



Jakob Norberg

No coffee

What is it about coffee — and coffeehouses — that makes it so agreeable to the bourgeoisie? asks Jakob Norberg in a brief social history of the dark, rich brew. For Jürgen Habermas, the coffeehouse is a place where bourgeois individuals can enter into relationships with one another without the restrictions of family, civil society, or the state. It is the site of a sort of universal community, integrated neither by power nor economic interests, but by common sense. For Carl Schmitt, coffee is a symbol of *Gemütlichkeit*, or the bourgeois desire to enjoy undisturbed security. And for Alexander Kluge, drinking coffee provides the opportunity for people to talk to each other beyond the constraints of purpose-governed exchanges, to enter into "human relationships".

Jürgen Habermas's study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, published in 1962, sought to remind contemporary society of its own inheritance, namely the vision of citizens participating in a critical discourse devoted to the scrutiny of state policies.¹ By recovering a history of democratization, Habermas confronted the modern European nation-state in general and the Federal Republic of Germany in particular with an idealized depiction of the lively political culture of the Enlightenment. In addition, the study contained some material on coffee.

In his survey of how the bourgeoisie gradually constitutes itself as a public interlocutor in matters of governance, Habermas relates how this class emerges as a collectivity claiming the right to subject political decisions to a standard of argumentative reason. The exemplary case of a successful transition from autocracy to public discussion is, for Habermas, modern England. And the primary locus of English bourgeois discourse is a new social venue, the coffeehouse.² The coffeehouse provides Habermas with the most satisfying historical instantiation of the speech conditions that he deems foundational for rational political self-determination: non-hierarchical deliberation rooted in shared capacities for reasoning, detached from the economic field of transactions and freed from the constraints of religious dogma.

But why does the coffeehouse play such an important role in the formation of the public sphere?³ And why coffee and not the equally exotic tea or chocolate, two other consumer goods introduced by the middle of the seventeenth century, whose careers are intertwined with England's rise as a global trading power? What specifically about coffee gives it the power to make the bourgeoisie a more politically vocal class? Caffeine is, after all, a "psychoactive addictive substance" with "antihypnotic and antifatigue properties."⁴ Does the ingestion of this drug wake a dormant class, long unaware of its political potential, from drowsiness? Is the conspicuous consumption of an oriental drink indicative of a systematic legitimation of the previously scorned pursuit of luxury, all according to new principles of political economy?⁵ Is the sudden restlessness of the bourgeoisie, its increasingly explicit ambition to influence legislation, fuelled by a caffeine

kick?

Historians of stimulants have tried to invest coffee with characteristics that would explain its agreeability to the bourgeoisie. Coffee does not contain alcohol and can easily be promoted as its antidote, as a means to maintain energetic sobriety and keep working, a disposition in line with the ascetic ethos of the agents of early capitalism.⁶ There is no shortage of advertising material from the period to support such a view. Drawing on puritan coffee propaganda, the historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch asserts that, with coffee, rationalism entered the physiology of man.⁷ Its somatic effects associate it with the exhortation to constant alertness and activity.

However, to Habermas, the chemical constituents and invigorating effect of coffee do not play any overt role in the constitution of the public sphere. As a thinker with Marxist allegiances, he avoids the fetishism that seems to inhere in the genre of commodity histories, in which objects of consumption take on unexpected powers and become protagonists in adventurous narratives.⁸ Yet no Marxist would believe that social relations can be neatly disentangled from commodity capitalism. According to Habermas, bourgeois individuals are able to enter into novel kinds of relationships with one another in the coffeehouse because the links between family, civil society, and the state are restructured under capitalist conditions.

The capitalist reorganization of the societal whole enables more fluid relations between individuals, whose social and economic ties predominantly assume contractual forms. The market economy allows agents of commerce to operate independently of societal bonds of lordship and servitude, but the household also ceases to be a site of manufacture and trade. As a consequence, the intimate familial circle of parents and children seems to be composed of autonomous individuals united not by production, but by mutual love and sympathy. Within the released sphere of intimacy, the bourgeoisie also discovers and explores a new mode of subjectivity, and the members of the family become readers and writers of emotionally saturated letters and diaries. On the basis of this new repertoire of experiences, they begin to conceive of themselves as human beings with an existence beyond prescribed official roles.

This private realm of human intimacy does not remain sealed off from other societal areas. Rather the individuals discourse with one another in new settings, such as the coffeehouse. When they do so, however, they retain their newfound status as autonomous and equal human beings, unburdened by the intricate feudal ceremonies through which rank was once ostentatiously displayed and corroborated.⁹ When the members of the bourgeoisie meet for coffee, they convene as participants in true humanity: they claim not to represent a particular constituency or interest, but to embody a universal community. In fact, it is partly by their claim to represent humanity as such rather than a defined group within an established grid that they can arrogate to themselves jurisdiction over policy matters. Enlightened public opinion can legitimately check the exercise of political power, because in the public discourse that unfolds through the voluntary interaction among individuals unencumbered by feudal barriers, rational argument prevails over all other concerns.

In Habermas's narrative, then, the success of the English coffeehouse as the primary organ of bourgeois political influence derives from its ability to portray itself as the site of a universal community. Those who in their free time gather in coffeehouses are integrated neither by power nor by economic

interest, but by common sense. Yet this pretense is supported by restrictive admission policies: almost in passing, Habermas notes how the reputation of the coffeehouse as a space of sober rationality requires the exclusion of women. The coffeehouse remains a gendered space: humanity, it turns out, comprises coffee-drinking men.¹⁰

Habermas's description of the English coffeehouse has in many ways crossed the boundaries of the academic study and become a kind of myth, a historical model that remains curiously evocative. The notion of a vivid intellectual culture tied to a specific site that is public and yet characterized by relaxed communication resonates with us because it is still recognizable. We have coffee, we meet in cafés, we sit down for chats with friends and acquaintances; Habermas's depiction of the coffeehouse still corresponds to an everyday practice. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* suggestively melds a normative vision of a liberated discourse with a common, even trivial experience. This blend explains some of the overly optimistic enthusiasm for the café as a site where conflicts can be resolved or at least bracketed. In a recent issue of the Swedish journal *Axess*, one contributor wonders if "the cafés of Europe can cure nationalism?"¹¹ Ethnic and religious conflict, discrimination and class differences — perhaps they can be effaced, as through a miracle, once we meet over a cup of coffee.

But Habermas himself presented a rather pessimistic account of the fate of the public sphere as a series of interlocking sites of face-to-face debate after the Enlightenment period. The success of the coffeehouse as a medium for the formation of bourgeois public opinion rested on institutional premises that disappeared over time. As an intermediary space between state and market, in which autonomous individuals can enjoy their common humanity in unrestricted conversation, the public sphere vanishes with the increasing interpenetration between government authority and commercial enterprises. Capitalist firms increasingly wield considerable power, and while the state expands its responsibilities to counterbalance them and guarantee individuals a measure of security, the resulting interaction between large-scale corporations and a growing state leaves little room for an efficacious free debate.

In Germany, with its traditionally strong executive and politically weak middle class, it is even doubtful if the culture of rational deliberation outlined by Habermas ever appeared in the interstices of state structures and markets. In fact, coffee has slightly different connotations in the German context. It is often associated with particular values — or perhaps a particular atmosphere and mood¹² — encapsulated in the notion of *Gemütlichkeit*, of semi-domestic coziness and comfort. *Gemütlichkeit* is the motto of a much less assertive bourgeoisie, a class that never really conquers a public space but rather withdraws into the well-isolated drawing room, furnished with "porcelain stoves, draped portieres, Turkish carpets, and sofas and arm-chairs of plush."¹³ The German bourgeoisie barricades itself behind luxurious furniture, thereby fortifying its homes against the nuisance of the public world.¹⁴

In a note in his acrimonious postwar glossary, the legal and political theorist Carl Schmitt captures the stale atmosphere of the bourgeois interior, and points to coffee as a symbol of the desire to enjoy undisturbed security within the confines of the household:

French: *sécurité*; German (until now): *Gemütlichkeit*. That is the internalized — or interiorized — but at the same time secularized assurance of divine grace, the end of fear and

trembling at a nice cup of coffee and a pipe stuffed with spicy tobacco. It is the reappearance of well-concealed sensual enjoyment, after Luther and the Moravians raged against security as the actual form of sensuality.¹⁵

In Schmitt's view, the typical bourgeois philistine, unmistakably portrayed in his entry, is not so much ascetically opposed to pleasure as he is wary of pleasure that cannot be enjoyed securely — that is — *without worry*.¹⁶ Coffee, in combination with tobacco, stands for intoxication without risk; it is a stimulant that does not dangerously loosen the subject's self-possession. It signifies a furtive bliss distinguished from the ecstatic, which implies a movement transcending the bounded ego lodged in the safety of plush comfort.¹⁷

Yet the note contains a more far-reaching critique. Schmitt contends that the comfortable life in the bourgeois interior, despite its mundane and modest quality, seduces men into a sinful attachment to worldly enjoyment. The sinfulness resides in the pursuit of security: the will to achieve a state of complete safety in the shielded salon betrays a blasphemous belief in the possibility of a man-made utopia.

Schmitt's diary entry might come across as a peculiar expression of a severe Christian ethos, but he joins a long line of critics of the bourgeoisie, who fault it for its incapacity to appreciate a community that extends beyond the realm of the family. The bourgeois individual typically believes that his real life plays out in the private sphere, and perceives the outside world as a foreign and dangerous territory. To the extent that the bourgeoisie does act politically, however, it continues to be guided by the desire for security nurtured in the home, and its ambition is to turn the world into a calm interior. To the bourgeoisie, conflict rudely disturbs the continual traffic of discourse — it should simply not take place. At this point, the bourgeois host's call for the re-establishment of placid conversation — *Nur immer gemütlich!* or "Temper! Temper!" — sounds increasingly sinister.

Schmitt's manner of constellating the concept of security, which from the Absolutist age and onwards is a central item in the vocabulary of political philosophy, with the everyday notion of domestic tranquility, ultimately suggests a critique of a modern utopia. He maintains that in its political projects, the bourgeoisie transposes the values immanent to *Gemütlichkeit* to a political realm necessarily defined by conflict. From a theological viewpoint, this equals blasphemy, and yet he also points to the disastrous political consequences of the unacknowledged vision of a global interior. Believing that conflicts are unnecessary and immaterial, the bourgeoisie refuses to acknowledge any opponents, and the one who nonetheless puts up resistance and voices opposition to the preordained social harmony captured in the concept of *sécurité* will be swept away and deemed nothing more than an inconvenience.

Despite its peaceable disposition, then, the bourgeoisie can be a formidable opponent. In his study of the concept of the political, Schmitt warns against liberals who identify themselves as men free of all specific determinations, and who claim to act in the name of humanity. The term humanity does not designate a genuinely political subject, conscious of its polemical position in a space structured by conflicts. The one who monopolizes the status of humanity will instead disqualify his opponents as non-human, and go about their annihilation. The pursuit of security that culminates in the maintenance of

global peace, ultimately an endeavor to construct an earthly paradise of perfect *Gemütlichkeit*, thus ends up marginalizing its potential antagonists in the worst possible manner, namely by robbing them of their membership in the human community. Nothing is more dangerous than family values.

According to Habermas, the bourgeoisie consumes coffee in the transient but promising public sphere; according to Schmitt, they do so in the spurious harmony of the bourgeois interior. Both thinkers ultimately describe how those who meet over coffee tend to view themselves as human beings freed from the pressures of political discord or social constraints. One drinks coffee in a space abstracted from all contexts that predetermine relationships. For the duration of the coffee break, the conditions that normally circumscribe an existence marked by conflict and inequality are suspended, and in the resulting state one can identify a principle of a sound public sphere or an apolitical and therefore fatal utopia.

The author and filmmaker Alexander Kluge can be said to occupy a position between the two poles described above. His attitude is best articulated in the story "Lieutenant Boulanger", published in his collection *Case Histories* [*Lebensläufe*] from 1962, the same year that Habermas's dissertation on the public sphere appeared. "Lieutenant Boulanger" relates the turbulent career of an ambitious young man, Boulanger, who, after failing to obtain a medical degree, agrees to work as the assistant for a Professor Hirt at the Reich University of Strasbourg in 1942. His task is gruesome — it entails procuring the craniums of Jewish–Bolshevist commissars on the Eastern front, and Boulanger is entrusted with isolating and executing the targeted group among prisoners of war. The professor's aim is to complete his collection of type samples of the "subhuman species" embodied by Jews in the higher ranks of the Soviet army,¹⁸ and Boulanger believes that his acceptance of this special mission will advance his chances of a "transfer to research" despite his previous failure to embark on an academic career.¹⁹

The bulk of the narrative is taken up by descriptions of how Boulanger carries out his task in as clinical and systematic a fashion as he can. He conducts interviews with captured Soviet soldiers in order to select those who seem to belong to the defined group, kills them with injections, severs their heads, and sends them off to Strasbourg in specially designed tin containers. Boulanger — the baker — has in fact been employed to carry out a "butcher's duties".²⁰ In other words, the desired advancement within academia does not occur.

However, the very last segment of the text relates an encounter that takes place almost two decades later, in 1961. Boulanger is working as a packer at a mill in Cologne, where he tries to keep a low profile and avoid further legal consequences of his earlier employment. But he is not forgotten: a French journalist from the left-wing newspaper *L'Humanité* tracks him down and is able to arrange an interview. During this interview, the report of which takes up the final part of the novella, the journalist concentrates on Boulanger's method of selection during his time as Professor Hirt's assistant. How did he identify the Jewish–Bolshevik commissars, how did he proceed?

The interview that ends the novella thus reverses the distribution of roles that prevailed in the earlier parts. In 1961, Boulanger no longer conducts interrogations with potential victims, but has been dislodged from a position of power and is himself asked a series of questions about his involvement in crimes, the answers to which will reveal his participation in the National Socialist machinery. Kluge's story is made up of a series of investigative

moves, and the text is written in the stripped-down language of the criminal profile or the cross-examination, most pronounced in a brief section towards the end where every utterance is marked as "Question" or "Answer".²¹

Yet the dominant interrogation style is broken up in the brief, final paragraph, when the journalist has finished his interview and yet is not quite ready to leave Boulanger. Despite the strictly regulated interrogative form, a tentative encounter between two human beings has somehow occurred, and both the reporter and Boulanger want to keep conversing outside of the framework of the enquiry. Contrary to Boulanger himself, who struck up conversations with people whose status as human subjects had already been annulled by the very process of trying to record the positive traits of a subhuman category, the French journalist-interviewer seeks to break out of the format of the investigation to engage in another kind of dialogue. But this more supple and egalitarian mode of interaction is immediately blocked, for the two protagonists cannot drink coffee with each other:

No coffee: During the interview a human relationship had developed between B. and the representative [*Vertreter*] from *L'Humanité*. When the interview was over they would have liked to have a cup of coffee together. This turned out to be impossible. At this hour coffee was not being served in the cafeteria so as not to give the staff an excuse to leave their jobs. And in the cafeteria no one was allowed to sit down. So B. and the interviewer parted without having had a cup of coffee.²²

Previous commentators have observed that the human contact between the journalist and Boulanger cannot be developed further because of the harsh workplace regulations devised for maximum efficiency: casual meetings are organizationally prohibited for the sake of profit.²³ The company cafeteria is not exactly a coffeehouse, a place of leisure outside the bounds of hierarchy and production. Yet this interpretation hardly exhausts the critical intention of the concluding paragraph. The irony directed at contemporary industrial capitalism is complicated by the presence of another problem, namely the possibility or impossibility of a "human relationship" with Boulanger. Even if Boulanger has reformed his thinking and regrets his involvement with Professor Hirt, to what extent can one sit down with him to explore and confirm a common humanity?

Kluge does not write that the attempt to cultivate a more human contact with Boulanger is inadmissible or inadvisable, but that it is "impossible". It is impossible to bridge the distance that separates, and indeed *must* separate, the investigative journalist and the former Nazi research assistant. In this interpretation, the French reporter not only represents a left-wing ideology or an invaded country; he is also, as the German text declares, a representative [*Vertreter*] of humanity, of *L'Humanité*. Given that Boulanger participated in a research project based on the premise that there is no universal humanity but only distinct and clearly ranked racial groups, he may not even be able to recognize such an ambassador.

Kluge's final paragraph even offers the reader an impasse. If one assumes the position of a representative of humanity in relation to Boulanger, one is inevitably forced to in some way betray the substance of that which one claims to represent. On the one hand, one cannot grant Boulanger a measure of human contact without smoothing over his willing participation in horrendous crimes.

He worked within an apparatus designed to negate the existence of a single human community, and the research he helped carry out furnished pseudo-scientific proofs for extermination programmes. On the other hand, one cannot refuse him a human relationship without in some way repeating a kind of differentiation and exclusion. The situation is, as Kluge writes, "impossible".

This problematic is suggested in a paragraph about a cup of coffee. There is no space for the journalist to have coffee with Boulanger, to engage with him in the most humane of all activities, namely to cease working and chat about nothing in particular. Coffee stands as an emblem for a sociability that escapes the strictures of the interrogation, or the mould of any kind of instrumental communication. The cup of coffee metonymically signifies the opportunity for people to talk to each other beyond the constraints of purpose-governed exchanges, and relieve themselves of the specifications inherent to assigned roles. Kluge does not repudiate our need for such opportunities, but he poses the question of what problems we can resolve during a coffee break, or what divisions we can possibly overcome.²⁴ It is hard, or impossible, to drink coffee with Boulanger.

Habermas, Schmitt, Kluge: their disparate texts discuss a notion of amiable, self-regulating modes of interaction, as well as the potentially political contents and uses of this form of interaction. The social history of coffee that emerges in their statements may seem curious, but it is far from concluded. Contemporary commentators can also read the expanding coffee culture as a manifestation of value shifts in society:

In the dismantled Swedish welfare state [*folkhemsbygget*] there was the idea that the state carried a certain responsibility for the social and for what people did outside of their work. [...] Now this responsibility rests, like so much else, on the individual, and the only thing that has happened is that more coffee shops have opened.²⁵

"The only thing that has happened is that more coffee shops have opened" --- one should not underestimate the role of coffee in the bourgeois social imaginary. The specific rituals and behaviours of commensality that have emerged around coffee drinking do seem to occupy a special place in bourgeois life: coffee does not intoxicate, it is even conducive to labour, but one must still take a short break to consume it; the conversation that accompanies coffee consumption can range from the banal to the serious, but it never takes place among irreconcilable enemies and tends to present itself as an opportunity to neutralize noxious conflicts; it is pleasant to have coffee with others, and yet the act of drinking it is not an essentially collective enterprise, and hence does not violate the idea of a society of neatly separable atoms. The coffeehouse or the café is thus the site where the bourgeoisie has, throughout its history, shown that it can conceive of a kind of human interaction that, in a minimal fashion, transcends the contacts necessary for purely economic transactions. One can say that bourgeois society allows for at least one place where community appears as something other than the secondary and somewhat mysterious effect of the pursuit of individual self-interest. We can converse, for a while, over a cup of coffee.

It is unclear, however, if all the coffee shops that have appeared since the state has started to withdraw from the social existence of men in any way embody the kind of public sphere that Habermas described: a forum for discussion

available to all who want to express their views and are prepared to advance and listen to arguments without consideration of hierarchies and official positions. To drink coffee involves a lifestyle choice, and constitutes yet another example of how we build our identities through acts of sophisticated consumption:

Coffee has now joined wine, whiskey, and cigars. Clever marketing and expanding consumption have pushed the snobbery to ever–new heights. [...] It's not enough to order a simple espresso anymore. No, rather a Shade Grown Colombia Nariño Supremo Decaf."²⁶

-
- ¹ *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand, 1962.
- ² A quotation adduced by Habermas notes the spread of explicit political interest beyond this primary site, thus confirming its centrality to the process of bourgeois politicization: "Men have assumed to themselves a liberty, not only in coffeehouses, but in other places or meetings, both public and private, to censure and defame the proceedings of the State." Habermas, 73.
- ³ For a more empirically oriented study of the English coffeehouse and its significance for social networks and consumer culture during the eighteenth century, see Brian Cowan's book *The Social Life of Coffee*, New Haven: Yale UP, 2005. For an overview of the continental café and its role as a meeting place, work space, and scene for literary coteries, see the anthology *Literarische Kaffehäuser*, ed. Michael Rössner, Vienna: Böhlau, 1999.
- ⁴ Bennett Alan Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer, *The World of Caffeine: The Science and Culture of the World's Most Popular Drug*, New York: Routledge, 2001, xi and 292.
- ⁵ For a discussion of the changing perception of luxury in the bourgeois epoch, see Joseph Vogl "Luxus," *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, vol. 3, ed. Karlheinz Barck, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2001, 694–708.
- ⁶ For a discussion of coffee and the bourgeois ideals of sobriety, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Das Paradies, der Geschmack und die Vernunft: Eine Geschichte der Genußmittel*, München: Carl Hanser, 1980, 29.
- ⁷ Schivelbusch, *Das Paradies, der Geschmack und die Vernunft*, 52. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White make a similar point, arguing that coffee proved to be "a new and unexpected agency in the prolonged struggle of capitalism to discipline its work–force". *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London: Meuthen, 1986, 97.
- ⁸ Habermas discusses the fetish character of the commodity in *Theorie und Praxis: Sozialphilosophische Studien*, Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1963, 179–88 and 317. For an overview of recent commodity biographies, see Bruce Robbins's "Commodity Histories", *PMLA*, 120.2 (2005), 454–63.
- ⁹ Habermas is not the only social theorist who singles out the coffeehouse as a space where the tirelessly emerging bourgeoisie can convene. In his study of the type of the intellectual, Lewis Coser writes that the English coffeehouse allowed for "daily intercourse across the cleavages of birth and rank and station" and in this way "helped to replace a solidarity based on common styles of life or common descent by one based on like opinion". See Coser's *Men of Ideas: A Sociologist's View*, New York: Free Press, 1965, 20–21. Habermas is not the only social theorist who singles out the coffeehouse as a space where the tirelessly emerging bourgeoisie can convene. In his study of the type of the intellectual, Lewis Coser writes that the English coffeehouse allowed for "daily intercourse across the cleavages of birth and rank and station" and in this way "helped to replace a solidarity based on common styles of life or common descent by one based on like opinion". See Coser's *Men of Ideas: A*

Sociologist's View, New York: Free Press, 1965, 20–21.

- ¹⁰ For a recent discussion of the coffeehouse as a gendered space, see E. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce, and Luxury*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, esp. 13–25. See also Robert Cowan's "What was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England", *History Workshop Journal*, 51 (2001): 127–57. Both scholars track the constant effort of the coffeehouse community to ensure the masculine status of their site of congregation, for instance by denigrating the fop, a strategy that points to the anxiety about weakened gender lines.
- ¹¹ Annika Ström-Melin, "Kan Europas kaféer bota nationalismen?", *Axess*, no. 9 (2006).
- ¹² Harold Nicolson writes "The adjective *gemütlich* and the substantive *Gemütlichkeit* imply both an atmosphere and a mood. [...] It is a kindly, amicable, comfortable, somewhat lethargic mood". *Good Behavior being a Study of Certain Types of Civility*, London: Constable & Co, 1955, 204–5.
- ¹³ Nicolson, *Good Behavior*, 205.
- ¹⁴ Walter Benjamin notes, "[d]er Fortifikationscharakter bleibt wie den Möbeln so auch der Städten unter der Bourgeoisie". *Gesammelte Schriften*, V.I, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991, 284.
- ¹⁵ Carl Schmitt, *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947–1951*, ed. Eberhard Freiherr von Medem, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991, 185.
- ¹⁶ For a discussion of the etymology of the word security, see Werner Conze "Sicherheit, Schutz", *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 5, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984, 832.
- ¹⁷ "Das Interieur ist nicht nur das Universum sondern auch das Etui des Privatmanns. Wohnen heißt Spuren hinterlassen." Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, V.I, 53.
- ¹⁸ Alexander Kluge, *Case Histories*, trans. Leila Vennewitz, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988, 114.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 124–25.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 128.
- ²³ See for instance Rainer Lewandowski, *Alexander Kluge*, München: C. H. Beck, 1980, 30.
- ²⁴ Since the interview with Boulanger constitutes much of the final part of the text, the impossibility of this meeting also points to the impossibility of writing about Boulanger in a more recognizably "human" manner. The desired but blocked conversation over a cup of coffee, a conversation supposed to affirm and develop human contact, would have to exceed the framework of the cross-examination. It would in other words have to be written in a warmer and more fluid style than the preceding story, a style that would presumably surpass the unadorned language of the profile or the investigation. But, again, this is impossible. "No coffee", a phrase that suggests the promise of a more spontaneous and egalitarian relationship only to withdraw it, encodes the impossibility of narrating Boulanger's life in a "human" language. There is no place for literary warmth in his story. The journalist remains an "interviewer" to the very last line of the text.
- ²⁵ Gabriella Håkansson, "Ja, vi shopper för mycket", *Dagens Nyheter*, 19 February 2007.

²⁶ Niklas Ekdal, "Ett kungarike för en kopp", *Dagens Nyheter*, 15 November 2006.

Published 2007-08-08
Original in Swedish
Contribution by Fronesis
First published in *Fronesis* 24 (2007)
© Jakob Norberg/Fronesis
© Eurozine