the goal of Larsson is to defy any sexual violence against women, they are at the bottom of his system, the victims of society. Food and drink to them would not have a function in his novels. The one exception would be the Christmas gift from Lisbeth Salander to her mother, coffee, an English Christmas cake and perfume, exposing how injured she is. Larsson wants to over-step the lines of gender stereotypes among the male and female characters but he does not make use of food, drink and coffee to mark equality.

In Sweden, there were three-hundred years of different ways for men and women to have coffee but very little is left in the modern society today – nothing at all in the trilogy. The characters will have their coffee the same way, be they men or women. The coffee is no longer a gender mark. The closest we get to a gender mark is a coffee set that once belonged to a grandmother, the reason being that Michael Blomkvist could not care less about these female cups. Rather, the function of the set is to demonstrate class reliability. Inherited by a young woman from her grandmother the set is to tell about innocence, purity, honesty.

Coffee as a class mark does not work because everybody has coffee. Various ways to make it may signal the social groups. Caffe latte and espresso sometimes mark smartness, modernity and elegance. Boiled coffee is not elegant but means honesty from the northern childhood of Stieg Larsson. It means reliability, even goodness, when poured in a vacuum jug by the housekeeper of the industrial magnate Vanger. Quite often Stieg Larsson pays homage to his favourite cafés, the Java at Hornsgatan and Café Wästerlund by the old bridge at Sandö in northern county Ångermanland. This café has its place in the Swedish history of democracy for a drama in 1931 when the military fired at a worker's demonstration. Larsson loyally places the products of the establishments he likes.

Stieg Larsson points out the characters of the good side of his system. The names of the establishments paint the local colour to readers, twinkling to those who know the streets. Nowadays the tourists come to breathe the air of the trilogy. Still, the coffee draws so much attention that the readers keep wondering about it. The coffee is certainly on the good side of life but not on the level of morale that Tim Parks means (2010). Or is it? Unconsciously? Larsson did not think that society was without class divisiveness but equality was the ideal of his morale. The Swedish readers do believe that men and women have their coffee the same way in the trilogy – on equal basis. So we might just as well believe in the coffee without class divisiveness? To be sure, this is an illusion but the illusion is there to signal equality

belonging to the good side. Subsequently, the coffee has a function in the morale system. Deliberately, Stieg Larsson is likely to use the coffee in yet another way, we may assume.

COFFEE AS A RITUAL? – TICS? DELIBERATELY?

“She showed where the coffee machine was in the luncheon room” (I, 300)

“At two o’clock on Tuesday morning Mikael made coffee and sandwiches enjoying them in the kitchen sofa.” (I, 304)

“He disappeared into the kitchen and immediately found her coffee brewer. ‘Where do you keep the coffee’, he yelled.” (I, 324)

“After a while she went into the kitchen, made coffee and sat in the dark on the kitchen sofa, smoking several cigarettes, intensely brooding.” (I, 503)

For Stieg Larsson the cafés were important meeting places where he could grab some food and grasp the important information. In the cafés Mikael Blomkvist is notified the peripetis of his life and story line, the prison sentence and the murder of Lisbeth Salander. The life and diet of the writer Stieg Larsson was not healthy with coffee, food and lethal smoking but the pathological definition of his coffee custom by columnist Kamp is a bit too thick for the Swedish readers. To us, it is easy to accept coffee as part of the ritual for breakfast, lunch, afternoon coffee and coffee after dinner. A lot of coffee in between is due to the need of a break, warmth, stimulus, when we need a fresh turning of the brainwork. This behaviour is so common that the Swedes will see the ritual but not the threat against health. The ritual kick off works with brainworkers like Mikael Blomkvist, Stieg Larsson – and me.

So how conscious was Stieg Larsson of all this coffee? To me, it seems a natural way for him to bring his character a step further while he himself is conducting the story line yet another step. On the other hand, the writer must have rattled the keyboard by his fingers so many times that he would have noticed. His signs of coffee flow relentlessly. The Swedish readers do not notice until they start counting. Also Kamp sees the relentless flow, counts and finds that the coffee appears on nearly every page (2010). I suggest that Larsson deliberately made the coffee his means of style art.

The Larsson coffee signs remind me of oral epic singers’ stores of fixed phrases and end-rhymes of one-, two-, or three syllables and other means of style to enhance memory and performance. When singers like Homer – and his followers of oral epics into the 1950s – want to perform a chain of events they need a memory store of phrases where to rest, to breathe, to check the character of the sequence and to announce a new link of the chain of action. So did Homer when he sang of Ulysses’ voyage. New features may be initiated “But when the morning breaks/Eos’ rosy fingers...” / ”*Men när morgonen gryr, den rosenfingrade Eos...*”. Stieg Larsson may have felt like this when bringing the story line forwards, letting Lisbeth Salander set to work, letting Mikael Blomkvist do some serious thinking. They would need coffee and so did Larsson – bodily and for the narrative style.

This ‘*tic*’ – coffee like a charm – works as a resting position for the writer to manage the process to create new sequences of action. Also the reader notices and prepares to be thrilled. There is no coffee while the action takes place. We will get it when the next phase is coming. Eventually, we do not care whether Larsson was aware of the meaning of the coffee. It is

there and the characters will have it the way it comes natural to them. Larsson will give them the sort of coffee that is evident in their way of life.

Stieg Larsson firmly establishes his unlikely characters and plots in probable surroundings by means of coffee without a mark of class – like exercises of culture, actually exercises of equality. The system that Parks is pointing to, good and evil, sex and violence, agency and resistance, it is there but it does not control food and drink, certainly not the coffee consumption. The good guys and the bad guys will have their coffee the same way. Coffee works smoothly, the way the Swedes pretend to even out the class divisiveness of affiliation – and that is the point by handling coffee and class together: coffee for everyone, good or evil. The coffee is everywhere so it has no impact on the system.

The connection between the classless coffee and equality is only indirect, never-the-less the mere thought of materiality points to something essential. Coffee does something to us. It gives us a daily break, working smoothly in bodily presence for community of the work place where people meet to share the sensation of a hot drink with certain aroma at the same time, day after day. The presence is there (Gumbrecht 2004:21-49). The ritual habit works to bridge, to reconcile differences, when the warm liquid fills the body with aroma, when simultaneously the mind is filled with community around the table. On an overarching level, the coffee does something to us, a levelling that we are trained to. The habit still works when we are alone and it simplifies the exchange in a group. We can look away from differences, pretend equality – and it works.

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