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## ***Culture Unbound, Extraction from Volume 2, 2010***

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## Uses of the Past; Nordic Historical Cultures in a Comparative Perspective

By Peter Aronsson

### Norden Unbound

The representation of Nordic cultures has a historical reputation that stretches from an older bellicose layer to a modern welfare dimension. Images and narratives span the Vikings and the Thirty Years' War to a Nordic welfare state characterised by a generous public sector, gender equality, strong child protection and so on – all of which are communicated within Norden and abroad. A strong and long prevalent idea of cultural similarity based on a shared Nordic culture can be argued.

Yet, history in Norden is, like elsewhere, marked by differences in class, gender and regional affluence which are negotiated by cultural representations. This is done everywhere, but at different nodes and with different means. *Lieux de memoires* such as memorials, museums and rituals combine mental and material spaces with reference to a meaningful past (Nora & Kritzman 1996). Chronotopes, like the Viking Age, create a unity of values, space and time (Bachtin 1981). The stories and representations reaching hegemonic strength hence look very different in different countries. The Nordic states themselves have had relatively varied experiences of state-making and violence which, in spite of contemporary similarities in political culture, are accordingly reflected in different historical cultures. Perhaps there is less in common than the Scandinavian rhetoric suggests?

For over a decade studies of the uses of the past have been a prominent trait of cultural research when it comes to fields such as nationalism, monuments, museums, commemoration and popular culture. Quite surprisingly, reflections on public historical culture have not been de-nationalised by comparative approaches to the same extent as research on nationalism. The competence needed for analysing public historical culture is multidisciplinary and thus easily fragmented. There is therefore a pressing need for trans-national and trans-disciplinary action to connect research and knowledge.

Relevant research does exist and is brought together in anthologies, although these have rarely been utilised to answer cross-disciplinary and comparative questions. Investigations into monumental representations in historical culture, the *lieux de memoire*, have been ignited by Pierre Nora and others following in the lead, but rarely have Nordic experiences been related to European cases (Nora &

Kritzman 1996; Isnenghi & Agosti 1997; Csáky 2000; François & Schulze 2001; Adriansen & Schartl 2006; Frykman & Ehn 2007; Aronsson 2009).

Two exceptions to this rule are Holocaust studies and research on national museums (Karlsson & Zander 2003; Knell et al. 2010). These reveal a new drive for comparative reflection – something that this special thematic section seeks to reinforce with contributions (by research) on the uses of the past with instances of both intra-Nordic and international comparative potential. The invited themes were:

- images of Nordic history produced in Europe and overseas;
- institutionalised historical culture in museums negotiating politics and knowledge;
- public debates on uses of the past, construction of canons and curricula;
- the public role of the past in celebrations, jubilees and education; and
- the popular uses of the past in re-enactments, local societies and theme parks.

Hence the contributions were invited to test the long-standing tension between a shared Nordic culture against the existence of a strongly nationalised historical culture as well as challenges from a constructivist attack on both as part of a post-modern situation, relativising both or at least adding multi-cultural and post-colonial discourses.

The priority for institutionalised culture emerges because in those cases a more thorough negotiation has to precede the realisation and hence entail and reveal the social embeddedness of historical culture. The power of commercial popular cultural might be stronger but is less marked by the quality of negotiation across political, cultural and economic logics to reach for existential desires.

This thematic section will add to the conversation on the dynamics of historical cultures with its articles on Nordic experiences of uses of the past in a European and international context. It has never been exactly clear what to incorporate in the Nordic, Scandinavian or Baltic area. How are unity construed and difference dealt with to reconstruct and renegotiate national identity? This ambivalence has been productive and transported images and values across borders and spheres. Different images and definitions have been connected to various goals.

## **Musealised Landscapes**

*Norden* has been portrayed in narratives, images and public representations as a region and as a concept over a period of more than 200 years. Images from outside communicate with self-produced images and so-called factual history in several interconnected cultural negotiations (Grandien 1987; Stråth & Sørensen 1997; Raudvere et al. 2001; Arvidsson et al. 2004; Stadius 2005; Sørensen & Nilsson 2005.). A communal past of two belligerent conglomerate mediaeval states wrestling between a complex union and attempting hegemony through war sets the

long-term scene where ideas of the impact of the cold climate, brutal Vikings, strong women and a protestant and democratic culture set the frame. Somewhere in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries harsh competition on the battlefield was changed for the cultural negotiation of shared brotherhood, strong enough to live through a series of secessions, creating Norway, Finland and Iceland without internal war. Yet Sweden is the only state not sharing the Second World War experience of occupation, making its nationalism the least articulated.

We may ask how images of both national and regional identity have been utilised in the periphery of rapid change from very poor to affluent conditions, during a period when the region has had to adapt to challenges in a changing world, namely by deploying culture and history to negotiate and communicate new understandings of political and cultural identity. How important has the whole idea of a Nordic community been in creating relatively egalitarian and non-aggressive neighbourhoods? Are the various elements in the historical cultures drawing on the same – or on different – directions in these respects?

International perspectives in the field are still mainly caught in the circle of nationalism and heritage understood as either unique but parallel processes in each country or as parts of a universal modernisation trajectory. Several weighty readers provide perspectives on museums, nations and nationalisms (e.g. McIntyre & Wehner 2001; Preziosi & Farago 2004; Bennett 2004; Carbonell 2004). In the Nordic context, the literature is slight but growing and, with a few exceptions, operates only within national contexts (Amundsen et al. 2003; Ingemann and Hejlskov Larsen 2005; Alzén and Aronsson 2006; Eriksen & Jón Viðar 2009; Ekström 2009; Kayser Nielsen 2010). The literature on memory and nationalism is more comprehensive (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992; Nora & Kritzman 1996; Gellner 1999; Hroch 2000; Smith 2001). The discussion of the relationship between history proper and the public cultural heritage has been animated by both questions of vulgarisation and ownership (Lowenthal 1996; Barkan & Bush 2002; Hodgkin & Radstone 2006). Analyses of narration and performance range from narrative theory to visitor evaluation (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Ricoeur 2004). Lately, the contributions of popular and commercial culture have been investigated (De Groot 2009).

Whilst the national dimension has quite understandably been emphasised and analysed by researchers of national history in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the actual national cultural homogeneity and state control has been exaggerated and to a varying degree been more of a programme and utopia. The state control over public images, in part through the formation of cultural policies, heritage institutions and museums, is far from total: the narratives and functions must have a more negotiating character in praxis in order to be nationally integrative. Already in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, museums worked within a complex setting of “hybrid” forms of cultural representations: the market place, wax cabinets and funfairs, industrial exhibitions, private collections, and dedicated associations for regional culture

were clearly visible. From the citizen's perspective, as well as for museum reformers, the public landscape was fluid and hybrid – prefiguring a post-modern description. As to content, it had to negotiate difference to foster unity, where class disparity, gender inequality and foreign ambitions and claims were at play. The creation and persistence of a transnational cultural heritage provides a vital platform for integrative and sometimes expansionist endeavours to negotiate historical change: to what (changing) extent is a Nordic, European and global dimension present in historical culture?

The carriers of Norden as an idea are manifold: political rhetoric, landscape paintings, artists, authors, cultural institutions, the branding of places. To what extent are they working within the same framework or general idea of Norden, exploring different facets and reinforcing the general imaginary by adding to the concert? To what extent is Norden a “*Mädchen für alles*” allowing for the construction and exploitation of any message from Aryan dreams of burning violence as well as acting for world consciousness and peace negotiations? Together, they create a traditional “archive” of “frames” that can be activated as actual “wrappings” for narratives and cultural artefacts presented and communicated internally and externally.

As parts of cultural policy, museums have played an important role as officially sanctioned arenas for the establishment of national unity. Today, they are part of the re-negotiation of what it means to be a nation in a late-modern world of migration, internationalisation, and globalisation and, in Europe, a growing community: namely the EU. As vital elements of public historical culture, museums interact intensively with the creation of a political community. This is especially true of national museums that negotiate, sanction and perform visions of kinship, uniqueness, destiny and borders.

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century a strong discourse of post-modern developments has called for cultural policy to overcome the essentialist and naturalist national ethos of many cultural institutions. Contrary to contemporary self-understanding of a radical shift in national cultural strategies, cultural heritage and museums are still dealing with similar opportunities and dilemmas in an effort to navigate and negotiate integration within and between communities, including national entities. The differences and communities in need of being negotiated might shift slightly, but not nearly as radically as the discourse of a post-national rupture suggests.

By observing the persistence of a Nordic dimension in the construction of national ideology since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, energising this interplay is a dynamic public history which appears and reappears in various conceptions of Norden over the centuries, be it the Vikings, Goths, Norse Saga, Scandinavism or the Nordic model. This line of thought is open to alternative nationalisms *and* internationalisms; interplaying with power struggles between the Nordic countries and, later, as a force in the negotiation of other political communities such as NATO and the EU.

## Framing Norden

The political organisation of Norden has a story that is parallel to that of the European Union. The free movement of people, capital and cultural exchange developed earlier and has survived the expansion of the EU without Norway and Iceland taking part as full members. Research collaboration has a standing organisation in place but also takes on larger ad hoc commitments. The aim of one of these, the International research programme *Nordic Spaces: Formation of States, Societies and Regions, Cultural Encounters, and Idea and Identity Production in Northern Europe after 1800* is to generate new research on Northern Europe and research collaboration within the region. In that sense, it is also a child borne out of the force of the Nordic imagery that is still alive, although more energy and funds are allocated to pan-European collaboration.

Several of the nine research projects have questioned the uses of the past and are contributing to this special section. *National History – Nordic Culture: Negotiating Identity in the Museums* is co-ordinated by the author of this introduction. Stuart Burch, Magdalena Hillström, Peter Stadius and Egle Rindzeviciute are participants in the same project.

Stuart Burch is troubled by the persistence and formlessness of claims covered by Nordic, especially as used in the art scene. Using the concept of “frames” and “metaframes”, he presents a novel way to think about the capability of a concept to survive and be implemented in a very different context, without being completely devaluated. Norden has been established as a frame that makes it possible to present a unity for very different sceneries in contemporary society.

This means that the presence of Norden is not equally persistent at all times and all contexts. Magdalena Hillström argues that Norden not only presented an extra layer of cultural meaning which was interplaying with the political nationalisms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but that it was in fact the primary form of identification for the innovative institution created by Scandinavian museum founders of cultural museums in Sweden and Norway. The people and culture to be represented was the Nordic people. This view became increasingly contested with the growth of nation-state nationalism and turned into museum policy by pragmatic actors who, at the turn of the century, got the upper hand with sharper controversies leading to the dissolution of the union of Sweden and Norway.

This argument can perhaps be expanded to understand the general question of a tendency to solve intra-Nordic conflicts peacefully and the early and deep cooperation that also evolved in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The cultural museum not only reflected that mentality but actively constructed, materialised and proved its existence.

Peter Stadius and Carl Marklund also undertake an international comparison, this time on a core dimension of the Nordic welfare state, the rapid and high-profile introduction of modern aesthetics, functionalism, at an exhibition in Stockholm in 1930. Comparing it with the world’s fair in Chicago 1933-34, they

argue that even though this trend was international and driven by architects in Germany and France, there was indeed a thorough and deep implementation in the Nordic countries, utilising ideas of a historical tradition of pragmatism and functional solutions to real-life problems, while simultaneously arguing against the power of any heritage of bourgeoisie or nostalgic aesthetics. The format should be radically revamped while the essence of national culture was liberated in the modern welfare state. In Chicago the contemporary exhibition was more of a defence of a century of achievements, whereas the Swedish one was anticipating the century to come. While Stockholm might have hoped for political support for the vision of a single road to modernity, Chicago tried to defend the value of autonomous markets and technology-based science, that are best left alone to promote progress: “While the Swedish backers of modernism came up against the challenge of marrying nationalism with rationalism in order to make modern aesthetics palatable to a traditionalistic majority, the American proponents were more concerned with the task of combining industry with science in order to defend modern capitalism in the eyes of a more radicalized American working class.” The modernisation process is thus nationalised with these cultural representations, and made to fit dominating political directions for the future based on the version of the past they represent. Part of the progressive message was very explicit, the parallel racist discourses were more implicit, but helped normalise the activist version of the white male majority culture of both countries, marginalising both ethnic minorities and (perhaps the majority of) people.

The experience of peace for 200 years sets Sweden apart from most countries in the world, including its Nordic neighbours. The country does, however, share the consequences of the end of the Cold War. In *Swedish Military Bases of the Cold War: The Making of a New Cultural Heritage*, Per Strömberg maps dimensions and forces in the process of changing the valorisation of military secrets to assets in the experience economy. They show striking similarities with the parallel process of the creation of industrial heritage (being historically important but ugly, huge structures that are difficult to preserve) but are marked by their strict state provenience. A mixture of scientific arguments of representation, nostalgic desire of former employees and local entrepreneurs are more decisive than formal decisions of heritage authorities on whether or not and how the road to heritage is to be pursued.

## **Nordic Culture Unbound**

Where does Norden stop? The term is preferred here because it unambiguously comprises Iceland, Denmark (with Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Norway, Sweden and Finland (with Åland). Scandinavia is sometimes used to mean the same territories in English but can also designate the geographical Scandinavian Peninsula (Sweden and Norway) with Denmark. Historically as well as in con-



temporary politics the delimitation has opened up again. Are not the Baltic countries also part of Nordic history and culture? What about Russia? Northern Germany? The diasporas in Northern America and elsewhere?

Egle Rindzeviciute treats the representation of history in national Lithuanian museums to analyse how trans-national concepts are utilised. Creating a Lithuania nationhood itself has been dependent on tuning down or forgetting the role of German and Jewish communities. The Baltics have had a stronger appeal with ideas of heathen culture and amber as 20<sup>th</sup> century constructs. Scandinavia has transformed from a source of destruction and oppression during Soviet rule to a source of possible affinity. In Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian museums the North played an increasingly important role in the discursive and material articulations of the regional situation of Lithuanian national identity. Baltic and Northern dimensions seemed to get closer to each other at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty first centuries. The idea of Baltic Vikings is one of the most telling inventions. The options are manifold and so are the challenges.

Yet when the Baltic countries have knocked on the door to the more formal institutions of Norden during the last decade, they have not been welcomed. Such requests have upset the balance among the old countries: with Estonia being regarded as more of a regional question of interest mainly to Finland; the multitude of religions as problematic, the provocation of Russia as a possible cost etc.

Images of Norden are used to a significant extent to communicate outside the Scandinavian area, to contrast and identify communities. In *Nordic Spaces in the North and North America: Heritage Preservation in Real and Imagined Nordic Places* ethnologists, folklorists and theatre scholars collaborate to bring forward the dynamics of Nordic identities in the North American diaspora as an act of re-connecting the distance created by migration. In this volume, Lizette Gradén, who leads the project mentioned above, analyses the roles gifts can play in creating and recreating connectivity between the old world and the new. By describing the transfers and transformation of a transatlantic gift in both institutional and individual life, she sheds light on how people perform their identity as hybrid Nordic-American, *Värmland-Minnesota*, when national relationships might be more strained. The “heritage gift”, where the prime object is a bridal crown, acts both as part of a museum collection and as a central object in performances of actual and symbolic marriage. These performances not only negotiate territorial belonging, but also the past and present to secure a vision of futures, male and female imaginaries, in reviving the relationship established by a collective act of giving and receiving a gift.

In the Nordic Spaces project *Arctic Norden: Science, Diplomacy and the Formation of a Post-War European North*, Anders Houltz is examining the role of musealised memory in promoting different national ideals of what it is to be a “polar nation”. In “Captives of Narrative, Scandinavian museum exhibits and polar ambitions” the interaction between national master-narratives and the public

performance of heroes like Fridtjof Nansen and S.A. Andrée locks the musealisation process into very different trajectories. The Fram museum of Oslo is an icon in a cluster of heroic, national and male maritime museums, while the legacy of Andrée as a scientific endeavour has had trouble finding its symbolic place both because of its tragic ending and tug-of-war between several museums in the capital and the museum of his birthplace in Gränna, Sweden. They do produce narratives of the polar dimension in the Nordic countries, but are likewise formed by the national narratives that frame the institutionalisation of memory.

The Nordic framing is extended and challenged in two contributions from outside the Nordic Spaces programme. One compares the hegemonic national narrative in Norway with China and the other the universalised and yet localised hero of Raoul Wallenberg in an international historical culture. What is the legitimate role of historians, politics and popular culture in the creation of heroic icons of the past?

All nations tend to emphasise the unique qualities of their own historical trajectory. This also goes for regional ideas of identity such as the Nordic one. At a narrative level of the plot, this is of course true as much as any two individuals do not share the same life story. Yet changing the perspective to the more grammatical level of narration changes this. Marzia Varutti makes a breath-taking comparison in *Using different pasts in a similar way: Museum representations of national history in Norway and China*, suggesting for Norway that in its core plot “Museum displays of national pasts in Norway develop around a set of themes including myths of ancestry and descent; epics of resistance leading the embryonic nation through a dark era and towards a ‘Golden Age’; a core of moral and aesthetic values; notions of national modernity; and selective amnesia”. China is not all that different in spite of the comparative strategy coming close to one of selecting the “most-different” case in order to explore deep structural commonalities. A genre of national and museum narratives seems to set the story in a similar manner in very different settings: a truly global “coagulation” of museum representation is suggested by Varutti. However, the two countries are dissimilar in size and geographies not so estranged when it comes to state-making. An early autonomous culture becomes ruled from abroad and only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century set within its own political sovereignty. Within the grammar of national narrative and representation in national museums this produces a similar stress on glorious pasts, struggle and successful modernisation as parts of a coherent and comprehensive whole. This pattern might produce another national representation than a long history of being an empire or a small independent state (Aronsson 2010). Further, the comparison goes beyond the observation of Nordic similarities and distinctions and produces a perhaps provocatively more universal pattern for understanding the creation of national narratives.

A significant frame for European and Western historical culture during the last decade has been the remembrance of the Holocaust. It connects the West by way



of a mutually shared trauma, also producing a setting for distinct national variations (Young 2000; Carrier 2004; Karlsson & Zander 2006).

Tanja Schult presents an analysis of how one man has been contextualised and nationalised differently with a rising status as a hero, in *Whose Raoul Wallenberg is it? The Man and the Myth: Between Memory, History and Popularity*. The circulation of images of the Swedish hero has been intensive and it is not possible to exclude the mythical dimension in any of them. The need for a hero is too strong to be disregarded in analysing the role of a historic person. It thus becomes an example of the intrinsic relationship between myth and history, politics and knowledge – when the past does matter in contemporary society. The usual confrontation between myth and history does not hold. The two are mutually dependent and claiming science to launch one version might in fact be an abuse of the power of legitimacy.

### **Norden – The History of a Productive Myth**

The mythical North lends itself to both degrading and saluting varieties. Evolutionary narratives blend with universalist ethics, whether the North harbours the absolute evil or a Golden Age of natural order. Tacitus already contrasted civilisation with the barbaric North in an ambiguous mode: it was both inferior in civilisation but more robust in its constitution and values. Civilisation, or at least the version of a just Welfare State, is today claimed to be defined by the North while the Orient or the South is still used as mirrors.

Distinctions are one of the main tools of cultural researchers. Yet this productive perspective might overemphasise difference and change. It is possible to compare narratives in museums in Norway and China and find strong similarities. Every distinction creates new exclusions. Where in the Baltics does the North end? Which elements are to be counted as characteristics? The very idea of Norden has a strong prevalence and useful to make a defence against the unwanted, be it contemporary neighbours in the USA or Catholics in 17<sup>th</sup> century Germany. It does create a frame for collaboration and sometimes mobilisation across borders within an expanding Norden. One price to pay is the contrast with the Others outside and the other is flexibility in content. Corollaries are that the more inclusive a narrative is, the more of a metaframe, and the less mobilising it becomes. Further, the more definite, less inclusive the more directly political conclusions follows out of the narrative.

This is the same game played within more successful nationalisms, but also and more surprisingly in the construction of strong field of gender studies from the 1970s, understood as boosted by a specific Nordic culture and network, later questioned for its implicit assumptions of a we excluding other subject positions (Manns 2009). The dynamic is contradictory, but not futile. By having this level of cultural representation in the arsenal, ethnic nationalism and cultural under-

standing of community becomes somewhat more open-ended, but always creating new boundaries. The success of the concept of Norden in cultural practice and politics might be measured with the lack of military conflict where that might have been the case. Sweden did not reclaim Finland. War did not break out in 1905. The conflicts around Åland were dealt with through international reconciliation. Nordic citizens in diaspora have integrated fairly well, collaborative welfare states have evolved in the Nordic Space. I argue this is partly due to the plastic prevalence of a frame represented as Nordic Culture. However, this act has had a price. The idea of a Nordic race can be perverted into racism or a mere reluctance to allow new members into the family, which has been the case with the Baltic neighbours.

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## Norden, Reframed

By Stuart Burch

### Abstract

This paper calls for Norden to be understood as a *metaframe*. Related formulations like “Nordic art” or “Nordic welfare” function as *mesoframes*. These trigger multiple *framing devices*. A cache of related framing devices constitutes a *framing archive*. Framing devices work best when operating unobtrusively such that inclusions, exclusions and inconsistencies are condoned or naturalised. Their artifice, however, becomes apparent whenever a frame is questioned. Questioning or criticising a frame gives rise to a *framing dispute*.

The theoretical justification for these typologies is provided at the outset. This schema is then applied to a select range of empirical examples drawn largely from the *disciplinary frames* (Ernst 1996) of art history and museum studies. Despite this specificity it is envisaged that the general principles set out below can and will be used to address a variety of devices, disputes and archives in Norden and beyond.

**Keywords:** Art, Baltic, frame, framing, museum, Norden, Nordic, Scandinavia.

## Setting the Frames

The literature on framing is as vast as it is amorphous (Entman et al. 2008: 175). This is ironic given that the very purpose of a frame is to bring order and focus. A frame is a filter, seeking to include only that which is deemed to be relevant whilst excluding or marginalising all else (Bateson 1954: 187; Schön & Rein 1994: 26; Snow 2004: 384). Some of the ways in which this operates in practice are explored by Erving Goffman in his seminal book *Frame Analysis* first published in 1974. It demonstrates how frames enable individuals and groups “to locate, perceive, identify and label” aspects of the real world (Goffman 1974: 21).

Deborah Tannen’s edited volume *Framing in Discourse* (1993) charts how Goffman’s sociological study had informed two decades of research into an array of subject areas ranging from linguistics to anthropology, artificial intelligence to cognitive and social psychology, and indeed any field that seeks “to investigate the socially constructed nature of reality” (Tannen 1993: 5–6; Tannen & Wallat 1993: 60).

This is elucidated further by the associated discipline of critical discourse analysis. Here a frame is understood as “a cognitive model” (Bloor & Bloor 2007: 11). Made up of “broad, culturally shared systems of belief” such a paradigm establishes the mental connections that are needed to make sense of the world around us (Schön & Rein 1994: 32; Lakoff 2004: xv). Bateson (1954), Tannen (1993) and Schön & Rein (1994) have differing idioms for this overarching frame or “message”, but all share the prefix “*meta-*”. This, plus the existence of a cognate term such as “metaculture” (OED 2010), has prompted me to adopt the concept of a *metaframe*. There are precedents for this, as when Gold (1993: 123) uses it in relation to the “expository model” of the museum. Norden’s status as a metaframe will be addressed in detail shortly. As understood here a metaframe provides the essential context to all forms of communication and meaning-making (Snow 2004: 384). Bloor and Bloor (2007: 11) note that such a frame “operate[s] automatically” and is habitually “accepted as everyday common sense”. Its tacit acknowledgment means that this primary frame of reference is normally overlooked and rarely questioned (Schön & Rein 1994: 23).

Under the mantle of this metaframe are a series of middle or intermediate *mesoframes*. These are fundamentally discursive entities: defined concepts that carry meaning within specific disciplines. A mesoframe seeks to delineate a distinctive subset of a given specialism. A clear demonstration of this is the “Nordic” tag applied to architecture (Lund 2008), music (Yoell 1974), literature (Grønn 2005), landscape (Jones & Olwig 2008) and so forth. Functioning as both bracket and modifier these mesoframes seek to verify the claim that the associated metaframe – Norden – has a distinctive and special contribution to make.

These discursive forays are invariably accompanied by more tangible corollaries. In the case of visual art such devices commence with borders around

paintings and go on to encompass museums and organisations; exhibitions and catalogues; awards and grants etcetera (Oberhardt 2001; Carter & Geczy 2006: 164ff). Each device is delineated in some way and underpinned by the accepted truths or generally held assumptions that make up a particular metaframe. Every time a recurring device is reintroduced or a fresh one implemented, another layer is added to the *framing archive*. The mediation and consumption of this store of devices occurs at the discursive level of the mesoframe, which in turn both sustains and replenishes the overarching metaframe.

Explicit and indirect connections are fostered across this compendium of frames. This occurs through a complex chain of “generative metaphors” (Schön & Rein 1994: 26–27). New framings will draw on the meta- and mesoframes and their associated archive. Novel insights are engendered through such strategies as innovative inclusions or unconventional omissions. The resulting devices lead to inventive interpretations that their instigators hope will be praised for casting “new light” on a familiar subject – as we shall see in the case of the mesoframe that is “Nordic art”.

This, however, leads to an innate tension between continuity and change. It is when the latter takes precedence that a *framing dispute* is likely to occur. As a result the frame itself shifts into focus (Tannen 1993: 4). Such disagreements are most evident within the frame of party politics and policy controversies (Schön & Rein 1994; Klandermans 2004: 368; Snow 2004: 384–5). It is for this reason that frames play such an important role in protest movements. Campaigning groups thus do what policy makers do: frame reality to match their beliefs (Snow 2004: 384). Hence Lakoff’s (2004: xv) pithy observation: “Reframing *is* social change”.

So, despite a metaframe’s regulatory function, the meaning of objects and ideas couched within is neither inherent nor fixed. Significance is instead determined by the mode of framing. With each reframing different aspects come to the fore, altering the relationship between actors and objects (cf. Snow 2004: 384). Framing devices are thus cognitive strategies. They compete symbolically for legitimacy in relation to the archive of other framing devices – both of the past and of the present. Each new device seeks to influence the future trajectory of that archive, its mesoframe and, ultimately, its metaframe (cf. Bourdieu 1985: 728).

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This intentionally concise and consciously partial overview of a select range of texts dealing with frames and framing has enabled me to construct a typology of devices, archives and disputes encapsulated by an overarching metaframe and at least one intermediate mesoframe. In the next section I will begin to apply these to my empirical material. Prior to doing so, however, it is perhaps instructive to foreground the main tenets of my argument. It centres on the word *Norden*, the literal meaning of which is “the North”. *Norden* will be treated as a *metaframe*: an endemic condition that serves as a point of reference and recognition for multiple *mesoframes* and an extremely diverse *archive of framing devices*. These devices



are “articulation” or “focussing” mechanisms (Douglas 1984: 64; Snow 2004: 384). They operate like a frame around a painting, valorising what is enclosed within its borders and channelling a viewer’s perception accordingly. Such frames are meant to be subordinate but they play much more than simply a marginal role (cf. Penny 2005: 6). This becomes evident whenever a frame is *disputed*. It is then that the frame comes into its own, emerging like an exoskeleton to be defended or undermined.

Framing is, in short, essential to meaning-making. There is of course a neat irony that this assertion should appear in a journal entitled *Culture Unbound*. Culture is *always* bound. For, as John Cage (1939/1973: 113; Springfield 1982: 115) put it:

Structure	without life	is dead.	But Life	without
structure	is un–seen	.		

It follows therefore that Norden and the suite of devices of which it is composed is an impossibility without being placed within some sort of bounds, structure or – as it is named here – frame. Yes, Norden can, and frequently is, reframed. But it is *never* unbound.

### Applying the Frames

If one accepts the premise – Norden is a metaframe – what “broad, culturally shared systems of belief” does it connote? Well, when it comes to “northern Europe, stereotypes of untouched nature, clear light, cool oceans, melancholy and mythical figures often dominate the picture” (NIFCA 2000; cf. Palmqvist 1988: 9). For additional “mental connections” we need look no further than this special issue of *Culture Unbound*. Under the title “Uses of the Past – Nordic historical cultures in comparative perspective”, the guest editor, Peter Aronsson, chose to begin his call for papers as follows:

Nordic cultural representations have a historical reputation that stretches from an older bellicose layer to a modern welfare dimension. Images and narratives span the Vikings and the Thirty Years’ War to a Nordic welfare state characterized by a generous public sector, gender equality, strong child protection and so on – all of which are communicated within Norden and abroad.

Present-day notions of “the North” are thus built on conceptions and associations that are as longstanding as they are divergent. In a certain context and at a particular historical moment Norden connotes conflict (“an older bellicose layer”), whilst in another it equates to childcare (“a modern welfare dimension”). Paradoxically enough, these and other inconsistencies confirm rather than counter Norden’s status as a metaframe. It is so entrenched that incongruities and contradictions can be enlisted in its defence. Each and every intimation or refutation of Norden – including the very article you are reading – makes it “real”.

This Nordic-themed special issue of *Culture Unbound*, like all such framing



devices, builds on and augments the metaframe that is Norden. New formulations overlay those that have gone before in the framing archive. This explains why Stephan Tschudi-Madsen (1997: 8) chose to begin his introduction to the UNESCO book *Our Nordic Heritage* with reference to Pytheas, Pliny the Elder and Procopius and their ancient notions of “Thule”. This Greek and Latin name for what Pytheas took to be the northernmost region in the world was revived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nilsson (n.d.) charts this through the writings of Goethe and the landscape paintings of Caspar David Friedrich to its “ultimate perversion during the Nazi regime” and then, in the post-war period, an internal strengthening of a shared Nordic sensibility “with new financial, political and cultural networks.”

A pivotal player in such networks is the Nordic Council and its related institutions (Jones & Hansen 2008: 566). Formed in 1952, this body, through the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers, is responsible for co-operation between the five states and three semi-autonomous areas that make up Norden as it is most commonly understood. These are respectively Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden plus Åland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Scandinavia, meanwhile, is a more geographically circumscribed frame, referring as it does to Denmark, Norway and Sweden or, less frequently, the peninsula made up of Norway, Sweden and the north-western part of Finland (Grønn 2005: 4).

The Nordic Council facilitates the furtherance of Norden “from above” by fostering activities and sentiments that sustain it “from below”. With reference to the latter, Henrik Stenius (2003: 21) has opined that “Nordic citizens feel that they are members of an (invented) Nordic family”. Jonas Thente (2010) has recently speculated that, whilst this familial sentiment is arguably evident among older residents of the Nordic region, the same cannot be said for younger citizens of an increasingly mobile, interconnected world. It is notable, however, that Thente’s cautionary remark came as he reported on that year’s Nordic Council Literature Prize. Thente allayed his concerns about the diminution of Nordicity by looking upon this prize as a token of togetherness: Nordic affinities might well be being eroded, fretted Thente, “but at least we have the Nordic Council Literature Prize in common” (Thente 2010).

Intended to “increase interest in the literature and language of the neighbouring countries”, the Nordic Council Literature Prize dates back to 1962 when it was first presented to the Swedish author, Eyvind Johnson (1900–76). Three years later his compatriot, the composer and conductor Karl-Birger Blomdahl (1916–68) became the inaugural winner of the Nordic Council Music Prize. In 1995 these awards were complemented by the Nordic Council Nature and Environment Prize and, a decade on, the Film Prize. The Nordic Council is not the only organisation to oversee such competitions. A case in point is the Carnegie Art Award established in 1998 “to promote Nordic contemporary painting”.

Jonas Thente is surely correct to look upon these devices and their associated mesoframes – Nordic art, Nordic literature, Nordic music – as strategies for sustaining a northern kinship. The debates triggered by the conferral of each and every “Nordic” award guarantees the prolongation of Norden. Thanks to them its future is assured, even if the art, literature or music being discussed are devoid of any purported “Nordic” traits that might be associated with that metaframe.

This becomes a bone of contention, however, whenever attention shifts from the Nordic parameters of a given prize to the Nordic credentials of its contenders: an action that often leads to much soul-searching about the particular Nordic qualities of whatever cultural manifestation is being scrutinised. Thus the Carnegie Art Award of 2008 sparked off the oft-asked question: “Do we have contemporary Nordic art?” (Kristensen 2007). Ten artists featured in that year’s competition were quizzed about this. Two were categorically of the opinion that it did *not* exist. Three more were uncertain. Another felt that contemporary Nordic art probably *did* exist, but that it was of no interest. Three answered in the affirmative, although they each found it “difficult to say what it is”. The Norwegian, Tor-Magnus Lundebj, for example, was unable to decide if Norden’s aesthetic imprint stemmed from site-specificity or some sort of ill-defined Nordic temperament.

Of the ten shortlisted artists probed about their views on Nordic art, it was the Finnish painter Silja Rantanen who provided the most emphatic response: “Contemporary Nordic art is art made by Nordic artists” (cited in Kristensen 2007: 10). She went on to add that what bound these artists together was the shared experience of living in countries that are inhabited sparsely by wealthy, educated people. Yet even she discerned aspects of these “caring” societies that, in her opinion, fail to manifest themselves in the art produced there. Rantanen was also uneasy about making generalisations, cautioning that they tend to lead people to resort to “ready-made interpretative models” (i.e. *frames*) rather than “looking at individual works”. This can be construed as meaning that critics and other commentators have a tendency to seek out *a priori* qualities framed as “Nordic”. The resulting findings are then used as evidence to support the framing thesis: “Yes, we *do* have Nordic art”.

The final word on the existence or otherwise of contemporary Nordic art goes to Fie Norsker from Denmark. If forced to select just a single “common element”, Norsker mused, “it would probably be [an] interest in art outside the Nordic countries” (cited in Kristensen 2007: 10). This amounts to a negative affirmation of the Nordic frame.

Norsker is far from alone in being coy when it comes to (not) defining contemporary Nordic art. Nordic-themed exhibitions and their accompanying texts distinguish themselves by their equivocation on this very matter. More often than not they end up reaching conclusions that “point in several different directions” (Gether & Helveg 2008: 16). Other devices take this a stage further by

sustaining the Nordic metaframe through overtly questioning, fragmenting and undermining the very homogeneity that one might think was essential for it to retain any semblance of unity based on thematic or stylistic equivalence (see e.g. Grønn 2005). As intimated above, however, equivocations and flat denials, paradoxically enough, play a crucial role in populating the mesoframe of “Nordic art”, enhancing its archive of framing devices and reinforcing the commonsense notion that Norden is something palpable, if not exactly definable.

This is not to say that all attempts at definition are lacking. Take, for instance, the catalogue to the 8<sup>th</sup> International Watercolour Festival of 2007. In it, Piet van Leuven, the coordinator of the European Confederation of Watercolour Societies, set himself the task of characterising “Nordic watercolour”. His “personal opinion” was that paintings that fell into this category were marked by informality, experiment and unorthodoxy. Van Leuven (2007: 6), seemingly without a trace of irony, professed his uncertainty as to whether the latter stemmed from the fact that a formal society for Nordic watercolour had only been in existence since 1989 or if unorthodoxy was “an atavism engendered by fierce, world-exploring Scandinavian ancestors”.

Another thing that struck van Leuven (2007: 6) was the Nordic watercolourist’s predilection for the extreme use of light and dark. Was this, he speculated, a result of “climatic conditions”? Whilst this question went typically unanswered, one thing is certain: light serves as an essential point of reference for all so-called “Nordic art”, whether painted in watercolour or oil. For many art critics and art historians, light is Nordic art’s *leitmotif*. A point of origin for this was the 1982 Brooklyn Museum exhibition “Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880–1910”. In the wake of this show the Swedish art critic and curator, Sune Nordgren (1983: 43) credited its American initiator, Kirk Varnedoe, with “cast[ing] a new light over all our national painters.”

Over a quarter of a century later, light continues to shine as a trademark for the art of “the North”. Two recent examples, both from Great Britain, illustrate this and show how light is used as a metonymy for Nordic art on a variety of scales. First, “Northern Lights: Swedish Landscapes from the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm” mounted by Birmingham University’s Barber Institute in 2009. Here a single Nordic nation – Sweden – came under the spotlight (Burch 2009: 334–335). A year later the national galleries of London and Edinburgh collaborated to bring “Christen Købke: Danish Master of Light” to a British audience. In this particular instance the gilt-framed canvases of a solitary Nordic artist exuded and radiated the “clear light” of Norden. And, as was noted at the start of this section, “clear light” is seen as a hallmark of this metaframe.

“Northern Light” – this time in the singular – has also been used to market Swedish art for an Australian audience (Cross 1997). This, plus the two examples mentioned above, pay testimony to the enduring legacy of Kirk Varnedoe’s “Northern Light” exhibition of the early 1980s. This was reinforced by his

subsequent book, *Northern Light: Nordic Art at the Turn of the Century*, published in 1988. The shift from “Scandinavian” to “Nordic” in the subtitles of the exhibition and book reveals the flexibility of the terminology at play when it comes to the art of “the North”. The constituent parts are equally fluid, as is apparent from the trend for travelling, temporary displays of fine art from the Nordic region that came in the wake of the Brooklyn Museum show. Subsequent manifestations, such as the London Hayward Gallery’s “Dreams of Summer Night” (1986) and, more recently, “A Mirror of Nature: Nordic Landscape Painting, 1840–1910” (2007) can and should be seen as subtly different manifestations of the archive of framing devices that articulates and animates the mesoframe that is Nordic art.

These and other shows tour Norden’s museums and, very often, incorporate a more far-flung destination in their itinerary. Thus, during the period spanning the Spring of 2006 and January 2008, “A Mirror of Nature” moved around the national museums of fine art in Finland, Sweden and Norway. It then relocated to Minnesota in the American Midwest before coming to a close at Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen. This diversion over the North Atlantic marked an anniversary: for the same destination – the Minneapolis Institute of Art – was one of the venues for the “Northern Light” exhibition of 1982–83.

This confirms Peter Aronsson’s point about Nordic cultural representations being “communicated within Norden and abroad”. An exhibition such as “Northern Light” provides a means of marketing Norden to the world. The true promotional potential of this was realised in the “Scandinavia Show”, a two day showcase of “Scandinavian design, travel, lifestyle, fashion and food” held in central London in October 2010 (Scandinavia Show 2010). This event demonstrated how the Nordic fellowship accords the sparsely populated nations of northern Europe a platform on the global stage. Recalling Erving Goffman it is possible to consider Nordic-branded culture as a frame for locating, distinguishing, identifying and labelling Norden in the international marketplace. And – to echo John Cage – Norden’s Nordic art provides a convenient structure to make it “seen”.

Brooklyn Museum’s “Northern Light” exhibition is a particular effective illustration of this because its display of nineteenth and early twentieth century painting was part of a wider initiative entitled “Northern Visions”. This featured solo exhibitions of contemporary art by Asger Jorn and Öyvind Fahlström as well as *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now: Scandinavia Today*, a group show first presented at the Guggenheim in New York before travelling to Philadelphia and Los Angeles. The fact that these coincided with Brooklyn Museum’s “Northern Light” cultivated a link between the art of the past and the art of the present. They were thus vehicles for the continuance of a tradition and strategies for consolidating its archival inheritance.

A central component of that archive is a careful selection of artworks painted around the turn of the twentieth century, a period when the art of “the North” was first codified (Burch 2009: 336). The supreme example of this is Richard Bergh’s painting *Nordic Summer Evening* (1899–1900, oil on canvas, 170 x 223.5, Göteborgs Konstmuseum). This rendering of “light and landscape... [and] psychological tension” (Varnedoe 1982: 83) is iconic precisely because it distills the Nordic metaframe. And it continues to act a catalyst for Nordicity. One of its many reframings includes being reproduced in the catalogue to the 2006 exhibition “Bent: Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Scandinavian Art” where it appears alongside Annica Karlsson Rixon’s photographic series *Nordic Light* (1997–98) (Chadwick 2006: 12). This juxtaposition visualises the metaframe of Norden and the mesoframe of Nordic art: frames that habitually evoke expansive landscapes, light summers and dark winters, nature – and introspection. In *Bent*, the latter quality is highlighted and used to connect with Eija-Liisa Ahtila, a contemporary Finnish video artist whose work apparently “shares an introspective tradition among earlier Nordic artists from Edvard Munch and August Strindberg to Ingmar Bergman” (Chadwick 2006: 13). These supposedly inherited qualities can and should be seen as the sorts of “generative metaphors” that are instrumental to the articulation of Norden’s archive of framing devices.

The curator of “Bent” was Whitney Chadwick: a sort of Kirk Varnedoe for a new generation of consumers of Norden. However, unlike her predecessor, Chadwick was eager to point out that, in choosing her artists, she was not aiming to seek out “a shared or ‘authentic’ Nordic or Scandinavian sensibility in their work” (Chadwick 2006: 9). But this did not stop her alluding to familiar tropes voiced years earlier in Varnedoe’s “Northern Light”.

It is not unusual to come across instances where Norden is invoked – and then almost immediately disavowed. A further example is *Like Virginity, Once Lost: Five Views on Nordic Art Now* (1999). Its authors, lest we be misled by the book’s title, stress that their initiative did not seek “to define a geographical region” or even “contemporary ‘Nordic art’” (Birnbaum & Nilsson 1999: cover & 9). A similar incongruity occurred nearly two decades earlier in the form of the previously mentioned “Northern Visions” project – an archival antecedent that is actually cited at the start of *Like Virginity, Once Lost*. Its co-commissioner, the Swedish curator and museum director, Pontus Hultén was almost apologetic about the regional grouping he had helped facilitate. He urged that any Nordic similarities that might be sensed were illusionary and merely the result of looking at the countries of northern Europe from the distant vantage point of North America (Hultén 1982: 11).

Hultén’s compatriot, Sune Nordgren would make a similar remark some years later when he dismissed the so-called “Nordic fellowship” as a “fabrication” only given credence by “New World” curators such as Kirk Varnedoe. Nordgren,

writing in 1990, considered the construction “Nordic art” to be “no longer something worth pursuing”. It was, and always has been, “a case of romantic self-deception... that has never functioned... [and that] is kept alive today by means of artificial respiration” (Nordgren 1990: 7).

Sune Nordgren, it must be stressed, was the exact same person who had praised Varnedoe for reframing Nordic art back in the early 1980s. Even after voicing his trenchant criticisms, Nordgren seemed happy to continue his involvement with Nordic-themed exhibitions, penning articles perpetuating Norden’s reputation for “barbarians and vandals” (Nordgren 1993).

This schizophrenic attitude towards the “fiction” that is Norden is par for the course (Per Unckel cited in Halén & Wickman 2006: 5). No wonder then that even a journal devoted to all things Nordic is able to conclude that Norden exists whilst not existing (Frenander 2009: 4). Such bewilderment is a confusion brought about by staring fixedly at the picture whilst overlooking the frame. This is because the images on show are contingent, capricious and cloaked in obfuscatory “explanations”. Sune Nordgren was right to talk of “artificial respiration”. But he failed to grasp that these respirators are frames: the very lungs that breathe life into Norden. Without them Norden would expire. That’s why Norden appears to fight for breath every time a framing dispute threatens to constrict its airways – as we shall see in the next section.

## Disputing the Frames

During the period 2007–2009 the Nordic Council sought to use its “Art and Culture Programme” to “renew and revitalise the Nordic art and culture co-operation in the Nordic region” (Nordic Culture Point 2007). Knowing as we do that “reframing is social change” (to recall Lakoff 2004: xv), this seemingly unremarkable assertion of rejuvenation is indicative of more than a mere administrative or discursive shift.

The reframing led to the termination of NIFCA, the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art. This was the Nordic Council of Ministers’ “expert organ for visual culture” from 1997 until 2006 (Gelin 2006: 6). An indicative example of the sorts of activities supported by this organisation was Kunsthalle Wien’s *Norden: Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Nordeuropa* (Folie & Kölle 2000). NIFCA’s leadership used this ambitious survey of contemporary practice as evidence that Nordic art had “moved into focus more than ever” (NIFCA 2000). Those in power at the Nordic Council clearly had other ideas, however, when they chose to disband what had hitherto been one of its principal policy or “action” frames (cf. Schön & Rein 1994: 32).

A flavour of this framing dispute is evident from Cecilia Gelin’s (2006: 6–7) foreword to the book *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*. In it Gelin announced the imminent demise of the organisation



she had led in its final years. NIFCA's cessation was part of the above-mentioned "renewal" process that would, according to Gelin, see the closure of nine of the twenty-one Nordic Council organisations and committees concerned with cultural collaboration. Gelin was at the time unaware of what was going to replace them. She was, however, certain that the "programming" of the new structure was going to be "decided by politicians". Gelin's framing of the situation led her to interpret this as further confirmation that "institutions and spaces for thinking processes and critical discourse are gradually [being] squeezed out of societies in the Nordic countries" (Gelin 2006: 6).

Whilst Gelin might have opposed the decision to end NIFCA, she did concede that cultural collaboration in Norden was in need of overhaul (Gelin 2006: 6). NIFCA's successor as the "counterpoint" for such co-operation was *Kulturkontakt Nord*. The evidently acrimonious realignment that led to this change confirms Schön and Rein's (1994: 29) point that "[f]rames are not free-floating but are grounded in the institutions that sponsor them, and policy controversies are disputes among institutional actors who sponsor conflicting frames." With this in mind it is pertinent to examine how *Kulturkontakt Nord* characterises Norden. It is notable, for instance, that an expanded concept of Norden is promoted from the very moment that one accesses its website (*Kulturkontakt Nord* n.d.). Its homepage features a map plotting the various "Nordic Houses" and "Nordic Institutes" in Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Finland and Åland as well as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This can be interpreted as an attempt to realise some of Cecilia Gelin's aspirations voiced as the curtain fell on NIFCA. She had urged for a transnational approach, shifting the focus to "the so-called peripheries" in an effort to scrutinise "the history of colonialism in the Nordic countries" (Gelin 2006: 7).

*Kulturkontakt Nord*'s elevation of the Baltic States and the semi-autonomous components of the Nordic region is not the only instance of an expanded, "post-colonial" treatment of Norden. In the process of researching this paper another Nordic-themed house – Voksenåsen in Oslo – hosted an exhibition featuring "ten artists with an immigrant background from Norway, Sweden and Denmark" (Leadership Foundation 2010). Its title – "New Nordic Art" – is indicative of an incipient process of reframing. The same phrase features in the promotional material of *Muuto*, a business that likes to promote itself as a unique proponent of "new Nordic design" (Danish Edge 2008). The company states that its designers "are striving to expand the Scandinavian design tradition with new and original perspectives." This is confirmation that naming and framing are complementary processes (Schön & Rein 1994: 26) given that *Muuto* is derived from *muutos*, a Finnish word meaning "new perspective" (*Muuto* n.d.).

*Muuto* represents a practical example of a "generative metaphor" whereby "a familiar constellation of ideas is carried over... to a new situation" (to recall Schön & Rein 1994: 26–27). The term "Scandinavian design" was first coined in 1951

(Halén & Wickman 2006: 15) and is by now a well enough established mesoframe to tolerate novel adaptations. Its frames are tested to the limit by the emergence of the design store *Nu Nordik* in the Estonian capital, Tallinn. The firm's founder, Anu Samarüütel, chose this name based on her belief that "Estonian culture and attitude is closer to that of the Scandinavian countries than to Eastern Europe" (cited in Charles & Marie 2008). This contentious claim is part and parcel of the reorientation of the so-called Baltic States in the final years of the twentieth century. Their shift from the Soviet Union to the European Union and the impact of geopolitics on the makeup and role of "northern Europe" marks a process of reframing on a continental scale.

Belonging to a region – or being so framed – can be a positive or negative thing. Indeed, framing forms a distinct strand in international relations literature (see e.g. Mintz & Redd 2003). A good example of this is the mesoframe "Eastern Europe". Webb (2008: xi) explains that this term was used between 1945 and 1990 to describe the then Soviet bloc countries, but that it did not include the Soviet Union itself. Czepczyński (2008: 3) in his book, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities* notes that, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, many commentators from the newly independent states of Europe have expressed their dislike for the label "Eastern Europe" given its connotations with "the Soviet empire and Russia". By this logic, "Eastern Europe" means "post-Communist" – an equally contested term. Czepczyński (2008: 149) favours "Central Europe" or the "re-branding of the region" as "New Europe". But in doing so he almost entirely occludes the three Baltic States from his study. They clearly fall outside his framing of "Central Europe". But if this is so, and if Webb is correct to say that "Eastern Europe" described the Soviet bloc but "normally excluded the Soviet Union itself", where does this leave the former Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic?

Such uncertainty and the negative connotations of being categorized as "Eastern European" or "post-socialist" helps explain why Estonia's current president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves has sought to frame his re-independent nation as a *Nordic* rather than a *Baltic* country. For Ilves (1999), the Baltic States were united only in misery: if the Baltic metaframe is evocative of anything, he argues, then it is the shared memory of military occupation by hostile powers.

However, it seems that "occupation" is not always something to be lamented. In stark contrast to attitudes concerning the belligerence of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, present-day Latvia and Estonia look back on the seventeenth century as the "happy Swedish time" (Burch & Smith 2007: 920; Burch & Zander 2008). Such munificence towards Sweden's long-gone imperial heyday explains – in part at least – the re-branding exercises that occurred in the run-up to two events in Estonia's recent history: the first relating to the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest held in Tallinn; the second concerning Estonia's accession to the European Union two years later. Under the mantra "positively transforming",



Estonia sought to divest itself of its Soviet heritage by completing a “return to Europe”. A means to this end was the decision to market Estonia as “a Nordic country with a twist”. This, it has been argued, represented an attempt, not only to embed Estonia in Norden and free it from its Soviet past, but also to differentiate it from present-day Russia to the east *and* its Baltic neighbours to the south (Jarvis & Kallas 2006: 161). So, whilst differentiation is essential to destination branding, identification with others – i.e. Norden – is equally important.

Of course, Estonia could hardly pretend to be exactly the same as the entrenched members of Norden. Instead, access was sought through humour and the gentle disparagement of its privileged neighbours to the north. One advertisement (i.e. framing device) drew on Norden’s metaframe of accepted images and ideas in order to subvert them:

You like a stormy view, rough coastline, snowy forests, minimalist churches, clean streets, well-groomed gardens, intriguing stone architecture or modern glass edifices, and many blondes – but you know that Scandinavians may be so boring and sterile. Come and see the effect of a dose of extravagance, irony and experimenting in Estonia. (cited in Priks 2008)

Here we have an alternative and less immediately favourable inflection of Norden: not so much a case of Scandinavia than Blandinavia (cf. Foreman 2005). Estonia has sought to position itself as a potential antidote to this by arguing that the staid Nordic brand would be refreshed and reinvigorated by its inclusion. With this in mind, Estonia could be seen as a foil to Norden; a sort of “borderzone” or “bufferstate” perched on its edge – its *frame* (cf. Hjort 1991: 37).

Whether Estonia remains a peripheral Nordic “outpost” or becomes conceptually manoeuvred to Norden’s core will say a great deal about future framings of Europe (cf. Pousette 1993: 5). What *is* clear is that the Norden of tomorrow will differ in all sorts of major and minor ways from the Norden of the past and, indeed, the present. By excavating the layers in the framing archive and honing in on disputes and reframings it becomes possible to chart the mutations of this metaframe. In so doing we will be able to detect aspects that differ from today’s commonsense associations. After all, “whatever happened to sex in Scandinavia” (OCA 2008)? Will it always be possible to speak of a distinct “Nordic model” when it comes to the welfare state? And how will Norden’s reputation for democracy and equality fare given that, as I write these words, the world’s media is training its lens on the electoral successes of the far-right in Sweden? The last of these speculations reminds us that we should be mindful of our frames, otherwise we may well find that groups less palatable than our own will do the reframings for us.

## Reframing the Frames

This paper has made the case for the framing of Norden. The schema presented here incorporates a diversity of tangible and discursive frames under one

overarching metaframe. Evidence for this has come in the form of multiple framing devices, a small sample of which has been addressed above. However, whilst this archive of devices helps substantiate the claims made about Norden, it needs to be stressed that this metaframe fits within an even more pervasive “system of belief”: the metaframe of nationalism. It is this that is the true “endemic condition” in northern Europe as everywhere else (Billig 1995: 6). Even the most ardent expression of Norden is framed in national terms. The inaugural Nordic Art Triennial held in the Swedish city of Eskilstuna in 2010 was organised, implemented and presented along national lines (Pantzare 2010). This was equally the case in 1982 when the Guggenheim structured its “Sleeping Beauty” exhibition around an equitable selection of two artists from each of the five nations of Norden (Hultén 1982: 14).

Analyses of Nordic sentiment and understanding confirm it to be subservient to that even more powerful framing construct: the nation (Frenander 2009: 4). Indeed, one of Norden’s strengths is its subservient status. It does not impinge in any serious way on the metaframe of nationalism. Estonia’s Nordic ambitions are undertaken to strengthen not diminish its national identity. Kirk Varnedoe might have “cast a new light” over Norden’s “national painters” with his “Northern Light” exhibition. But these artists remain national first, Nordic second. The exact same artworks enlisted to Norden’s cause slip seamlessly back to where they “belong”: the national canons and national museums of Norden’s constituent states and autonomous regions.

Put harshly, Norden is an add-on; a pleasant diversion; a convenient tool for marketing and a means for the affluent nations of northern Europe to have a profile that belies their international importance. But this is not to belittle the significance of Norden as a subject for study. Indeed, the fact that Norden can accommodate so many inherent contradictions makes it a fascinating topic for analysis. Any such investigation will surely conclude that Norden is a very flexible phenomenon. Funders and policy makers ought to recognise this so as to avoid repeating humdrum framings. That Norden can tolerate all manner of divergence should give scope for inventive reframings by curators, scholars and sponsors alike. The Nordic Council has opened the way for a more expansive definition of Norden – and with it the frames will follow. If this leads to frame disputes then that is all well and good, for they will help expose Norden’s fault-lines and delimitations.

Yet for these flaws to be properly appreciated we must sharpen our framing faculties. This will dispel many misconceptions held even by those driving the framing devices. It is, for example, troubling that the instigators of the first Nordic Art Triennial could claim to have approached Norden “as a nought, as an unwritten sheet” (Pantzare 2010: 10). Equally problematic is the fact that the authors of *Like Virginity, Once Lost: Five Views on Nordic Art Now* could countenance their vision of Norden as “a fantasy that lives only within these

pages” (Birnbaum & Nilsson 1999: 9). These assertions are indicative of serious and fundamental misunderstandings. The exhibition and the book are only explicable because of a vast and multifaceted pre-existing metaframe constituted of an ever-expanding archive of devices and disputes.

To really grasp the framing features of Norden one would do well to consult the writings of Gregory Bateson, an early exponent of frame analysis and author of “Theory of Play and Fantasy” first published in 1954. This makes plain that, in order to assess the “semantic validity” of the sort of “fantasy” put forward by Birnbaum and Nilsson, we must “examine the nature of the frame in which these interpretations are offered” (Bateson 1954/1972: 184). This is precisely what I have endeavoured to do in this playful paper.

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## **Contested Boundaries: Nation, People and Cultural History Museums in Sweden and Norway 1862–1909**

By Magdalena Hillström

### **Abstract**

It has become commonplace to assert that museums embody, perform and negotiate national identities. Many researches in museum history have stressed a close relationship between nation building and the origin and formation of the modern public museum. Museums, it is argued, contributes to the construction and representation of the ethnical and historical distinctiveness of the nation's self. This article explores the ambiguities of the concept when applied to the establishment of cultural history museums in Sweden and Norway during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It shows that the relation between nation building and early museum building in the Scandinavian context was more intricate than earlier has been assumed. Museum founders like Artur Hazelius, who opened the Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection in 1873 (renamed Nordiska museet 1880), was deeply influenced by Scandinavianism, a strong cultural and political force during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Union politics played an important role for museum politics, as did the transitions of the concepts of "ethnography" and "nation". At the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the original concept of "nation" meaning people and culture gradually was subordinated to the concept of "nation" as state and political territory. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century museum ideology cultural history museums were strongly connected with "nations" in the modern sense. Consequently, efforts to "nationalise" the folk-culture museum were made both in Norway and Sweden. A contributory force was, naturally, the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905.

**Keywords:** History-19th century, Museumhistory- 19th century, Nationalism, Scandinavianism, Nordiska museet, The University Museum of Ethnography in Oslo, Norsk Folkemuseum.

## **Nordiska Museet: A Museum of and for the Swedish Nation?**

It has become commonplace to assert that museums embody and negotiate national identities. Many researches in museum history have stressed the close relationship between nation-building and the origin and formation of the modern public museum. Museums, it is argued, contribute to the construction and representation of the ethnic and historical distinctiveness of a nation's self (Bennett 1995; Duncan, 1995; Boswell & Evans 1999; McClellan 1999; Knell et al. 2010). In Sweden, this dominant academic perspective has played an important role in the description and analysis of how the Nordiska museet in Stockholm was established. The museum was opened to the public in 1873 and moved to its current premises at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many scholars have suggested that Nordiska museet should be analysed within the perspective of nationalism and the construction of national identity. The inclusion of folk culture as part of the national heritage to be displayed in the museum has helped to establish, demarcate, propagate and visualise the national identity.

In the book *Historia, museer och nationalism*, the ethnologist and museum historian Stefan Bohman (1997) focuses on the relationship between museums and national identity. He argues that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century people from aristocratic and middle-class circles promoted the idea that the people's national feelings and loyalty must be strengthened. Therefore, the people in these social groups tried to propagate an accurate meaning of Swedishness. According to Bohman, one of the most important actors was Artur Hazelius (1833–1901), the founder of Nordiska museet and the open-air museum Skansen. Bohman argues that Hazelius contributed successfully to the symbolic construction of the national past, emphasising Swedish history – the kings, the great Swedish artists and, most importantly, folk culture. The old Swedish peasantry (*allmogen*) signified a national Swedish identity worthy of imitation. The Swede should get to know himself/herself through an encounter with unspoiled and original folk culture (Bohman 1997: 21).

A related viewpoint is articulated by the historian Sverker Sörlin (1998). In the introduction to the anniversary book *Nordiska museet under 125 år*, Sörlin asserts that Artur Hazelius was involved in many projects that contributed to the establishment of a national consciousness. This process included a mapping of the nation; the nation became a concept, picture, map and a story. Through these means the nation became conceivable to people. Nordiska museet is a representative of national institutions whose establishment aimed to mobilise the masses to revive the nation. The overall purpose of Artur Hazelius' museum projects was to create a national memory and a national memorial, Sörlin adds (1998: 27).

These interpretations seem valuable enough yet, when looking more closely at the museum's collections and the collecting practices that characterised the museum's early development in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the strong alignment between nation-building and museum-building that is advocated, among others, by Boh-



man and Sörlin cannot be empirically supported. The perspective is oversimplifying the complexity of museum formation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavia. Rather than any straightforward nation-building, the setting for cultural museum-building in Scandinavia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was profoundly permeated by attracting and repelling forces of countries intricately joined together in political history. Up until 1809 Finland was part of Sweden; in 1814 Denmark and Norway parted and Norway entered into a union with Sweden. Up to the last quarter of that century Scandinavianists sought to establish a pan-Scandinavian nation-state, and celebrated the cultural unity of the Scandinavian people (Finland was often included). These political and historical circumstances formed the contexts of museum-building in the North. Also contributing to political uncertainties about the territorial definition of the nation was the contemporary re-definition of “ethnography” and changing ideas of what a cultural history museum should be and what collections they should consist of.<sup>1</sup>

## Heterogeneous Collections and Uncertain Geographical Boundaries



The Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection (Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen).  
(*Meddelanden från Nordiska museet 1898*, Stockholm 1900.)

Nordiska museet was opened under the name of the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection (Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen) in 1873. The name was changed in 1880 when the museum was turned into a private foundation. Formerly, it was owned by Artur Hazelius himself. Until 1907 the museum was located in central Stockholm and later the collections were moved to a building at

Djurgården, where they still reside. The museum was originally described in newspapers as a permanent exhibition of peasant costumes, but almost immediately after that the collections expanded in various directions. They grew ever bigger and more diverse. The breadth of the collections can be illustrated by a report in the museum's yearbook from 1898 (Hazelius 1900: 161–174). In this year, the collections were expanded, for example, by the inclusion of the following items:

#### ***The folk culture division:***

***From Swedish provinces:*** Jewellery, bridal crowns, household utensils made of wood, tin, bronze and clay, tools for handicraft, a spoon made of silver, a rich decorated sideboard possibly painted by the famous artist Per Hörberg, a sleigh from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, several complete costumes for women and man, different kinds of old furniture, a hurdy-gurdy, an iron cross, furniture hollowed out from wooden logs typical of the Finnish people from Värmland, a child's costume, two dishes from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, hand-made paintings with biblical subjects, and a clog almanac. ***From Norway:*** Richly carved sideboards and four-poster beds, household utensils made of glass, brass and bronze, silver jewellery, peculiar bottles, tapestries, and harnesses. ***From Finland:*** Two boats. ***From Estonia:*** A gift from peasants (*allmogemän*) close to Reval consisting of household utensils made of wood and a piece of jewellery made of bronze, probably from the Middle Ages.

#### ***The arts and crafts and guilds division***

***From Sweden:*** Eight old guild-plates made of silver, two guild-chests and numerous seal stamps.

***From Germany:*** Parchment records from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a guild-chest, 58 seal stamps, paintings and richly decorated banners.

#### ***The history of work division***

A printing press from 1747, several woodblocks made for textile and tapestry printing, a sewing machine from the 1860s made in Sweden, a sewing machine, some harrows, and a larger collection of pewter casting forms.

#### ***The memories of old Stockholm division***

A number of old sign boards, some lintels made of oak, glazed tiles and an iron gate, all from different houses and addresses in Stockholm.

#### ***The hunting division***

Several bear traps and wolf spears.

#### ***The military organisation division***

Two medieval weapons, two powder horns and military uniforms from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### ***The church division***

A decorated chandelier made of iron, a christening font, a pew from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a poor box.

### ***The higher classes division***

Two portraits of nobility from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and other paintings once belonging to the castle of Målsåker and donated by King Oscar II, several rich embroidered waistcoats in silk, silk embroideries, cloths with embroidery, a sewing table made of mahogany, two goblets made of glass, and two sugar bowls made of crystal.

### ***The history division***

Plaster models of statues and busts made of famous Swedish artists, a work box once belonging to Queen Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, sheets and pillow cases bearing the monogram of Queen Josefina, various possessions from the estate of Frithiof Holmgren donated by his wife (both were close friends of Artur Hazelius), a large number of tools and other equipment including a working table from the estate of the famous Swedish engraver Lea Ahlborn, and a number of remembrances of artists, including a shoe once belonging to the celebrated Swedish-Italian danseuse Marie Taglioni.

### ***The portraits and engravings division***

Numerous Nordic portraits (engravings, lithographs and photographs) and 96 silhouettes from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The above inventory is only a selection of the many items that were incorporated into the collections in 1898. It is important to observe that most of these objects were gifts. In 1898, 522 people donated a total of 3500 gifts to the museum.

The wide heterogeneity of the collections appears clearly enough from just this short glimpse at the accession list. However, the museum's many faces have been suppressed by its historians in favour of the museum being seen as a museum of folk culture with the explicit purpose of collecting and exhibiting artefacts of the Swedish pre-industrial rural culture. A strong emphasis has been given to the dioramas and panoramas that Artur Hazelius installed in the museum (e.g. Nyström 1998). This was a popular exhibition technique that grew out of the great industrial exhibitions during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The idea was to reconstruct the "natural" environment of the objects. The dioramas in the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection contained house interiors, including exterior parts, from different provinces of Sweden. In order to create as lifelike a milieu as possible, wax mannequins dressed in folk costumes populated the houses. A panorama depicted a "Laplander scene": The autumn movement of reindeers. However, most of the objects in the museum were not presented in dioramas. They were gathered in glazed cases and cupboards; they hung on walls and from ceilings, always in overcrowded rooms (Hazelius 1900: 271ff).



Artur Hazelius 1833-1901

Among Artur Hazelius' contemporaries, this heterogeneity of the collections was questioned from time to time and influential critics, including Hans Hildebrand, director of the state-owned Historical Museum, argued that Artur Hazelius collected everything that he could get, without any consideration of the scientific and artistic value of the objects. He was, in short, a doubtful omnivore. Even worse, he collected objects that were also collected by other museums in Stockholm, showing no respect for the principles of museum organisation. They asked for his plans, but received no answer. In fact, a single and well-articulated official meaning of the museum was never established. On the contrary, the floating meanings formed a substantial part of the achievements of Nordiska museet in terms of rapidly growing collections and of public endorsement. Artur Hazelius' main strategy was to allow as many actors as possible to contribute to the museum. According to Artur Hazelius' rhetoric, the museum was built by the people and in line with the people's will, opinion and taste in terms of the items collected (Hillström 2006: 205). The museum could only be clearly distinguished from the Natural History Museum and one noticed that objects from countries outside of Europe were rare.

One of the many aspects of diversity was the indecisive geographical boundaries of the collections. From the very beginning Artur Hazelius collected objects from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, Estonia, Russia and Germany (and from other areas). This circumstance contributed to uncertainties among both admirers and critics of the museum. Through which lenses should the museum be viewed: Was it a museum representing Sweden and the union neighbour Norway or a Scandinavian (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and perhaps Finnish) museum? Was it a museum of the old Swedish Empire? A museum of Northern Europe? Did Artur Hazelius collect on behalf of the Swedish/Scandinavian/Nordic people or on behalf of the Nation itself? (Hillström 2006: 219f). What kind of "nation" or "people" was assumed in the collecting and exhibiting practices?

## **Scandinavianism and Ortography**

These questions could not be answered with certainty, neither then nor now. However, a clue can be found in the biography of Artur Hazelius. He was, like many of his generation, devoted to the idea of a strong affinity and community amongst the Scandinavian people (including Finland). He was a Scandinavist, similar to many intellectuals and artists of his generation. He participated in the student meetings in Uppsala in 1856, in Copenhagen in 1862 and in Kristiania in 1869, but his commitment to Scandinavian ideas can perhaps best be illustrated by his passionate engagement in an orthographical reform (Böök 1923: 45ff).





The Scandinavian students meeting in Uppsala 1856. Unknown painter.

In 1869 a Nordic orthographic meeting was arranged in Stockholm. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibilities of harmonising the spelling of the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish languages. These efforts were based on the idea that spelling should be as phonetic as possible. Artur Hazelius played a major role at the meeting as he was responsible for reporting the suggestions and their consequences for the Swedish language. However, Johan Eric Rydqvist, a prominent member of the Swedish Academy and the leading linguist of the time, regarded the meeting as an indecent initiative and worked hard and successfully to refute Artur Hazelius, who was publicly scandalised (Böök 1923: 231ff). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the spelling reform Artur Hazelius had suggested was put into practice, but at that time he was no longer alive. Rydqvist's indignation exemplifies how Scandinavists both identified themselves and were identified as rebels to the "old generation" of academics and similar types (Nilsson 2000). In arranging the orthographic meeting any involvement by the Swedish Academy was carefully avoided. It has often been argued that, when the dreams of a united Scandinavian state finally lost all political relevance in 1871, the Scandinavian movement was transformed into a non-political but cultural movement (e.g. Hemstad 2008). Yet this distinction must be questioned as it presumes that "culture" cannot be "political". The many attacks on Artur Hazelius that originated from "the old" elite show that the Scandinavian movement was not conceived as innocent and harmless, although in terms of realist politics it might be difficult to understand what was actually on the agenda. It is also important to note that many

members of the Scandinavian student movement later constituted the new social and academic elite, as emphasised by Uffe Østergård:

The high political vision of political pan-Scandinavianism was superseded by cultural collaboration at the civil level. Interestingly, this activity was to a large extent undertaken by the self-same Scandinavianist student circles, whose members were now able to work together by virtue of the positions they held as public servants, teachers, and artists. Scientists, lawyers, engineers, educationalists, painters, and writers were all able to maintain connections at Nordic meetings and through Scandinavian journals. (Østergård 1997: 42)

Here one can add that Artur Hazelius was mobilising a well-established Scandinavian network when starting his new career as a collector and museum builder.

The fact that Hazelius named the museum the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection and later renamed it Nordiska museet has been perceived as testimony to a lifelong commitment to Scandinavianist ideals of a common Nordic history and identity. Hazelius himself never explained these names since he was generally quite reserved about his thoughts and plans.

### **The Various Meanings of “Nation”**

The theory of a strong connection between museum-formation and nation-building is based on: a) an idea of what a nation is; and b) an idea of what a museum is. The museum is identified as being dependent on nationalist ideas. “No nationalism, no modern museums”. Ernest Gellner’s well-known definition states that nationalism is primarily “a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 1983: 1). Hobsbawm stresses that the concept of “nation” was transformed towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hobsbawm 1990). Although many historians agree that the modern Western state system emerged as a result of the Thirty Years’ War, the nation-state, the modern territorial state, is generally a more recent invention – perhaps more so than we usually assume – as it did not attain mass support until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hettne et al. 1998). The mistake of Bohman and Sörlin is that they tend to equate “nation” with “state”. Despite the obvious fact of the two names of the museum: the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection and Nordiska museet, they are convinced that Nordiska museet encouraged a *Swedish* national self-consciousness and was “mapping” the territory of the Swedish nation-state. Viewed in this way, the museum appears to have been more dependent on nationalism, in Gellner’s sense, than was really the fact. The collecting and exhibiting practices were not guided by ideas of “mapping” a territory, nor did they stake out the borders of the Swedish state.

Hobsbawm observes that the concept of “nation” mostly did not have any territorial connotation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It signified variations in traditions and customs. Therefore, different “nations” could exist in the same territory (Hobsbawm 1990: 16f).

Much of that survived into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. If one seeks a definition of “nation” in the first edition of the Swedish encyclopaedia *Nordisk familjebok*, published in 1887, the following is found.

Nation [lat. natio, people from nasci, to be born] People; unit of people with common descent, physique, mentality, fatherland, language, culture, religion, legal system, customs, forms of government and historical memories. *In the Swedish language* “nation” and “people” are usually used without distinction.<sup>2</sup>

The drifting of meaning of “nation” from “people” to “state” is underlined by an article on “nation” in the authoritative *Nationalencyklopedin*. “Nation” is explained there as a concept that in the Swedish language is used synonymously with state.<sup>3</sup> The difference between the definitions of “nation” in the two encyclopaedias used here as empirical sources illustrates the historical transformations of the concept of nation, today meaning state or country.

The complex relationship between old and new linguistic usage is demonstrated in an article in *Nordisk familjebok* from 1887 that can be found under the heading of “*The principle of nationality*”. It was written by Magnus Höjer (1840–1910), a historian, geographer and liberal politician.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, one learns that the principle of nationality refers to the basic idea of modern political life emanating from the French Revolution, according to which the state should be grounded on nationality. The principle of nationality was superseding older ideas of the legitimacy of the state, and was revealing its power in political movements seeking unification in Italy and Germany. Bismarck had earned his greatness by being a servant of the idea of nationality, Höjer noted. Pan-Scandinavianism is mentioned as an example of the impact of the principle of nationality in the North.

Nonetheless, Höjer warned against far-reaching applications of the principle of nationality since that would pose a risk for “freedom” and “cultural development”. The principle of nationality was applied excessively when a powerful people sought to assimilate and politically incorporate a minor people of “equal nationality” (sic!) that had as much of the necessary physical and spiritual capacity to live an independent political life and to develop a valuable culture. The author exemplified “abuses” of the principle of nationality by pointing to the ideals of Grossdeutschland (Greater Germany) and Pan-Slavism.

## “Nation” and Collection

One of the promoters of the Nordic Orthographic Meeting in 1869 was Ludvig Kristensen Daa (1809–1877), a controversial politician, publicist and historian. Daa was an influential leader of the Scandinavian movement. He had a special interest in the history and culture of Finland, and argued that Finland should be seen as the fourth branch of the Scandinavian tree. Daa published a book about Swedish grammar in 1837 and a Swedish-Norwegian dictionary in 1839. Like Hazelius, he supported spelling reforms and museum development, although Daa



started before Hazelius as a director of the University Museum of Ethnography in Kristiania (Oslo) from 1862 until 1877. The museum was founded in 1856. When Daa became the director the museum was in a very poor condition and Daa spent a lot of time trying to introduce some orderliness into the museum's narrow rooms. He concluded that the objects should be arranged in accordance with geographical principles. The main reason for this, he emphasised, was the difficulties in separating items of different national origins from each other. Knowledge about an individual object was mostly limited to the country it had been collected from, for example India, Africa, North America or Russia. Even rarer it was possible to identify the nation which had used it (Nielsen 1907: 31).



Professor Ludvig Kristensen Daa.

Ludvig Kristensen Daa 1809–1877

Today, as already mentioned, “nation”, “state” and “country” often are used without any clear distinction. For Daa, “nation” and “country” were not overlapping concepts. For him, the “national” origin of an object was much more difficult to detect than the country of its origin; it was even tricky, he added, to distinguish between Norwegian and “Lappish” objects in terms of their “nationality” (Nielsen 1907: 31).

Daa worked hard to expand the small collection. He travelled to Amsterdam and London in order to buy or exchange objects with museums or antique dealers. He established contacts with consulates and encouraged Norwegian sailors to collect “exotic” items from distant places. He successfully searched for ethnographical objects (Scandinavian and others) in the University Museum of Northern Antiquities and the University Museum of Natural History. It was often the case that to enlarge the museum collection he received several gifts, sometimes larger private collections (Nielsen 1907: 23ff).

In an official letter to the Budget Committee of Stortinget in 1862, Daa drew at-

tention to the fact the museum of ethnography lacked objects belonging to the Norwegian people. The absence of such objects must seem very strange to a visitor from abroad, he argued (Nielsen 1907: 28). Daa tried to increase the collection of Norwegian objects and received help from a renowned collector from Hallingdal, Sander Røo, and from a clergyman in Hiterdal. In 1877 the Scandinavian (as Daa called it) collection comprised 200 accession numbers (Nielsen 1907: 77ff).

When Artur Hazelius began his new career as a collector and museum builder, he argued that the old folk culture was quickly disappearing as society was modernising. In addition, the remaining objects of folk culture were often being taken to foreign countries by collectors of antiques and antique dealers. Therefore, public attention to and the collecting of peasant objects could not wait. Soon, very soon, they would be gone, and irrevocably along with them knowledge about the peasants' habits and customs (Hazelius 1900: 270f). In Norway Daa articulated the same opinion. The Norwegian people ran the risk of losing their "treasures" of science. If nothing was done, knowledge about the Norwegian people would in the future have to be searched for in Hazelius' museum in Stockholm. Daa dreamed of a separate room for the Scandinavian collection in the museum, convinced that it would encourage the public appeal and growth of the collection (Nielsen 1907: 76f).

From Daa's perspective, an ethnographic museum included all cultures, all ethnoses – groups of peoples – or "nations". He considered Artur Hazelius' ambition to create a Scandinavian ethnographic collection reasonable enough as the Scandinavian people shared common roots. He also considered it most appropriate to exhibit "nations" from all over the world in the same museum (Nielsen 1907: 77).

As I have tried to illustrate, the connection between nation-building and museum-formation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavia is much more intricate than has often been assumed. Of course, nationalism was an important component of the museum's legitimacy in both the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It cannot be said that Nordiska museet was a museum exclusively in the service of Swedish nationalism, or that it chiefly contributed to the mapping of the Swedish nation-state, making it an "imagined community", in Anderson's terms (Anderson 1991). Most significant are the voices of the past that questioned the identity of the museum and hesitated about Artur Hazelius' purposes. Nordiska museet was not underpinned by a firm idea of contributing solely to the Swedish people's identification with the Swedish nation-state. The meaning of it was much more floating and the geographical borders of the collections were never defined. In Norway, Daa strived for a museum collecting and exhibiting all "nations" and human "races" in the world, hoping to develop ethnographical science. It is obvious from the examples of Daa and the Swedish encyclopaedia that "nation" primarily meant "people" and that the territorial aspects of "nation" were subordinated or not articulated at all. It is significant that in both Norway and Sweden museums of cultural history originated within the Scandinavian movement.<sup>5</sup>

The stress on the unity of Scandinavia as the relevant frame of reference for Hazelius' as well as Daa's museums was equally a matter of museum-building and nation-building. Contributing to Swedish and Norwegian patriotism was seen as fully compatible with a concept of culture, people and nation that privileged "Scandinavia" over its individual countries. Considering the changing meanings of "nation" from "people" to "state", it is indeed true that the pioneering cultural history museums were "nationalist". But it must be carefully observed that the nation involved was not exclusively Sweden or Norway but also encompassed Scandinavia.

### **Nationalising the Museum**

The founder and director of Nordiska museet, Artur Hazelius, died in 1901. Soon after his death a committee was formed. It consisted of ten members, including Artur Hazelius' son Gunnar Hazelius (1874–1905). Before his death, Artur Hazelius expressed a strong desire for Gunnar Hazelius to succeed him as keeper of Nordiska museet and Skansen. Yet, contrary to Artur Hazelius' wish, in 1905 he was in fact succeeded by the archaeologist Bernhard Salin. In the meantime, Gunnar Hazelius was appointed the head of Skansen, and the art historian John Böttiger the head of Nordiska museet. Gunnar Hazelius and John Böttiger played major roles in the committee. So did the chairman Oscar Montelius, a renowned archaeologist and museum curator (Hillström 2006: 259ff).

The committee's purpose was to devise a programme for the internal design of the new museum building, including the layout of new exhibitions. The committee members disagreed in several important respects, including the meaning of the museum as a national institution. The committee's report was published in 1902 and strongly stressed Nordiska museet as a national Swedish institution. The report underlined that Nordiska museet was founded with the aim of strengthening national feelings and patriotic values and ascribed the original intention to create a museum for the Swedish people that would illustrate the people's history and development to Artur Hazelius.<sup>6</sup>

Gunnar Hazelius rejected this description as radically mistaken. Contrary to the report, he ascribed a twofold aim to Artur Hazelius: The museum was:

- (a) a Swedish patriotic educational institution addressing the Swedish people; and
- (b) a Nordic scientific institution.

The origin and growth of the museum, Gunnar Hazelius argued, proved that it was firmly rooted in Scandinavianism and a feeling of Nordic affinity and community. The Scandinavian people had a common cultural development. The Nordic people should build their future on this basis, along with their shared history and joint characteristics and experiences. From the perspective of Scandinavian cultural history and ethnology geo-political borders played a less relevant role. They did not constitute natural cultural borders between the Nordic people. According to

Gunnar Hazelius, this fact should be clearly articulated and easily observable in the museum. Most importantly, Swedish cultural history should be displayed in ways that emphasise the Nordic context. This included, for instance, that the rich collection of German guild items should be put on display alongside guild items from other Nordic countries – obviously, Gunnar Hazelius included parts of German cultural history within the boundaries of Nordic culture.<sup>7</sup>

Gunnar Hazelius accused certain committee members of distorting his father's vision. In opposition to the museum's original aim, they wanted to create a Swedish national museum with Scandinavian subdivisions. Oscar Montelius rejected Gunnar Hazelius' view. It was necessary to follow scientific principles of order and comprehensibility when arranging museum exhibitions. If not, the museum visitor would be confused. The visitor should always know in which country he or she was. Therefore, it was imperative that objects from different countries be set apart. Contrary to Gunnar Hazelius, Oscar Montelius argued that the Nordic dimension of the museum had already been subordinated to the Swedish dimension during Artur Hazelius' lifetime.

The conflict between Gunnar Hazelius and Oscar Montelius illustrates several essential themes, some being specific to the history and development of Nordiska museet and some holding general implications for the formation of modern cultural history museums in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After the death of Artur Hazelius, the various meanings of the museum and its miscellaneous collections were regarded with suspicion by many museum professionals (Hillström 2006: 259ff). Oscar Montelius' demand for organisation and his heavy emphasis on the museum being a national Swedish museum can be understood as an effort to make the museum more homogeneous in terms of which people and nation it appealed to and represented. Stating that Nordiska museet was a museum for, above all, the Swedish people solved an important problem. Yet Gunnar Hazelius could not agree with such a simple solution. He defended the idea that Nordiska museet was a museum for the Nordic people. As a museum and scientific institution of cultural heritage it represented a Nordic nation, a Nordic people with floating geo-political boundaries. However, he agreed with Oscar Montelius that in its capacity of a public institution the museum primarily addressed the Swedish people.<sup>8</sup>

One reason for Oscar Montelius to stress the Swedishness of Nordiska museet was the crisis of the union between Sweden and Norway. From around 1890 this union had entered a period of crisis that ended with its dissolution in 1905. One main factor was the claim made by the Venstre (liberals in Stortinget, the Norwegian parliament) for separate foreign consuls. In May 1905 the Stortinget accepted the Norwegian government's proposal for Norwegian consuls. King Oscar II declared that he could not accept the decision and thereafter the ministry resigned. The Stortinget then agreed to a resolution stating that the Union had been dissolved since King Oscar II could not form a government – all in accordance with

a prearranged plan. In Sweden, the reactions to the Norwegian revolt were strong and preparations for war were made by both countries. Military forces were mobilised although it all ended peacefully. In September 1905 King Oscar II acknowledged Norway as an independent state. Prince Carl of Denmark ascended the Norwegian throne as Haakon VII in November of the same year.

Although neither Montelius nor any other committee members mentioned the union, it seems highly reasonable that Montelius tried to adjust the identity of Nordiska museet to the actual political situation. Being sensitive to the political currents of the time, not least the Norwegian claim for self-government and independence, he found it less wise to emphasise the museum's Nordic identity, especially when the big Norwegian collection in the museum was frequently deplored in Norway. An illustration of Hazelius' bad reputation that was prevalent within museum circles in Norway is the opinion the internationally renowned archaeologist Ingvald Undset (1853–1893) articulated in a programme to establish a National Norwegian Museum in Kristiania (Undset 1885). In the new museum (that was never actually realised) a Norwegian folk museum was to be installed and organised as a separate department with its own supervisor. Undset presented the organisation of Dansk Folkemuseum in the National Museum of Copenhagen as a model. Nordiska museet was *not* to be imitated, he warned. The museum contained too many heterogeneous collections and, even worse, nothing in the museum's programme stopped Hazelius from swallowing up all the museums and collections in Scandinavia.

The efforts to “nationalise” Nordiska museet were, in view of the crisis and dissolution of the union in 1905, a step of rational adaption to the political realities. Montelius' argument was quite understandably *not* a political one but one of museum orderliness – separating collections by country rather than by cultural nation. The “new” Nordiska museet was opened to the public in 1907. According to Montelius' main principle of orderliness, all items were exhibited within a geographical framework consisting of provinces and countries. However, this was the only consequence of the endeavours to nationalise the museum. The rich Norwegian collection was exhibited in a conspicuous way and even the guild objects that had been collected in Germany were put on display (Hillström 2006).

## **A National Museum of Folk Culture in Norway**

Parallel to the political forces that contributed to the “nationalisation” of Nordiska museet after Hazelius' death were changes in the idea of ethnography and its application in museum practices in Norway.

When Daa died in 1877 he was succeeded by Yngvar Nielsen (1843–1916). Nielsen was a historian, publicist and politician and became a professor of geography in 1890. Nielsen played a major role in Høyre, the conservative party. He was a strong supporter of the union between Norway and Sweden, and also an

important advisor in Norway to the Swedish-Norwegian king Oscar II. Like Daa, he was particularly inspired by Scandinavianism and had participated in several student meetings (Nielsen 1912). Many of his Swedish friends were also the most important allies of Artur Hazelius.



Yngvar Nielsen 1843–1916

His vision for the museum differed from Daa's but in the spirit of Daa he found it most important to enhance the Scandinavian collection, although he resisted the name. Nielsen wanted to establish a Norwegian folk museum separate from the Ethnographic Museum and stated that the idea to include all groups of people in a single museum was entirely wrong and old-fashioned. The overall aim of an ethnographic museum was to represent the culture of "primitive" people, not European people and culture. Objects that illustrated European civilisation must be sorted out from ethnographical museums, Nielsen emphasised, although he failed to undertake such a reform in his own museum (Nielsen 1907: 77). Nielsen regarded the enriching of the Norwegian collection as his assignment. Parallel to Artur Hazelius, Nielsen told a revealing story of the source of his obligation to rescue what was left of old-time peasant objects. Similar to Hazelius (and Paulus) the conversion took place during a journey. Hazelius was travelling in Dalarna; Nielsen through the fjords (Hazelius 1900: 270; Nielsen 1881: 153). Through these stories, both Hazelius and Nielsen dramatised themselves as the chosen ones for collecting with the noblest aims. They should not be mistaken for antique dealers or private collectors – their potent rivals in the collecting field.

Nielsen travelled through Norway during the summers of 1878, 1879 and 1880. He collected costumes, jewellery, household utensils and other objects that could illuminate the oldest cultural development of Norway. He mainly paid for these



journeys himself. He wrote letters to *Morgenbladet*, eager to draw the reader's attention to his important work. Nielsen's vision was to establish a museum similar to and in competition with Nordiska museet and he hoped to reduce the lead of Artur Hazelius. It was, Nielsen wrote, both a national and scientific programme. However, Nielsen's dream was left unfulfilled. In 1881 the Stortinget refused to give him a supplementary grant to develop the Norwegian collection. Nielsen added this rejection to the many critical voices that were heard at the Stortinget and in the newspapers about the value of a national Norwegian collection (Nielsen 1907: 78ff). Nielsen continued to look for new funding. During the spring of 1881 he gave five public lectures about Norwegian cultural history, aiming to inspire the audiences to support the idea of a state-owned national Norwegian museum. The lectures were later published in a book. All the resulting income was donated to the Ethnographic Museum (Nielsen 1881). However, it seems that after this Nielsen lost his fervour and turned to other duties within the museum.

From the outset the University Museum of Ethnography was a destitute museum installed in small and dark rooms with no heating during winter. The situation was much the same as for the state-owned Historical Museum in Stockholm. Money was a constant problem. Nielsen's efforts to find new financial resources are illustrative of the conditions of many state-owned museums in Scandinavia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One can also observe that the Stortinget was as hesitant as the Swedish government to give more than minor financial support to museums (Hillström 2006).

When Nielsen wrote the history of the University Museum of Ethnography in 1907 he tried to distinguish between his own activities and aims and those of Daa. Replacing "Scandinavian" with "Norwegian" is one tendency. Another one is that he blamed Daa for not being conscious of the need to separate "primitive" culture from the culture of European civilisation. A third tendency was that Nielsen called special attention to those items in the museum collected by Daa that Nielsen emphasised had no place at all in an ethnographic museum. He mentioned the following:

half of a Russian time-bomb used in the Crimean War; a model of the lighthouse in Eddystone; a one-dollar bill, a ten-dollar bill, part of a bomb and a lead bullet from Sebastopol; a piece of pitcoal from Spitsbergen; and the hydrogen balloon "La ville d'Orleans". The latter was sent from Paris but lost its course and ended up in Telemark. When the two French passengers eventually arrived in Kristiania they were celebrated as heroes. The balloon, obviously, was found and exhibited in the Ethnographic Museum (today it is in the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology). (Nielsen 1907: 32–53).

Why did Nielsen draw the reader's attention to items he thought had no place in the collections? To amuse the reader with the stupidities of Daa? The late 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of museum-formation. This process was characterised by shifting opinions and conflicts about the most accurate principles of museum regulation. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of



the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period, in short, of boundary work. In this process, many of the earlier museum builders, like Hazelius and Daa, were accused by subsequent museum curators of accumulating curiosities, creating some kind of late Wunderkammern, rather than scientifically ordered and modern museums (Hillström 2006: 259ff). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century most cultural history museums, including museums of art and industrial art, comprised heterogeneous collections (The South Kensington Museum, later renamed the Victoria & Albert Museum is a very good example; see Burton 1999). Nielsen's hopes and strivings for a separate Norwegian folk culture museum from the Ethnographic Museum, characterising his programme as both "national" and "scientific", visibly resemble the conflicts that followed Artur Hazelius' death. One central aspect of this was the change of reference to the concept of ethnography.

The shift of meanings ascribed to "ethnography" can be illustrated by two articles in the first and second editions of *Nordisk familjebok*, the Swedish encyclopaedia.

The first article was published in 1881 and written by the anatomist and pathologist Gustaf von Düben. He wrote: Ethnography is the description of man as he appears in social groups as people. Ethnography refers to both physical and mental character, environmental adjustment and relations between people, habits, customs, tools etc. The concepts of ethnography and ethnology are not demarcated, and run together with the concept of anthropology. Collections of tools, household utensils, weapons, costumes etc. belonging to different people are named museums of ethnography. As examples, he mentioned Nordiska museet, and the museums of ethnography in Stockholm and Copenhagen.<sup>9</sup>

The author of the article "Ethnography" in the second edition of *Nordisk familjebok*, Edgar Reuterskiöld, remarked that "formerly" the concepts of "ethnography" and "anthropology" were not distinguished. "Nowadays", he added, anthropology refers to the study of the physical aspects of man's life, whereas "ethnography" refers to the cultural aspects. Anthropology observes man as a specimen of the Homo family, while ethnography regards him as a member of a certain group of people. "At the present time" ethnography is used in a more restricted sense as a descriptive science, while ethnology is a comparative science. The purpose of ethnography is to describe the cultural feature of each people. Ethnography is "today" commonly limited to the study of "primitive people". The corresponding study of the culture of civilised people is called cultural history.<sup>10</sup>

The following article is about ethnographic museums. The author was Erland Nordenskiöld, who became director of the ethnographic division of the Göteborg Museum in 1913. Nordenskiöld wrote that ethnographical museums were commonly associated with museums that collected objects from countries outside Europe. However, this assumption was wrong, he argued. Several European museums, including the most famous Nordiska museet, collected objects of "domestic" ethnography.<sup>11</sup>

The inconsistencies between the two articles in the second edition of *Nordisk familjebok* are noteworthy. The first author is very clear on the point that “ethnography” refers to the study of “primitive” people. Nordenskiöld, on the other hand, insisted that Nordiska museet was an ethnographic museum. If he had followed the opinion expressed by the first author, he would have characterised Nordiska museet as a museum of cultural history. Obviously, the “new” meaning of ethnography had not been fully established.

The replacing of “Scandinavian” with “Norwegian”, that in Nielsen’s terms was part of the “national” programme, indicates that “Scandinavianism” was losing ground in Norway. After the 1860s the Union lost much of its political support in Norway and liberal politics were making progress. In 1884 parliamentarism was adopted and the liberal government of Johan Sverdrup was installed. The two opposite groups established official political parties in 1884: Venstre (Left) for the liberals who wanted to break up the union, and Høyre (Right) for conservatives who wanted to hold on to a Union of two equal states. Although Nielsen might have wanted to retain the idea of a Scandinavian collection (he travelled to Finland in order to enhance the number of Finnish objects in the museum in 1880), this was not wise from the perspective of gaining the desired political support for creating a national Norwegian folk museum. In this Nielsen showed the same political realism as Oscar Montelius. In his memoirs, Nielsen complained that his idea had been largely rejected by the Stortinget on the basis that as a conservative politician he was not regarded as a trustworthy nationalist by the liberals (Nielsen 1912).

### **New Times: Norsk Folkemuseum**

The idea of a national museum of the Norwegian people was realised 1894. The weakened political support for the Swedish-Norwegian union constitutes an important background to the success of the new museum project. Indeed, in the biography *Hans Aall – mannen, visionen og verket* (1994) Tonte Hegard identifies the emblem of the new museum from 1895, representing the Norwegian heraldic lion as a proclamation of Norwegian independence in the union politics.

Parallel to Nordiska museet, Norsk Folkemuseum was a private initiative by Hans Aall and its establishment was independent of the Norwegian state. Similar to Artur Hazelius and Yngvar Nielsen, Aall told an “origin story” of how, during a journey to Hallingdal, Numedal and Telemarken, he was overwhelmed by a strong conviction that the old peasant culture was being threatened by modernisation, and that it was necessary to rescue *everything* that was left of an old, disappearing culture (Hegard 1994: 38).

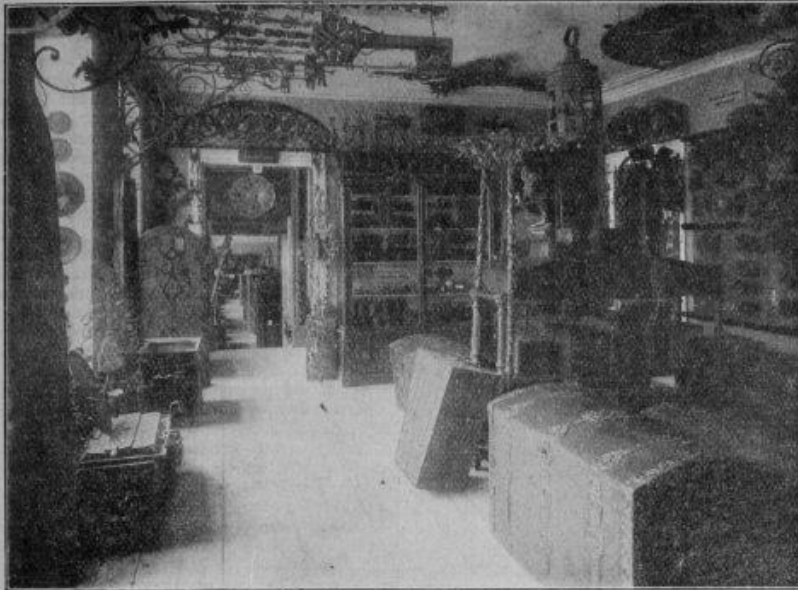


Fig. 1. Ett museirum, ordnad efter numera föråldrade principer. (Från Nordiska museets första, trånga lokaler vid Drottninggatan i Stockholm.)

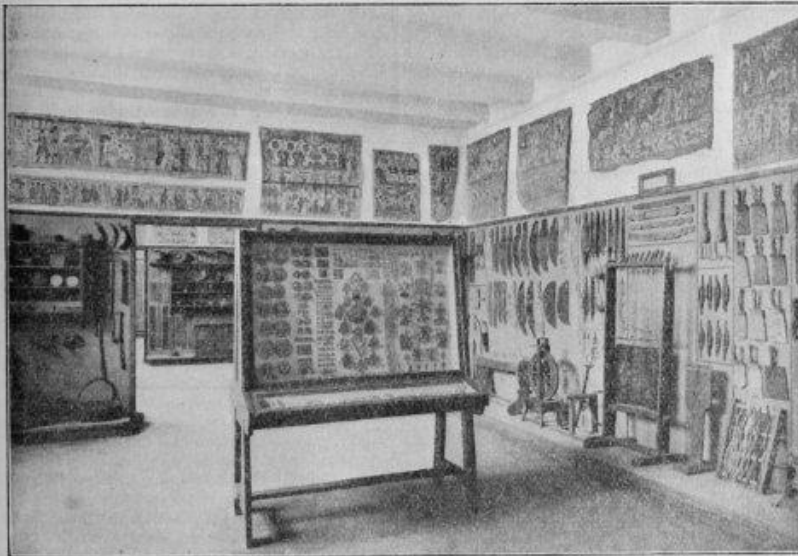


Fig. 2. Ett välordnad museum. (Från Nordiska museets n. v. skånska allmogefdelning; se sp. 1424.)

Illustration of disorder and order in museums. The example is Nordiska museet.  
(*Nordisk familjebok*, Stockholm 1913).

Aall was born in 1869. He was a three-year-old boy when Artur Hazelius first presented his vision of a permanent exhibition of peasant costumes. Aall died in 1946; Hazelius in 1901. In comparing Nordiska museet with Norsk Folkemuseum, one must pay careful attention to both the relevance of the union crisis and the fact that Aall and Hazelius belonged to different museum generations. When Aall started his career as a museum builder the museum profession was already gradually emerging, manifested among other things by the emphasis on the proper ex-

hibiting order of things and the need to advance science through collections. Contrary to Hazelius then, Aall wrote museum manuals and paid significant attention to professional tools like standardised catalogues. Although museums were being built in much the same ways, not least through gifts of different kinds that resulted in heterogeneous collections, like many of his generation Aall marked a distance towards Hazelius' museum projects. When Nordiska museet became the target of professional critique, Aall was one of the critics. However, it is important to note that, although Norsk Folkemuseum consisted of heterogeneous collections, the Norwegian framework was kept. In contrast, when Nordiska museet in Stockholm was nationalised according to Montelius' principle of "countries apart" it was obviously still a museum without distinct geographical borders.

The Scandinavian movement represented a nationalism that, in retrospect, has been described as a romantic illusion of a Nordic community upheld by naive and arrack-loving students. However, in its historical context, Scandinavianism was an important cultural and political force that is difficult to grasp for subsequent historians working in the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century concepts of the "nation". It was possible for Hazelius to mobilise the rhetoric of Swedishness and Swedish patriotism within a framework of Scandinavianist nationalism.

## A Real Museum of Folk Culture

However, the Scandinavianist framing of Hazelius' museum was losing terrain, both politically and professionally. It was neither comparable with the disruption of the union between Norway and Sweden, nor with a new generation of museum ideology that then, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, strongly connected cultural history museums with "nations" in the modern sense. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the 20<sup>th</sup> century concept of "nation" also became increasingly relevant in actual museum practice.

The actuality of these questions in early 20<sup>th</sup> century museum policy can be further illustrated by a presidential address to the Museum Association at a meeting in Maidstone in 1909.<sup>12</sup> The president was Henry Balfour (1863–1939). He was an anthropologist and the first curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. In his talk he complained about the lack of interest in Britain in national culture, reflected in particular in the *absence* of a splendid collection of national artifacts. In the British Museum, Balfour argued in his address, the ethnology of most regions around the world was represented; however, there was a "reticence in dealing with our own nation which is especially noteworthy in view of the name which is applied to this great institution". Whereas the pre- and proto-historic antiquities of Great Britain were represented by rich series in the museum,

[...] the student who wishes to form a more or less complete picture of the mediaeval and post-mediaeval life of these islands in particular, and he who would investigate the gradual development of our later culture and the survivals of early condi-

tions in recent times will be compelled for the most part to seek his material for study far and wide and often in vain. (Balfour 1909: 253)

“What is required is a National Folk Museum, dealing exclusively and exhaustively with the history of culture of the British Nation within the historic period, and illustrating the growth of ideas and indigenous characteristics”, Balfour underlined (1909: 254). National Folk Museums could be found in most continental cities: Berlin, Budapest, Sarajevo, Moscow, Paris, Helsingfors, Copenhagen, Bergen, Christiania and Stockholm, with all of them expressing national pride. These folk museums, Balfour continued, contained objects of times long past as well as “characteristic features of the more recent culture and social economy of the peasantry, the backbone of every nation” (Balfour 1909: 254). The most important of these folk museums was, according to Balfour, Nordiska museet in Stockholm that afforded “a model worthy of imitation”. In Nordiska museet, it “may now be studied in detail the domestic and social economy, arts, industries, and amusements, ceremonies, beliefs and superstitions of the Swedish people and to a lesser extent of the other Scandinavian peoples” (Balfour 1909: 255).

Although “a model worthy of imitation”, Balfour stressed that a national museum, contrary to Nordiska museet, “should be devoted exclusively to national products and objects of national use”. If not, there was a risk that the national character of the museum would be obscured:

The exotic specimens, at first added to the collection to give additional interest and significance to the indigenous objects for which the museum was primarily designed, would be liable soon to outnumber and overwhelm them, and would rapidly obscure the original national character of the collection and tend to convert or pervert it into a museum of comparative technology. (Balfour 1909: 256)

It was wiser, Balfour stressed, to keep the two ideas separate. A national museum should be restricted exclusively to national objects. The function of dealing with “the evolution and geographical distribution of human arts and appliances of the wider basis of a broad comparative system” should be left to museums of comparative technology (Balfour 1909: 256). In defining “national objects” Balfour’s point of departure was obviously the geo-political borders of Great Britain. A national museum was a museum for and of the British people, collecting and exhibiting British cultural history. According to Balfour, the national museum should display the development of British culture in a chronological series “depicting the general life and habits of the people at successive periods” (Balfour 1909: 256). It should illustrate the environmental effects on physique, culture and national characteristics but also illuminate local peculiarities. The national museum ought to be completed by an open-air exhibition and by a permanent centre for performances of folk dances, songs and old-time ceremonies.

Balfour’s view reveals that the nationalising force in cultural history museums developed around the turn of the century. Nation, people and culture were finally united in terms of the territorial domain of the political state.



## Conclusions

One important change in the museum landscape of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe was the rise of the museum of domestic (in contrast to exotic) folk culture. It was here that the Scandinavian countries played a pioneering role. Many museum historians have pinpointed nationalism as the basic spiritual force behind the rise of major institutions like Nordiska Museet in Sweden and Norsk Folkemuseum in Norway. This paper argues that, while in a sense this is true, it misses the vital point that Nordiska Museet and the unsuccessful predecessor of Norsk Folkemuseum, the University Museum of Ethnography in Oslo, collected and displayed a Scandinavian “folk”. The museums were certainly Swedish and Norwegian institutions of popular education and learning but their “folk” was a Scandinavian one in the “old” sense of the concept of nation as a cultural community transcending politically defined territories. They both conceived themselves as ethnographic museums at a time when ethnography meant the study of folk culture generally. The original name of Nordiska Museet was the Scandinavian Ethnographic Museum. Around the turn of the century in 1900 the concept of ethnography came to designate only the cultures of primitive peoples. At the same time, the longstanding drifting of meaning of the concept of “nation” – from “people” to “state” – was coming to an end.

Strongly contributing to the idea of Scandinavian folk culture museums in Sweden and Norway was Scandinavianism and the union between Sweden and Norway, established in 1814. Artur Hazelius, the successful founder of Nordiska Museet, Ludvig Kristensen Daa and Yngvar Nielsen, directors of the University Museum of Ethnography, were all active in the Scandinavian movement. After about 1870 “old-school” Scandinavian nationalism started losing ground to “new-school” territorial nationalism. From about 1890 the union between Sweden and Norway was hastening towards its dissolution in 1905. As a consequence, the folk culture museum movement in Norway changed paths into Hans Aall’s Norsk Folkemuseum, founded in 1894, and pressures mounted to “nationalise” Nordiska Museet in Sweden, i.e. to turn it into a proper *Swedish* museum of cultural history.

In this nationalising process of Nordiska Museet the political downfall of Scandinavianism ran parallel to changes in ideology of the emerging museum profession. The politically convenient “de-Scandinavianisation” of Nordiska Museet after Hazelius’ death in 1901 was therefore argued in terms of scientific and museological prudence. Through the combined forces of conceptual changes to “nation”, the downfall of Scandinavianism and the rise of a museum profession Nordiska Museet transformed into a Swedish National Cultural History Museum with a big division to cover neighbouring countries.

There are many connections between nationalism, nation-building and museum development in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet the formation of nation-states and the spiritual ascent of political nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century may as a theory of the driving forces of museum-building be over-emphasised with regard to the ma-

for novelty of the museum branch, the folk culture museum. As exemplified by the development of folk culture museums in Sweden and Norway adapting collections to nation-state borders was not a significant 19<sup>th</sup> century trait. It only developed at the very end of the century, when the original concept of “nation” as people and culture, in this case Scandinavia, was gradually being subordinated to the concept of “nation” as state and political territory.

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E-Mail: [magdalena.hillstrom@liu.se](mailto:magdalena.hillstrom@liu.se).

## Notes

- 1 The capacity of the idea of a Nordic cultural community to negotiate national tensions is the main subject of the research project *National History – Nordic Culture: Negotiating identity in the museums* that is also examined in Aronsson (2008).
- 2 “Nation” in *Nordisk familjebok*, first edition, Vol. 11, 1887, p. 837. Unsigned.
- 3 “Nation” in *Nationalencyklopedin*, [www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se). Signed by Rune Johansson.
- 4 “Nationalitetsprincip” in *Nordisk familjebok*, first edition, Vol. 11, 1887, pp. 842-843. Signed by Magnus Höjer.
- 5 The argument could easily be expanded to Denmark for the same period. See Aronsson 2008. For contemporary attempts to revitalise a Nordic dimension, see the contributions by Stuart Burch and Egle Rindzeviciute in this volume.
- 6 Handlingar rörande installationen i Nordiska museets byggnad, bilagda nämndens protokoll af den 24 april och 6 maj 1902 (Stockholm 1902).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 For a more comprehensive account of these conflicts and more specific information about relevant sources, see Hillström (2006), Chapter 9.
- 9 “Etnografi” in *Nordisk familjebok*, first edition, Vol. 4, 1881, pp. 777-778. Signed by Gustaf von Düben.
- 10 “Etnografi” in *Nordisk familjebok*, second edition, Vol. 7, 1907, pp. 996-997. Signed by Edgar Reuterskiöld.
- 11 “Etnografiska museer” in *Nordisk familjebok*, second edition, Vol. 7, 1907, p. 997. Signed by Erland Nordenskiöld.
- 12 Henry Balfour, “Presidential Address to the Museums Association, Maidstone Meeting, July 13, 1909”, *The Museums Journal* 9 (July 1909), 5-18. Reprinted in *Museums Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Bettina Messias Carbonell (ed.), 2004, pp. 252-259.



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## Acceptance and Conformity: Merging Modernity with Nationalism in the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930

By Carl Marklund & Peter Stadius

### Abstract

This article takes a closer look at how interwar supporters of modernism sought to overcome the opposition they had to face. It does so by looking at the usage of history and Swedishness at the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 and contrasting this experience with a brief excursus on the image of progress and Americanism as presented at the *A Century of Progress* International Exposition, held in Chicago in 1933–1934. The backers of both these exhibitions – functionalist architects and progressive businessmen, respectively – consciously sought to find ways in which to savor the propagandistic value of this “the shock of the new” while retaining a reassuring continuity between well-known and widespread self-identifications with “the idyll of the past.” They did so by forging “national” forms of modernity, attempting to bypass the political conflicts and ideological polarizations which characterized the interwar years. As such, it is argued, they also exemplify how the logic of the exhibition could be used for harnessing technology, science, and *funkis* (functionalism) as tools for re-identifying the nation with modernity and simultaneously de-politicizing modernism.

**Keywords:** Exhibitions, modernity, modernism, anti-modernism, nationalism, functionalism, progressivism

More than any other date since the industrial revolution 1930 constitutes a boundary line between old and new [in Sweden].

Göran Therborn (Therborn 1981: 25–26; Pred 1995: 97)

The utility art of every age shall be a child of its time. Novelties shall be tested, meanings confronted with each other. But the artistic inspiration must have to be rooted deeply into the own soil, in the soul of the own people, in order to grow sound and strong.

Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf (*SvD*, 17.5.1930)

## Introduction

The Nordic, or Scandinavian, countries are often assumed to have followed a rather unique path towards “modernity.” This path has been characterized by compromise (or even consensus), cooperation (between classes and interests), and relative peacefulness, at least if compared with interwar Continental Europe (Stråth & Sørensen 1997; Glans & Almqvist 2001). While this characterization may underestimate the numerous conflicts which in fact took place there is nevertheless a powerful notion that the “project” of modernization provided a unifying vision which could bypass some of the many conflicts and fault-lines which undoubtedly existed in Nordic societies.

Indeed, the emergence of a new Nordic, modern, (social-)democratic, and welfare-based society construction, mostly in Denmark and Sweden, has for long been central when characterizing Scandinavian societies both abroad and at home during the last 80 years or so. Most notably, inter-war Scandinavia was portrayed as capable of somehow combining the past with the future, the old with the new, and the modern with the national. In July 1936, just to take one example, Tennessee editor and historian George Fort Milton informed US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a letter that he was crossing the Atlantic:

...to study how the Scandinavians have made such an admirable synthesis of yesterday and tomorrow [...] I am persuaded that the discoverable and usable analogies in Sweden and Denmark are substantially more than America can find in the more rigid autarkies such as Russia, Italy, and Germany [...] There has been consent as well as change. And it is extraordinarily important that we here in America find out how there can be change by consent rather than by conflict. (Woodward 1997: 302)

However, the Scandinavian countries were not the only societies struggling with the challenge of modernity – “the shock of the new,” in Robert Hughes’ famous characterization – at this time. It is therefore valuable to place the Scandinavian attempts in international comparison.

In this article, we will take a closer look at how the idea and image of a modern Nordic mass society model was kick-started during the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930. While the Stockholm Exhibition has been analyzed in some detail by previous scholars, its particular role in the Swedish attempt at joining the old with the

new has not yet been compared and contrasted with other exhibitions in other countries. Modernity is often said to form part of the national mythology of Sweden, in some ways akin to the American national identification with “progress” (Ruth 1984). We will therefore make a brief outlook to the A Century of Progress International Exposition held in Chicago in 1933 and 1934 in order to compare American and Swedish attempts to merge modernism with nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

Both the Stockholm and the Chicago Exhibitions – as museum exhibitions, industrial expositions, and art fairs more generally – served as display cases of American and Swedish society undergoing great changes. As such, they represent attempts at freezing the liquid and potentially dangerous experience of modernity into a more controlled national framing. The idea of fairs and exhibitions was born around a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of national pedagogical practice and class inclusion. At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the fairs developed into more or less institutionalized forms of competition and comparison between different nations (Cornell 1952: 116–132; Wurdak 1996: 51–84). National museums also fitted into this broader movement towards national cohesion and international competition, seeking to forge a collective understanding of the history of the nation, while the task of fairs and exhibitions carried the ambition to guide the nation towards the future. Hence, exhibitions and museums have both been conditioned by current needs. In both cases, the boosting of national ego has been the rule, rather than the exception.

This need of boosting the national ego gained a more acute edge under the pressure of rising economic instability and rampant financial crisis which hit both Europe and North America at the end of the 1920s. The resulting crisis brought out conflict about the direction of the future and the tangent of the past in most industrial societies as national myths were shaken to the core. It is in this context we must see the new national narrative on display in both Stockholm in 1930 and in Chicago in 1933–1934. However, not everyone agreed to these new narratives. For example, the new and modern Sweden aggressively marketed and displayed at the Stockholm Exhibition pleased some and disgusted others, in Sweden as well as abroad. Such a bold manifestation of a new aesthetic and social program was obviously felt as a political standpoint as well.

In other words, modernity did not merely represent the shock of new forms of art and expression. It also came packed with notions of a new social order which ran against traditional understandings of the good life and “the idyll of the past.” As such, the aesthetics of modernism could hardly be separated from the political and social program of cultural radicals. So, who needed and wanted this new modern Sweden and this new America? Who were the actors? What were the arguments? These exhibitions served as a catalyst for a quite heated debate on modernity and modernism in both countries, debates which would last well until the outbreak of the Second World War. In this debate, attitudes towards national his-

tory, subject to conscious subordination to futuristic aims in the exhibition, can be studied in operation.

In order to do so, we will first map the background of the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 and the group of functionalist architects who organized it, in particular looking at the way in which they made use of particular stories about the ethnicity, history, and tradition of the nation in order to market their modernizing ideology, but also at what kind of opposition they encountered. This Swedish experience is compared and contrasted with the attempt of American business and industry to market modernity as a benign power in the wake of the Great Depression.

It is our argument that the planners of both the Stockholm and the Chicago exhibitions consciously sought to find ways in which to retain the propagandistic value of the shock of the new and at the same time present a reassuring continuity between well-known social norms of the past by forging a new national form of modernity. We claim that this attempt in many ways ran counter to the political conflicts and ideological polarizations which characterized the interwar years, and represented a conscious attempt at harnessing modernism as a tool for national re-identification and modernistic de-politicization.

### **Architecture and Functionalism – The Stockholm Exhibition 1930**

The Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 was a national exhibition arranged by the Municipality of Stockholm and *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* [“Swedish Arts and Crafts Association”], a national arts and crafts association central in the country’s national cultural policy making from late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The Exhibition has often been seen as the main single event introducing functionalist architecture on a popular level in the emerging mass society in Sweden (Råberg 1970). The exhibition was a continuation of the tradition of similar art and industrial fairs arranged in Stockholm in 1851, 1866, 1897 and 1909 (Chrispinsson & Sörenson 1999). The core group behind the exhibition included architect Gunnar Asplund (1885–1940), journalist Ludvig “Lubbe” Nordström (1882–1942), and art historian Gregor Paulsson (1889–1977), who also acted as president of *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* (after 1976 *Svensk Form*).

Paulsson had first hatched the idea of an exhibition in Stockholm after his visit to the Paris World Fair in 1925. After his appointment as commissar of the Exhibition in 1928, he delivered a speech at *Svenska slöjdföreningen* revealing his new and bold approach for the planned exhibition, opting for a full-out acceptance of new functionalist trends. This was a signal of how the entire project was to be distanced from the arts and crafts approach and the neo-classic “Swedish grace” of the 1920s launched to international fame in Paris, which was kept as too elitist and unsatisfactory in its modernist message. With him he had a group of architects, complementing each other: the young and dogmatic ideologist Uno Åhrén (1897–1977), also nick-named Mr. Concrete, the social housing pioneer Sven



Markelius (1889–1972) and the above-mentioned Gunnar Asplund, who somewhat smoothed the break between 1920s classicism and the radical functionalism of the 1930s within the group (Sommar 2006: 123).

As Lorentz Lyttkens has pointed out the industrial revolution and its modernity had to be transformed into an equally social revolution of modernity and this, “was launched with thunder and lightning by the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930” (Lyttkens 1991: 18; Pred 1995: 97). In this sense the commissar Paulsson set the tone, opting for housing and other structurally fundamental pieces of society construction rather than just promoting beautiful design objects in everyday life, as had been the case in the 1917 Home exhibition (*Hemutställningen*) arranged at the Liljevalchs museum of art in Stockholm by the same arts and crafts society (Alzén 2002). The stakes were now much higher. The space for dialogue with what was conceived as the reigning bourgeoisie aesthetic ideals was often minimal, and the functionalist modernism was frequently marked by a certain unwillingness to communicate with the past. This shock of the new was the main impact of the Stockholm Exhibition. This shock treatment was aimed at overwhelming the masses and to disarm possible resistance.

In comparison with the World Exhibition held the summer and autumn 1929 in Barcelona, the emphasis on providing a uniform functionalist architectural milieu in Stockholm was indeed striking. Even if the famous German pavilion *Werkbund* by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) in Barcelona has a prominent place in architectural history, it was about the only true functionalist statement in Barcelona. This Bauhaus School and Weimar Germany show case had to share the role of attraction on the Montjuich Hill with *The Spanish village – el Poble español*, a collage of picturesque and traditional Spanish architecture still standing transformed to a recreational and tourist attraction. In Stockholm, by contrast, the organizers provided a functionalist statement exhibition, where absolutely no building on the entire fair ground was allowed to deviate from the central ideology of modern, radical and minimalistic aesthetics. This was made by creating what the British architect historian J. M. Richards in 1940 credited as “the first large area with functionalist architecture on the same place” (Pred 1995: 98). Until the Stockholm Exhibition, functionalist works had mostly been presented singularly to the great public, often looking quite strange, especially in highly built-up urban environments. Now, for the first time, there was a dedicated and uniform functionalist space ready to be experienced by the masses during that summer.

And indeed, the masses came: Considering the short time the exhibition lasted, this event – part public education, part popular amusement – marked an unprecedented modern mass experience in the history of Sweden. The exhibition area on the Gärdet south sea shore facing Djurgården stretching to present day Diplomatstaden, was visited by almost four million visitors from the opening day 16 May to the closure on 29 September 1930.<sup>2</sup> Even if this represented only a tenth of the estimated visitors to the Chicago Exhibition (see below) three years later, it ri-

valued the latter in terms of modernism and optimism. Indeed, the Depression had not yet hit Sweden with its full power at the time the exhibition gates opened in the beginning of this unusually hot summer.

Even if the facilities were all torn down afterwards, the memory of the exhibition would live on and constitute the symbol of how Sweden entered modernity. One often quoted manifestation of this memory culture is the young “proletarian author” Ivar Lo-Johansson’s (1901–1990) account from 1979:

The many acres of plain grass stretching from the Diplomat City to the Life Guard Dragoons had been built-up with functionalistic houses and exhibition halls of steel and glass, paved with new streets and given way for squares, towers, dams, dustbins, signposts with prohibitions, oases for rest and contemplation of a brand new city. All that could block the vision was gone, all rubbish which could have prevented the observer from gazing into the future had been removed. [---] Flags were blowing in the wind. Fountains were playing. The whole thing felt as if one were walking on a street leading right into the future. One was already in Urbs, The City of the New Human.

(Lo-Johansson 1979: 452)

Indeed, the Stockholm exhibition played an important role as a symbol of a new national self-identification of Sweden as a “modern” and “progressive” country. This national re-branding played out on two different levels: On the one hand, the exhibition signaled what may be called a “nationalization” of the long-standing concerns regarding the quality of the “good home” for the ordinary man and woman. In fact, the exhibition introduced the general public to the functionalist socio-political program for an industrial, planned, rationalized, and standardized production of housing to meet the needs of a badly-housed Swedish working class. This problem was considered to be of national importance. If functionalism claimed to be capable of solving this dividing issue, it would by inference be taken as an intervention reaching far beyond the confines of mere aestheticism, into the core of the political tension about what kind of society Sweden should be, a debate which had been running high in the wake of intensifying labor market conflict and growing political polarization in the late 1920s.

On the other hand, and far more playfully, the new Swedish nickname *funkis* – that diminutive of the term for the new architectural style – begun to symbolize everything new and “cool” in colloquial speech, including clothes, music, lifestyle. As such, it became almost a plague during the summer of 1930 (Pred 1995: 108–109; Christinsson 2007: 80). The word *funkis* – not used in English – was taken into Danish, Norwegian and Finnish architectural jargon soon, which shows the Nordic impact of the Stockholm exhibition. It thus marks a beginning of launching radical architecture as part of a national and specific Nordic (or also referred to as Scandinavian) form of modernity. In Denmark the functionalist ideas arrived somewhat independently, but in the other Nordic cases the Stockholm exhibition was crucial. The new trends also arrived autonomously to Norway during the late 1920s, but the importance of the Stockholm exhibition as a showcase for a larger public is also underlined by Norwegian art historians

(Brekke, Nordhagen & Lexau 2003: 318). The Stockholm exhibition was not the absolute beginning of the broader Nordic interest in the functionalist ideas and aesthetics, but perhaps the single most important event at this early stage and a starting point for a broader diffusion of the functionalist ideas (Lindh 2002: 113).

In Finland the young Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) joined the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which was the main international forum for the new functionalist architecture, on the initiative of Sweden’s Sven Markeilius. He was greatly inspired by the new trends when visiting the second CIAM congress in Frankfurt am Main in 1929, and upon returning from Germany he shared this new and radical vision with the Finnish press, stating that architecture had to: “[...] forward the idea of replacing the present way of building based on taste preferences and coincidences, with a complete consideration of a more scientifically established minimum norms.” (*ÅU*, 3.11.1929) This social awareness displayed by Aalto was undoubtedly close to the ideas of the central radical modernists in Sweden. Together with Erik Bryggman (1891–1955) he had presented the first pure functionalist buildings in Finland at the Turku 700 years anniversary fair in the summer of 1929 (Lindh 2002: 112–113).

### **“Accept the Given Reality – Only Thus May We Have a View to Control It..”**

It was in conjunction with this newly-established self-identification of a “modern” society that the functionalist architects behind the Stockholm Exhibition could programmatically declare their motto to be *acceptera* (“accept”), i.e., “accept the given reality – only thus may we have a view to control it, to master it in order to change it and create culture which is a flexible tool for life.” (Asplund et al. 1931: 198) *Acceptera* [sic!] was also the title of a pamphlet book written collectively as a post scriptum of the exhibition and published in 1931 (hereafter referred to as: *Acc*). *Acceptera* is not just an architectural manifesto, but rather an all-embracing statement of how the life of modernity could be achieved in Sweden. The crucial point was to strive forward on the path of progress, explicitly defined as industrialism, mass production, mechanization of all sectors of production, urbanism and a rejection of old bourgeoisie aesthetic norms. Otherwise, the authors – who included Asplund, Paulsson, Markeilius and Åhrén, as well as the architects Wolter Gahn (1890–1985) and Eskil Sundahl (1890–1974) – explicitly warned, Sweden would be relegated from the centre to the periphery. With simple yet powerful imagery, the authors of *Acceptera* showed how Sweden had become part of what they called “A-Europe,” the Europe of tractors and electricity, great cities, efficient industries, and new media entertainment. Yet, it constantly ran the risk of ending up in what they called “B-Europe,” the Europe of horse and carriage, traditions, and superstition, as exemplified by the Balkans and Eastern Europe, as well as the south of Italy and Spanish Andalucia.

The authors operated with the terminology of present and ancient Sweden – “Nu- och forn-Sverige”. The former was B-Sweden, with a religious culture from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a dwelling culture from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and an education culture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Acc*: 22–24). At the same time, Swedish industry had moved full speed ahead into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The present day belonged to A-Sweden. Indeed, some even concluded that Sweden had entered a Second Great Power Era, as was incidentally the title of a book published two years before the Exhibition by industrialist Gerard De Geer (1928). In his book, De Geer explained that export of patented Swedish innovations would conquer the world and bring prosperity to what less than two decades earlier had still been known as *det befästa fattighuset* [“The Fortified Poor-House”] in the phrasing of a widely spread and read Social Democratic pamphlet.

Since the Swedish industry had clearly shown its development during the past 60–70 years, it was of utmost importance than the rest of the society would not lag behind. This lack of development, visible for many in the large emigration wave from rural Sweden to North America, was a true concern and fear scenario for many. The past would have to be aligned with the needs of the present, B would have to be upgraded to A. The authors of *Acceptera* and the central figures behind the Stockholm exhibition skillfully tied these larger societal questions to the question of housing, town planning and radical minimalistic design. This was the still missing piece that would make Sweden a great place to live in. The finger was pointing at each individual of the nation: “The one who does not want to accept, he desists from cooperating in the development of culture. He will recline into a meaningless pose of bitter heroism or worldly skepticism.” (*Acc*: 198)

This intriguing oscillation between the individual and the collective is omnipresent in *Acceptera*: The first page in the book portrays a photo montage of a young man standing in front of a vast sea of an anonymous crowd, and the text asks: “The individual and the masses... the personal or the general?” (*Acc*: 3) The imagery illustrates a central tension in the *Acceptera* discourse: On the one hand it is about creating a certain type of mass society where the rate of class inclusion, and hence social leveling, would be greater than ever before. On the other hand the text speaks directly to the reader, to the individual. There is no doubt that the pamphlet was aimed at reforming the individual, let it be that this time the group of individuals was very large. This constant interplay between individual and collective is in the end aimed at the individual, who is given the responsibility to elevate him- or herself to the level of modernity. The figure of thought bears a resemblance with how religious ideas and practices have been promoted in different societies. All instructions, explanations and motivations are given by the experts – the self-ordained high priests of modernist revivalism (Gullberg 2001: 127) – i.e., from above. It is just to follow the sign-posted path and to accept the objective reality. This is at least the textual strategy build up by the authors, and was ob-

viously also the central idea behind the huge public event that the exposition constituted.

The stated aim of the Exhibition and the authors of *Acceptera* was to promote the image of irreversible progress and to, “shape a visual and emotional identity for a new human being that can take the step from ‘B-Europe’ to ‘A-Europe’.” (Mattson & Wallensten 2009: 16) Thus it is no surprise that the main focus of the exhibition, apart from the steady focus on the new and brave modern future, is to describe and make the Swedes aware of the giant leap in wealth and prosperity that Sweden had achieved during the past 60 years. The grand narrative was focused on the blessing brought to this country by industrial development, and consequently rural culture and tradition was impossible to integrate into this vision of future Sweden. The contrast to the Scandinavian Arts and Industry exhibition held in Stockholm 1897 and featuring the then recently opened *Skansen* is striking. Rural culture was a thing of the past as was also the central role of the parish priest in society. Now, scientifically competent experts, who contemporary Americans called “social engineers,” were to guide society according to good political morals and scientific competence.

Much has been said about the explicit message of modernity and how this was imposed from above on the Swedes by a certain interest group that seemed to have some kind of semi-official blessing by authorities. This was a time when “the expert”, possessing scientific knowledge, was highly esteemed and respected in an intellectual environment where science would aim at providing a new universal objectivity. This was the content of the so-called social engineering ideals present not only the radical left and movements like Clarté, but more and more also accepted over the ideological borderlines. Even if many within the left claimed monopoly on radical modernism, it is clear that leading industrial actors had a great interest in these ideas as part of their own strategies of earning profit. This becomes apparent when looking at the Chicago exhibition 1933 later in this article.

This observation also makes it important to ask to what extent and in which respect was the exhibition and the practical implementation of the functionalist program in Sweden a specific Nordic phenomenon? Functionalism as such was a European movement, centered in Germany and France and with multiple early influence channels over the continent. Later it was implemented globally as a form of modern architecture. Yet, we feel that functionalism has had a comparatively greater and over-reaching impact on society in the Nordic countries. Firstly, there was an articulated attempt to present radical functionalism as closely connected to traditional folk architecture. This was a way of claiming the new radical ideas as part of national cultural heritage, which differed radically from how the heavily future-oriented functionalism was perceived in other parts of the world. Journalist and cultural historian Gustaf Näsström (1899–1979) published a popularized book *Svensk funktionalism* [Swedish functionalism] in the fall of 1930,

simultaneously with *Acceptera*. His message is explicit, when he claims that, “many tendencies in today’s radical architecture have deep roots in old Swedish building tradition and history.” (Näsström 1930: Foreword) This was in line with the authors of *Acceptera*. The connection of aesthetic minimalism with rural culture, closeness to nature and the Lutheran value of thrift can be noted also in other Nordic countries. Secondly, the practically goal-oriented implementation and the strong focus on centralized planning can be seen as a typical feature of the comparatively homogeneous Nordic societies with a traditionally high degree of trust in authorities. This consensual societal and political culture of trust in authorities and law obedience, potentially explains the easy acceptance of the shock of the new, given “from above” by authorities that the majority recognizes.

This to a certain extent programmatic strategy of implementing modernity from above invites us to consider the analysis made by historian Henrik Stenius on tolerance and modernity in Nordic societies. Stenius sees a connection between the uniform rural Lutheran culture that united political culture in both Scandinavian kingdoms during the early modern era (*circa* 1520–1800) and the Enlightenment project of modernity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The actors are just given different roles in the same play. Stenius sketches the outlines of a deeply-rooted culture of conformity in Scandinavian societies leaning on, “the peasant-as-citizen [...] determined to figure out the common good, to reach consensus, because it is the mark of true democracy to have everybody thinking alike” (Stenius 1997: 168). The idea of tolerance is not, as in some other regions where Protestantism is dominantly present, a matter of tolerating diversity and accepting subcultures, but rather a question of “patience” in the “strive to draw everybody into the world of modernity” (Stenius 1997: 169).

This suggests that the entire exhibition can be seen as a one and only option presented to the Swedish people: “Accept, or otherwise...” Otherwise, the argument implied, the future of both the individual and the nation would be imperiled. Refusal to accept the given reality would result the continuation of misery and injustices for the poorer classes. As such, it would be a betrayal of not only the concrete achievements of Swedish industry but also of more long-held values of the Swedish nation. The organizers apparently believed strongly in their cause, and a certain amount of sectarian conviction and dogmatism can be detected in their attitudes (Gullberg 2001: 127). Somehow it was inevitable that new and modern times had arrived and this had to be accepted, but exactly which kind of modernity was still up for debate as was the question of how radical this consensually accepted modernity would be.

It is therefore perhaps significant to note that the debate on modernity and modernism in Sweden as set off by the 1930 Exhibition was primarily about...houses. It was not primarily about non-figurative art, stream of consciousness literature, machine romantics, cult of the future, or about a new political program, but, indeed, about houses. This pragmatic connection between modernity and ordinary



people's homes, housing, and living standards, accentuated the practical and comparatively low key intellectual touch of Swedish modernism (Mattson & Wallenstein 2009: 16; Eriksson 2010: 7). It is also the essence of the Swedish national interpretation of the new and radical modernist manifesto. The simple, ordinary, folkish, pragmatic and practical were on the agenda, in contrast to the metaphysical, revolutionary, and often overtly intellectual and speculative dimension which dominated much of radical modernism elsewhere in the 1920s and 1930s. The strategy was to forward the program as containing universal and rational values, thus making it difficult to challenge with any "serious" arguments and thereby forcing the opponents to revert to the rhetorical arsenal of tradition, aesthetics, and style.

It is therefore of some interest to look at whether the Swedes so readily did accept the one and only option presented at the Stockholm Exhibition and whether the opponents went into the trap set up by the functionalists. A closer look at the way in which the Exhibition was received in the press and in the public opinion – support as well as opposition – might therefore be relevant here.

## **The Opposition**

The early reporting in the press was unanimously positive and a general enthusiasm about that summer's great event sparked an initial atmosphere of consensus. This was underlined by the presence of the King Gustav V and the Crown Prince at the inauguration ceremonies on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 1930. There was an established tradition, both in Sweden and other monarchies, that the monarch as a unifying symbol of the nation would sanction grand exhibitions by inaugurating them. In his speech King Gustav V was diplomatic to say the least, declaring that:

Even if one can have diverging opinions about some of the most modern schools and ambitions to shape something new in terms of aesthetical value, I am, however convinced that the core of the exhibition in a joyful way will show that our art industry takes a most prominent place not only here at home but also on the world market. (SvD, 17.5.1930)

The role of the King was to be the symbol of Sweden, not to take part in a cultural debate. The existing tensions within Swedish art and architectural circles would surface on the pages of the daily press quite soon as the summer advanced. It was a debate that had an elitist and expert oriented dimension on the one hand and a popular dimension on the other hand. It is obvious that there was no unanimous acceptance of the new functionalist program, and the apologists and propagators of these ideas were acutely aware of this.

The opposition within the art and architectural field clearly manifested itself within the public debate. Many in the older generation could not accept the exhibition, and the popular author and artist Albert Engström (1869–1940) is credited for having said that this all reminded him of things he had seen in Moscow in the early twenties (Pred 1995: 111). While Engström represented a cultural and intel-

lectual past that was now fading in Stockholm, the perhaps most prominent and persistent domestic critic was the furniture designer Carl Malmsten, also a member of *Svenska slöjdföreningen*. Malmsten (1888–1972) was primarily critical about the promotion of industrially produced goods at the expense of handicraft tradition. He was of the same generation as Paulsson and Asplund – while many of his fellow combatants, such as sculptors Carl Milles (1875–1955) and Carl Eldh (1873–1954), as well as architect Ragnar Östberg (1866–1945), belonged to an older cohort – so there was no generational gap to explain this divergence in opinion.

For Malmsten, the sell-out of Swedish handicraft tradition in the name of industrialism, functionalism and internationalism was not the right path to take. The exhibition organizers met Malmsten's complains at the planning stage by stating that everything that could be qualified as good quality Swedish handicraft would be at display, "only copies and apparent pastisch works would be excluded. No specific artistic style is to be favoured."<sup>3</sup> (Råberg 1970: 175; Rudberg 1999: 197) This promise on behalf of the organizers was not kept and concessions to the "elitist" arts and crafts movement were minimal. The rumors of programmatic supervision and control of everything from large buildings to small details as merchandise in the vending booths, was apparently more than just rumors and during the summer the conservative daily *Svenska Dagbladet* started a campaign of trying to find as many kitsch objects as possible and giving them publicity in the press. They apparently succeeded in their provocations, since the organizers as a consequence of this publicity even sanctioned raids on the fair grounds.

The critique of functionalist architecture continued during the thirties and it is apparent that the exhibition 1930 angered many opponents. The grand revenge of the opponents was symbolically erected on the very same plains of Gärdet in 1938, when *Sjöhistoriska museet* ["The Maritime Museum"] was inaugurated. The building designed by Ragnar Östberg, the architect of the Stockholm City Hall, represented a neo-classical style that had been prevalent in the 1920's. The building even flirted with the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Gustavian style, since the stern piece of *Amphion*, the pleasure and command vessel of Gustavus III was to have a central place in the building. The museum project was only possible with the generous donation by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation. The only conditions the donors set for the Swedish state was that the building was not to be designed in a functionalistic style, which obviously caused a great uproar among the leading functionalist architects (Cornell 1965: 24).

### ***Svea Rike: Past, Present and Future Tense***

However, despite the shock value of *Acceptera* and the *funkis* modernity on display at the Stockholm Exhibition, the organizers did make an attempt to bridge the rift between the past and the present, between new and old: The *Svea Rike* exposi-

tion gives us an insight into how modernity coped with history when aggressively forging a new ideology in Sweden in 1930. This exhibition section has been thoroughly examined by both Annika Alzén (2002) and Petter Tistedt (2005) and the idea of dealing with *Svea Rike* here is to examine it as the only historical element in the Exhibition.

Even though the organizers frequently underlined the unofficial character of *Svea Rike*, it is clear that it had an undoubtedly official character bearing the name of the realm and posing the official coat of arms at the entrance (Tistedt 2005: 26). The Crown Prince was honorary president of the Exhibition Committee and as mentioned earlier the entire event had been opened by the King, who seemed especially pleased with this part of the Exhibition, according to the conservative press (SvD, 17.5.1930). *Svea Rike* (hereafter referred to as: *SR*) combined history with current statistics and racial anthropology, and a grand teleological interpretation of the current state of affairs and the potential of future Sweden was thus given historical depth. The section was predominantly thus a presentation of current statistics, a kind of learn-to-love-your-country's-statistic exposition in the name of scientific rationality that was so much a part of the dominating modernity discourse at the exhibition.

The separate, obviously functionalist style, building hosted a section where great efforts had been made to visualize statistics on Sweden in an appealing manner for the great public. However, history had its role in this setting, more precisely in the entrance hall where a set of posters visualized the great past of the Swedes. It started with, "how Sweden arose from the cold and darkness of the Ice Age more than 10 000 years ago [...] that was the beginning of the Swedish Realm's drama." (*SR*: 7) A little bit further a chronological exposé of high visual ambitions, presented historical persons, buildings, documents etc. from medieval time onwards. This was a more traditional way of packing historical knowledge as part of national education. The great kings from Gustavus Vasa and Gustavus II Adolphus to the scientists Carl Linnaeus and Olof Rudbeck were present in this quite conventional presentation.

The initial text for the *Svea Rike* exhibition, written by journalist Ludvig "Lubbe" Nordström, is very explicit in its objectifying of Sweden's past as a tool for future direction.<sup>4</sup> These 10 000 years had been a process leading to a national unit that had strived and fought for its existence. As a northern European country it possessed the tradition of antiquity and, "250 years ago it was the leading power between The Arctic Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, the great Russian-Siberian tundra belt and Europe, the centre of culture." (*SR*: 7) However, the drama was still continuing, something Nordström wanted to be sure that the spectator understood and took to his and her heart: "And now? The Swedish Realm as a great power ended 200 years ago, but during the last 100 years its economical power has slowly gained. Sweden is a leading industrial country." (*SR*: 7) History had proven that Sweden could not just survive, but also achieve a great position internationally.

This was the challenge now facing the Swedes. The Swedish Realm was now in a process of change. This process of industrialization, urbanization and internationalization – in short modernization – put new demands on society and its members. What was needed in this new era was an “intellectually trained and morally mature people” as “the main capital of the Swedish Realm. School will be the steady foundation of the factory Sweden.” (SR: 7) Nordström’s rhetoric is ambiguous. He speaks about the “factory Sweden” in the purest *Acceptera* style, but at the same time as the exposition itself is called *Svea Rike* – The Swedish Realm. The first term is extreme in its futuristic proclamation, while the latter embodies all the traditions that the coat of arms *Tre Kronor* stood for as it embellished the functionalist façade of the *Svea Rike* building. Certainly, however, it was Nordström’s as well as the Exhibition organizers overall aim to bridge the apparent opposition between exactly these two symbolic worlds by showing how the pride of past glory on the battlefield could be sublimated into belief in a new, modern and productive Sweden.

In many provincial newspapers this section attracted the most unanimous praise. Maybe it was the section easiest to grasp, and thus the most nationalistic in a traditional and “understandable” sense (Pred 1995; Tistedt 2005: 56–57). Obviously this enthusiasm can be read as a subtle articulation of an ambiguity towards the massive functionalist shock that the rest of the Exhibition constituted. However, the presence of a history section to our mind had a role to play in the modernist shock treatment: The great moments and persons in Swedish history tied together old and new, and helped to nationalize the next step that was now to be taken in “the drama of the Swedish Realm”. Those who wanted the series of successful events in Sweden’s national history to continue had to accept the new functionalist program for the sake of the nation and for the sake of him- or herself. Only through accepting modernity could Sweden become great again. Nationalism hence equaled modernism, and *vice versa*.

Interestingly, this initial part of *Svea Rike*, was a combination of history and racial anthropology – Historiska fotomontaget och rasbiologiska avdelningen [“Historical Photographical Montage and the Race Biology Section”]. (SR: 6) This accentuates – besides the obvious sign of the times – once again the focus on the nation as a collective through the individuals, each important for the total quality of the nation. The entire exposition was a message to the individual Swede, and here again the rhetoric is quite straight forward. A set of “six Swedish S” was presented as typical of the Swedish character: “*självständighet* [“independence”], *skarpsynthet* [“sharp-sightedness”], *storsinthet* [“generosity”], *sparsamhet* [“thriftiness”], *stolthet* [“pride”] and *ståndskänsla inför världen* [“sovereignty against the world”]” (Alzén 2002: 3). All statistics presented served the purpose of showing how Sweden was developing and becoming part of, “A-Europe or the industrial Europe, the nucleus of the world.”<sup>5</sup> This could be explained by history, where “war had given him [the Swede] organization, science given him tools, and

from these industry evolved, that finally brought him out in the sun among the great nations of culture.” (SR: 7–8) Nordström used a metaphor of how ice was part of the soul of the Swede, thus explaining why the Swedish striving towards the warmth of the sun had always been the objective. History is described as a continuing progression, a constant drive for reaching the highest level of civilisation and wealth. And what else would have been more natural for a country that possessed such a high degree of pure Nordic-Germanic race types among its population.

The section for race biology was produced by Herman Lundborg, head of the Swedish Institute for racial biology founded in Uppsala 1921, *Rasbiologiska institutet* [“Institute of Race Biology”]. Here a map of Sweden was sectioned showing the predominance of the “Nordic” (Aryan) racial type in the country. The differing types presented as constituting part of the Swedish racial blend were the “Swedish Vallons, the East-Baltic Race (‘Finns’) and Lapps.” (SR: 21) The people was indeed seen as “the main capital” in the quest for national success, or as Lundborg had written some years earlier: “A populace material of good racial faculties is the highest asset of a country.” (Lundborg 1925: 8) Even though it is not expressed, it becomes quite clear that the ideal Swede would be of Nordic race.

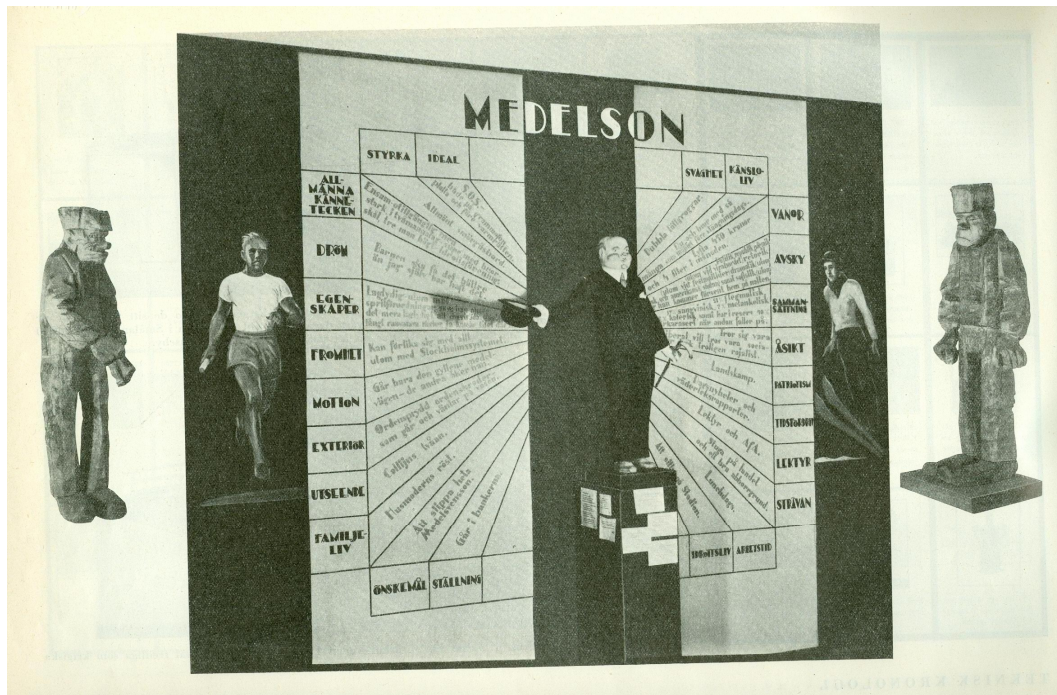
### **Medelson: Modernity as Bodily Exercise**

However, this serene and nationalistic pathos together with the seriousness of presenting scientific data needed some lighter touch in order not to bore the public. *Homo ludens* was thus also let in, but even in the playful presentation of *Medelson* – the average middle-aged Swedish man – there was an underlying serious message. The reshaping of both body and mind was the underlying purpose of this seemingly humorous part of *Svea Rike*. The rotund and jovial figure of Medelson is somewhat awkwardly placed on a pedestal. Behind him a chart of his true character and opinions is presented as a circular diagram. He is a man who is content and do not want change. He likes the way things are, does not particularly fancy doing too much sports, eats and drinks a little bit too much, but generally he is a nice chap. On both sides of the diagram two sporting figures, a track runner and a cross country skier respectively, hint at how a modern and new human being was to look like. At the most extreme is additionally added two images of two small carved wood figures by the popular and famous folk artist Döderhultarn. These were rural archetype men, here symbolizing the past and undeveloped B-Europe.

Set between the scruffy figures of *forn-Sverige*, and the high-performance sportsmen-citizens of *nu-Sverige*, Medelson is a not yet fulfilled version of the cultural (r-)evolution. An individual too content and unwilling to stretch his capacities to the full, is not a vital part of the collective work towards the fulfillment of a trimmed nation. Medelson must change, but he must also understand why he



has to conform for the sake on the Swedish Realm, that is now taking a giant leap in order to become a beacon for modernity in the world. A-Sweden in A-Europe cannot afford Medelson, who probably liked his old fluffy armchair just as much as the later Archie Bunker did in the 1970s American sitcom, to be too comfortable in his lifestyle. Medelson has to get in shape, do sports, eat less, drink less, and become a better citizen in order to fulfill his part of the deal.



As we can see, not only the those who did not conform to statistical norms – whichever “race” they belonged to – would need to conform to a new reality and accept a stricter regime in order to improve themselves in the interest of the Swedish Realm. Also, the statistically speaking “normal” Swedish man had to do his part of the job. He could not rely upon his very normalcy to make him exempt from the future drive of national/rational modern project as outlined at the Stockholm Exhibition and the path of the past as illustrated in the *Svea Rike* exhibit.

This “ideology” of functionalism relied upon two basic concepts, as Björn Linn has pointed out: The whole functionalist system of a typologization of the dimensions, demands, and needs of individual human life hinged upon the concept of “the average human,” *l’homme moyen*, as formulated by Belgian statistician Adolphe Quételet (1796–1874). The other concept concerned optimal efficiency in industrial production processes, as pioneered by Frederick W. Taylor (1856–1915). From these two sources, Linn argues, the idea that housing and living should be reorganized as the frames around a rationalized process of household work, rather than around social customs and practices of the past. In a parallel development, architects increasingly redefined themselves as engineers, becoming technicians rather than artists (Sandström 1989: 55; Zunz 1998).



But this reformulation also allowed for another very important step. The functionalist could also begin to take the step from collecting and analyzing facts about society, to begin to actively try to change and shape that society. Functionalism, in the national Swedish rendition as put on display in the Exhibition and in *Acceptera* presented two fix points for such a change: First, there was the idea of the average human – Medelson – which could be used to identify similarity as well as difference in a population and hence be used to inculcate a need for change. Second, there was the idea of a close connection between an unstoppable modernity which goes across all lands and from which there is no escape on the one hand, and a national community which cannot be denied, on the other.

Previously, modernity and modernism had largely been presented in Sweden as international in origin and alien in temperament. Numerous relatively negative accounts of modernity had dominated the public opinion up to this point, not the least since modernity was closely connected with the “cutthroat capitalism” and cultural leveling primarily symbolized by the great melting pot on the other side of the Atlantic where so many Swedes had gone (Alm 2002). Now, however, through the careful presentation of their arguments at the Stockholm Exhibition, the functionalist architects and their supporters among the cultural radicals across the political spectrum could launch modernity as not only the only way forward for Sweden, but also as the only truly Swedish way forward. Three years later, they would have the opportunity to present this image abroad, at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1933–1934.

### **Business and Progressivism – The Chicago Exhibition 1933–1934**

A little while ago this site was placid lake. Now, shimmering beside the water, a dream city is risen. It lights the sky with splendor, yet soon will disappear and be merely memory. [...] As two partners might clasp hands, Chicago’s growth and the growth of science and industry have been united during this most amazing century.

(Chicago. A Century of Progress [CCP], 1934)

Since its founding in 1833 as a frontier outpost, Chicago had developed into one of North America’s biggest urban and industrial centers by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chicago had become *the* archetypical modern metropolis, often depicted in films and books. To Americans and Europeans alike, Chicago embodied the promise and the peril of American life perhaps more than any other city at the time. Apart from celebrating the century which had passed since Chicago’s founding, the more wide-ranging goal of this massive investment in the midst of the Great Depression can be gauged from the theme of the fair: technical innovation and progress.

Progress had long been part of American identity. As such, it had been closely connected to the other core values of American civilization, such as competition, creativity, and individualism, especially in the field of business and entrepreneurship.

In the mid-1930s, however, this identification appeared questionable. Not only had the Great Depression brought progress to halt. It had also spawned a seed of doubt as to whether capitalism, liberalism, and individualism – core American values – were up to the test as the USA had reached its geographical limit and no longer seemed able to buy off its growing social problems by expansion to the west. Furthermore, modern industry and advanced technology, which had for some time been positively coded as part of American self-identification, appeared more nefarious as capitalism swung to an all-time low while highly technology-dependent sectors of the economy laid off workers in masses. Anti-modernism, anti-capitalism, and technology critique – since long predominantly European specialties, which played a mostly aesthetic role in American intellectual debate – begun to spread as Americans found themselves increasingly confused as to who they were and what kind of society they lived in (Pells 1973).

The organizers of the Chicago's Centennial celebration – mostly business interests and industrialists – stated that the World's Fair should largely in response to this sense of disorientation “help the American people to understand themselves, and to make clear to the coming generation the forces which have built this nation.” (CCP) In other words, the backers of the exposition sought to defend the existing order despite its many recent failures with references to the history of American progress, pointing to how American industry and “American civilization” had overcome adverse situations before.

In order to bring this point across, the organizers commissioned noted progressive historian Charles A. Beard (1874–1948) to write a piece on the concept of progress in light of the contemporary calamities and to connect it to the theme of the exposition (Beard 1932). Beard championed a rather unsentimental view of history (and history-writing) as a sociopolitical instrument for the change of the present in the service of the future (Beard & Beard 1927). For example, the Bolsheviks had shown, Beard told Raymond Fosdick already in 1922:

...that you can have the power of government – the symbols of sovereignty – and have nothing but dust and ashes. The sword won't do the job any more. The social engineer is the fellow. The old talk about sovereignty, rights of man, dictatorship of the proletariat, triumphant democracy and the like is pure bunk. It will not run trains or weave cloth or hold society together.

(Hofstadter 1968; Nore 1983: 93)

Technology would be the only way forward towards the future, Beard concluded in his commissioned work for the World's Fair. By subscribing to this view and making it the official ideology of the World's Fair, the organizers not only sought to attract business interests. They also vied for support among the academic community (where Beard was a respected name) for a rallying cry to save traditional American values of thrift, industry, and innovation at a time when the nation turned against its past identity of modernity and progress.

The purpose of American business interests organizing the great Chicago Exposition was – among other things – to show that business could operate the econo-

my just as efficiently during the present crisis as it had managed to do earlier. The crucial task was therefore to repair the broken links between technology and industry and between science and capitalism in order to rekindle the belief in progress in a time of crisis (Marklund 2008). However, words alone would hardly suffice in convincing the American public about the inherent value of capitalism in the midst of the Great Depression. Action and example would be required.

### **“Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms”**

Action and example is exactly what the Chicago exposition would put on offer to the 40 million or so visitors who gathered at the gay fairgrounds next to Lake Michigan for two summers in a row during the otherwise somber 1930s (Rydell 1993; Rydell & Schiavo 2010).

The motto of the Exposition was summarized in the sentence “Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms.” This motto clearly outlined the role of these three elements, and requires little interpretation: Science would ask the crucial questions about “know what,” industry would provide the “know how” while citizens would be happy to tag along as consumers.

The so-called “Hall of Science” was at the heart of A Century of Progress. The building itself contained the message of modernity as the official program encouraged visitors to consider that it had been erected on “man-made land – a creation of engineering science.” (CCP: 26–27) The architectural commission in charge of the Exposition stated that it would be unfitting for the World’s Fair celebrating the progress of the past century “to hark back to antique times and house itself in the traditional manner in buildings copied from ancient Greek temples and the Roman Forum.” This temple of science did not “seek to veil itself in the aroma of ancient history,” as “the beauty of the new architecture is peculiar to itself,” as the Official Guidebook of the World’s Fair declared (CCP: 27).

In conjunction with the Hall of Science visitors also could find the “Hall of Social Science,” exhibiting a wide variety of topics as described in the official guidebook to the exposition (CCP: 93). All these seemingly diverse exhibits were subjected to one overarching theme: “The struggle of knowledge to bring order to social life.” (CCP: 91) Order was apparently an undisputed good in this rendition of modernity. Again and again, the theme of knowledge and order was interwoven with the message that, despite the current setback, social life had made great progress during the past century, not the least if the visitor cared to study the comparison between “old inhuman laws” of the past with the social legislation and “community-planning” of the present on display at the World’s Fair (CCP: 91).

The diversity and inequality of American life presented a difficult problem for the planners of A Century of Progress. They solved it by directing attention to the progress of social welfare and philanthropy and obscuring its exclusions. African-

Americans, for example, were largely excluded from the fairgrounds, except as functionaries, which makes the “Special research at the World’s Fair to establish standards of the American type” an interesting example of racial coding of modern America. The organizers of the fair had contacted the Harvard Anthropometric Laboratory to set up a measuring station where, according to the Official Guidebook, “many thousands of visitors to the exhibit have been weighed, measured, tested and questioned,” turning cheerfully to the reader and suggesting that “You may stop and have your record taken.” (*CCP*: 94) The results of this research would naturally conclude that the “American type” was predominantly white.

Originally, the intention had been to include a far more ambitious social science exhibit. Sociologist Howard W. Odum (1884–1954) of University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, had been contacted by the fair organizers to demonstrate the capacity of modern American social science to provide guidance and control in an era of crisis, just as objectively and efficiently as any natural science. However, despite Odum’s network of contacts, the North Carolina professor failed to secure the necessary funds from American business and research foundations. These investors were generally skeptical of the link between social science and social reform. They remained more convinced by the more material achievements of “pure science,” e.g., mathematics, chemistry, and physics – especially as demonstrated by industry through its production of consumer goods (Jordan 1994: 89).

Perhaps this connection between material advance, modern science, and technological prowess was nowhere as clear as in the presentation of “modern homes” as markers of progress. The organizers did not balk at drawing explicit comparisons with Native American dwellings or African huts in order to make their point (*CCP*: 16). Here, it was easy to demonstrate in concrete and practical terms the advantages of modern science in providing cheaper, cleaner, and more comfortable housing than in the past. While not available to all just yet, the Home and Industrial Arts Group presented an impressive view into the modern way of life in the modern home (*CCP*: 127).

In the so-called Home Planning Hall, the visitors could experience how these ideas could be brought to “direct application to the problems and wishes of modern home planners.” (*CCP*: 133) This is also where the Swedish contribution would make its mark on the Chicago World’s Fair. In the words of the Official Guidebook for 1933, the Swedish pavilion exemplified not only an “unique architecture” – “just two boxes,” someone called it – but also “the revival of home industries under the lash of economic necessity.” The next year, in 1934, the Swedish contribution – with an extensive exhibit prepared by the Swedish Arts and Crafts Association, which had been instrumental in the Stockholm Exhibition four years ago – had not changed substantially. Yet, the American reception of the Swedish exhibit contained a new twist, noting both the practicality and the “distinctive” Swedishness of the Swedish designer objects (*CCP*: 22).

The Swedish exhibit at the World's Fair placed the emphasis upon the Swedish manufacturing industry and its products rather than upon any particular Swedish social legislation or political reform when promoting the vision of Sweden as a modern nation. Due to the close collaboration between artists, industry, and labor, Swedish manufacturers could show that modern technology did not necessarily have to imperil either the artistry or the quality of the products. Thus, modernity and nationality could be merged in and through everyday objects.

In the case of American industry, "the science exhibits were intended to exemplify 'the idea of scientific and industrial unity' and to inject 'system and order' into the exposition and, by extension, into American culture as a whole" as noted by historian Robert W. Rydell (1993; see also Jordan 1994: 89). While the Swedish backers of modernism came up against the challenge of marrying nationalism with rationalism in order to make modern aesthetics palatable to a traditionalistic majority, the American proponents were more concerned with the task of combining industry with science in order to defend modern capitalism in the eyes of a more radicalized American working class.

This tension came to the fore a few years later, in 1938, as the ten-mile-long preview parade of the 1939–1940 New York World's Fair, was forced to obey traffic signals at the intersection of Thirteenth Street and Seventh Avenue in downtown Manhattan while one hundred thousand participants in the May Day parade cut across its path. The May Day parade highlighted what the world's fair organizers – many of whom had been instrumental in arranging the Chicago Exposition a few years earlier – already knew, namely that they could not assume mass support for their vision of the world of tomorrow. In fact, as Rydell has keenly observed, the parade was part of the job of "selling the Fair," and this job was bound up, with "the task of selling Americans on the idea that the vision of the future projected at the fairs was worth pursuing" (Rydell 1993: 116).

## Conclusion

Coming to an end, it is time to summarize the (dis)similarities between the experience of combining a modern self-identity with a national self-identity in the Stockholm and Chicago exhibitions, respectively. The differences are considerable, and serve to bring important characteristics of both these events and the times they reflect into the light: In Chicago, for example, both business interests and progressives within social science participated, but business interests clearly dominated and consumerism prevailed above any overt calls for social reform. In Stockholm, by contrast, architects and cultural radicals forged a tight-knit community whose political message could be neatly packaged in harmless propagation of new styles of housing. Perhaps this may have been a contributing factor to why the modernistic style in itself became so central in the critique of the opponents.

Indeed, in Stockholm, the opposition to modernism seems to have been primarily based on the grounds of tradition and conservatism among established social elites, yet it was directed at modernism because of its aesthetic, rather than political radicalism. In Chicago, by contrast, the skepticism towards modernism rather emanated from public opinion on the grounds of economical and moral issues, due to the strong association between modernity on the one hand and capitalism and industrialism on the other. The Chicago Exposition in fact amounted to an attempt by business and capital to take back the good will generated by the popularity of machinery and engineering triumphs, successes which stood in glaring contrast to the dismal prospects of American economy.

While the World's Fair in Chicago sought to reestablish the traditional American association between the American nation and modernity, the Stockholm Exhibition, by contrast, strove to recast the Swedish past in a modernist form, thus establishing a rather new link between modernity and nationhood. Here, however, the Swedish modernists could draw upon long-standing, widely shared, and safe associations between "Nordicity" and various modernist virtues, such as order, pragmatism, and thrift. Indeed, this type of merging Nordic nationhood with modernism was not unique to Sweden, but it took different forms in different Nordic countries, as Kazimierz Musiał has shown (Musiał 2002).

There are several similarities as well. Despite the optimistic tone set in the promotional texts produced in support of both these exhibitions, there is a worry uniting the optimists: Both Lubbe Nordström and Charles Beard come across as convinced that the world of tomorrow would become a better place than the world of yesterday. Yet, both agree that this would not happen automatically. Effort, on the part of business, citizenry, and government would be required if modernity would not self-combust. "Man" – whether the average "American type" or the jovial Medelson, to say nothing about the Roma and Sami of Sweden or the African-Americans or Native Americans of the USA – would not only have to "accept" the world of tomorrow as a given fact already today. They would also have to conform to modern "normalcy" as identified and promoted by Swedish functionalist architects just as well as by American progressive industrialists – all in their own interest, of course.

The planners of the Stockholm Exhibition went to great lengths to emphasize the continuity between the Swedishness of the past with the Swedish community of the future, by using a narrative which compared past achievements on the European battlefield with present day victories on the global market – and hopefully future ones, too. Here, the backers of modernism could rely upon the strong notion of consensus as identified by Stenius (1997) above about reaching modernity together – i.e., Medelson had to get fit and leave his semi-decadent bourgeoisie habits behind him.

Similarly, the backers of the Chicago Exposition signaled economically determined path towards the American community of the future. Rather than promising



some emotional or political bond or community for the future (even though the ideals of Americanization of the immigrant and the identification of the American type may indicate otherwise) their message was firmly based in the promise of future consumerism: American science would find the means, American industry would implement the findings, and Americans would end up enjoying the fruit of both – as consumers – if they only remained true to American values of individualism, innovation, and perseverance. In other words, consumerism would provide Americans with community, rather than any program of political or social reform. This presupposition was of course put at risk when prosperity came under threat. This is where science and technology – as proverbially American values and virtues – could be harnessed in the interest of American civilization.

To some extent, statistics and race could be used as a point of reference for modernity and normalcy in Sweden with its homogeneous population. In the USA, the planners of the World Fair rather used the desire of prosperity and higher living standards – which could be assumed to be largely similar across a very wide spectrum of people – primarily due to its more heterogeneous demography. Swedes could easier accept the notion of a modernistic future through references with the perceived community of a familiar past, while Americans could easier accept the notion of a capitalist present through references to a prosperous future of consumerism.

We have here tried to point to the role of exhibitions in showcasing society and promoting visions of the past, present, and future in an accessible way through the museum, the exposition, and the observatory gaze. For all their differences, we hope that this brief survey of the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 and *A Century of Progress* International Exposition in Chicago in 1933–1934 can serve to illustrate the power of the modern exhibition – with its dioramas, its statistics, its cult of science, and its usage of visual presentation – in bringing home the quintessentially modern paradox in conforming to the norm in the interest of liberty and in accepting the given for the sake of change.

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## Notes

- 1 Ulf Zander has argued that modernity and tradition must be understood as complementary concepts, while Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren have pointed to the continuity between bourgeois modernity and progressive modernity. See Ulf Zander (2001): *Fornstora dar, moderna tider. Bruk av och debatter om svensk historia från sekelskifte till sekelskifte*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press; Jonas Frykman & Orvar Löfgren (1979): *Den kultiverade människan*, Lund: Liber Läromedel; and Martin Wiklund (2006): *I det modernas landskap: historisk orientering och kritiska berättelser om det moderna Sverige mellan 1960 och 1990*, Stockholm: Symposion, pp. 19, 78.
- 2 Naturally, many visitors made repeated visits. Nevertheless, 4 million visitors is a quite impressive figure considering that the total population of Sweden in December 31, 1930 reached a mere 6,142,191 (SCB, 1992). It should also be mentioned that the Exhibition attracted some minor numbers of foreign visitors; from Finland came 18 000; from Poland 3000; from Estonia and Lithuania 2000–3000, and from the rest of Europe 1000 visitors. See also Eva Rudberg (1999): *The Stockholm Exhibition 1930. Modernism's Breakthrough in Sweden*, Stockholm: Stockholmia förlag, p. 191.
- 3 Minutes from the executive committee (*Verkställande utskottets protokoll 24*) 1929.09.04. Stockholm Municipal Archive: Svenska Slöjdföreningen.
- 4 Nordström was instrumental in combining rural traditions and modernity in Swedish intellectual life during the 1920's and 1930's. He embodied a belief in Sweden's future, even if his journalistic reports also exposed misery and problems especially in rural Sweden. He is best known for his series of radio programs in 1938 on social misery, which were later published as a book, *Lort-Sverige* (1938). His ability to combine simple and practical questions of dwelling and comfort with bigger national issues of politics, made him central in the Swedish "modernity project".
- 5 Here, we can directly observe how the worldview of the *Acceptera* authors influenced the drafters of the *Svea Rike* exhibition. *SR*, p. 8.

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## Swedish Military Bases of the Cold War: The Making of a New Cultural Heritage

By Per Strömberg

### Abstract

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union completely transformed the military-political situation in the Nordic countries. The movement from invasion defence to input defence in Sweden has made many of the subterranean modern fortresses and permanent defence systems of the Cold War unnecessary. The current problem is what the administration authorities will do with the superfluous military buildings: let them fall into decay, preserve or reuse them – and for what purpose?

The aim of this article is to describe and analyze the cultural as well as spatial foundation of a new genre of heritage industry in Sweden – the cultural heritage of the Cold War – whose value is negotiated through a range of processes by the different stakeholders involved – emotional, social and cultural processes as well as legal and economic processes. The subterranean fortresses of Hemsö and Aspö are used as empirical case studies in the article. They both describe the making of a cultural heritage and illustrate the problems related to the ambitions of converting cultural heritage into tourist attractions.

One of the conclusions is that the previous making of the industrial cultural heritage in the 1980s and 1990s has many things in common with the one of the Cold War. The “post-military” landscape of bunkers and rusting barbed wires is regarded with the same romanticism and with similar preservation ideologies and economic interests as the post-industrial landscape was earlier. Similar negotiation issues appear, and these negotiations are carried out by similar stakeholders. The difference is that the military culture heritage of the Cold War was developed through a deeply centralized selection process directed by administration authorities, but was also influenced by certain persuasion campaigns and preservation actions made by local stakeholders such as retired officers and municipality administrations.

**Keywords:** The Cold War, cultural heritage, tourist attractions, military bases, post-military society, regional development, Sweden

## Introduction

The fall of the Berlin wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union totally changed the military-strategic situation in the Nordic countries during the beginning of the 1990s. The military threat has been substantially revised. Today, defence systems such as that in Sweden require a large degree of unpredictability and mobility. Subsequently, the reorganization from invasion defence to input defence has made many of the modern subterranean fortresses and fixed defence systems of the Cold War era obsolete. Nevertheless, military bases are historical monuments and important keys to understanding the development of society during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The question is what the armed forces and the state administration will do with this diversity of superfluous military buildings – will they allow them to lapse into complete disuse, or, preserve and reuse them, and if so, to what purpose and for what purposes?

This paper attempts to describe and analyze the foundation of an entirely new genre of cultural heritage in Sweden, the cultural heritage of the Cold War, with its value negotiated and regulated through a range of processes in practice by the different stakeholders involved, including emotional, social and cultural processes as well as legal and economic processes. The study is based on two case studies, one on the coastal artillery fortresses at *Hemsö* (Härnösand), and the other on *Aspö* (Karlskrona). Both cases study the making of a cultural heritage and illustrate the problems related to the ambitions of converting the cultural heritage into tourist attractions.

The study shows that the development of a tourist attraction both demands a blessing from culture heritage institutions, and from supportive local initiatives. Regarding the heritage of the Cold War, there is a common two-step-change based on an authorized heritage discourse; first, from military building to heritage – a conversion process which implies *identification*, *selection* and *declaration* – and secondly, from heritage to attraction – a *valorization* process which requires a local support both from authorities and private initiatives.

I argue that the preceding and analogous making of the industrial culture heritage in the 1980s and 1990s has many things in common with that of the Cold War. The “post-military” landscape of bunkers and rusting barbed wires is regarded with the same romanticism and with similar preservation ideologies and interests as the post-industrial landscape earlier was. Similar negotiation issues appear, and these negotiations are put forth by similar stakeholders. The main difference is that the military culture heritage of the Cold War was developed through a deeply centralized process directed by administration authorities, but it was also influenced by preservation campaigns on the part of local stakeholders.

The military landscape and the material culture of the Cold War could be a valuable contribution to cultural heritage tourism in terms of education and experiences. But why should one tell the story about the war that never came, repre-



sented with military structures that were never supposed to be seen, of which many have already been dismantled in silence?

## Research on the Cold War

The *Cold War* is the name of the conflict between Western powers, mainly the U.S. and former communist countries, primarily the Soviet Union, during the post-war period from 1946/47 to 1989/91. The research focus in this article is, however, the post-Cold War period. Research on the Cold War has recently included new perspectives and foci. Historical analysis of military strategies and foreign policy between the great powers still dominate the research field on the Cold War. On the international level, there is a coordination project based in Zürich, the *Parallel History Project*, which gathers researchers from various countries in primarily North America and Europe, who study different aspects of the Cold War with a main focus on NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In the Scandinavian countries, there are several ongoing research projects which aim to record and analyze how small European countries politically navigated on this political field during the Cold War; for example, the Swedish research program is *Defence and the Cold War* (FOKK) at the National Defence College, of which Thomas Roth's *Försvar för folkhem och fosterland* (2007) are one publication related to this program.

To some extent, the ending of the Cold War marked a complementary turn to cultural studies in Cold War research with a greater focus on ideas, norms and cultures (See: Boym 1995; Cronqvist 2004; Salomon, Larsson & Arvidsson 2004; Miyoshi Jager & Mittner 2007). Interestingly, the cultural perspective was adopted early on by the discipline of archaeology, especially concerning the material culture of the Cold War. The anthology *Matériel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth-century Conflict* (Beck, Johnson & Schofield 2002) and *A Fearsome Heritage* (ed. Schofield & Cocroft 2007) are two important examples of this tendency. The contributors of the latter book focus on the material culture of the Cold War. They emphasize the challenges of interpretation, from the Berlin Wall to the remains of an abandoned launch ramp for nuclear missiles in the UK. A similar investigation on former Soviet nuclear missile sites in Cuba was carried out by a Swedish-Cuban research team, lead by Mats Burström (Burström et al. 2009).

There are also examples of ethnographic contributions which highlight the transition processes in post-Cold War society, such as the ongoing PhD-project of Beate Feldmann on the transformation and remembrance of garrison towns in the Baltic Sea Area. However, there are few scholars who have described the institutional founding of the Cold War heritage in a retro-perspective. One example is *Modern Military Matters* (2006), in which the archaeologist John Schofield discusses the issue and gives a short summary of the making of the Cold War heri-

tage in Britain. Another example from the Swedish context is a short review of the heritage process written by Ingela Andersson & Anders Bodin (2008).

In sum, while there is an extensive research on the Cold War, there is still a lack of retro-perspective and reflexive studies of cultural analysis on the post-Cold War period. Therefore, this paper is intended to be a contribution to the international discussion. It is based on the author's research report carried out in 2009, *Kalla krigets försvarsanläggningar* which describes the transformation process of Swedish Defence holdings into cultural heritage and tourist attractions.<sup>1</sup> This comparative case study was empirically based on observations and interviews with the different stakeholders, but also, literature and archive studies.

## Theoretical Approach

Cultural analysis is the main method applied in this paper in order to understand the transformation process from operative defence building to cultural heritage and tourist attraction. I will focus on the different conceptualization processes – cultural, emotional and social processes as well as legal and economic processes – which define and redefine the various functions of military structures. In this paper, the word *process* is not just considered to be a period of time in which something substantially changes. A process also requires stability. I choose to regard processes as *negotiations* in which change stands in relation to a continuum, i.e. conditions that are stable, conceived of as persistent and taken for granted.

This theoretical and somewhat postmodern point of view coincides with other scholars in the field of cultural heritage (Harvey 2001; Smith 2006). Laurajane Smith, for example, suggests heritage is a cultural process that “engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and the sites themselves are tools that can facilitate, but are not necessary vital for, this process” (Smith 2006: 44). Smith not only considers heritage as a process, but also as a set of practices which form an *authorized heritage discourse*. These practices, as well as the meaning of the material “things” of heritage, are constituted by the discourses that simultaneously reflect these practices while also constructing them (Smith 2006: 12-3, 29). Basically, it is through such discourse that the Cold War is formed and regulated as a heritage by experts and institutions. This study more or less confirms the structuring theory suggested by Smith.

An additional theoretical problem is how to consider spatiality in view of this transformation process. The French sociologist Henri Lefebvre has analyzed the relation between space and social life. His thesis is that (*social*) *space is a (social) production*. This theoretical relation is also appropriate for this study. For example, I believe that the shift of function of military facilities is a shift in people's (social) relation to and within that space. Social space can be considered to be a result of a social practice that is manifested at three levels and related to one an-

other, (1) how people experience space by involving collective symbols, bodily perceptions, and resistance to dominant practices (lived space), (2) how people consider space, perform, create routines, possess it and divide it into (social) zones (perceived space), and (3) how the stakeholders – such as architects and urban planners – articulate and intellectually conceptualise space as an abstract notion (conceived space) (Lefebvre 1991: 26, 33, 38-9).

In view of the theories of Lefebvre, there are two aspects of the term *conceptualization* which are relevant to this study. They are related to the way space and locations are taken into possession. One aspect refers to the legal framework that defines the use of a military building. When a building is redefined as a cultural heritage, it implies a legal shift which changes the overall conditions of using the building. The second aspect concerns the social and cultural relations within the former military facilities, for example, how people act as social and cultural individuals on site.

### **Transition Processes**

The end of the Cold War caused a fundamental revision of Swedish foreign and military defence policy. Resolution of national states, democratization processes, national identity crises, and regional and ethnic conflicts all characterized the political situation in Europe during this time. The military threat during the Cold War – potential nuclear attacks and invasion wars between nations – was no longer a reality. As a result of the political *détente* in northern Europe, Swedish armed forces began an intensive and, for many employees, painful conversion process, known as the LEMO process. The number of units and recruits were more than halved in a period of few years. At the same time, international operations became increasingly important. The earlier invasion defence was replaced by a so-called “network-based input defence” according to new defence decisions.

All European countries were involved in such a transition process after the dissolution of the Warszawa pact. In former communist countries in Central-Eastern Europe, there has been a two-part process: the creation of a national army with a new agenda, and diminishing of its quantity. Its nuclear capacity has been phased out. In the path of this change, there have been limited ambitions to preserve the post-military landscape or to make use of the deserted military bases of the Red Army. Generally, it is considered to be a “negative heritage”<sup>2</sup> in view of its negative connotations, which evoke the repression, militarism and the environmental destruction of the former Soviet domination. In the Baltic States, for example, there are very few examples of preservation actions with focus on the Cold War heritage. The military structures have either been destroyed or deserted, or reused for other purposes or regimes. However, the “Military heritage based tourism”-project in Latvia co-financed by EU (European Green Belt program) is one exception.

In contrast, the heritage process has been less problematic for the West European countries, which were either members of NATO or neutral. In the UK, several research and inventory projects began recording twentieth-century military remains in the 1990s, including the Cold War period. Alongside a greater awareness of twentieth-century military remains, the National Monument Records and locally held Sites and Monuments Records now typically incorporate these sites, embedding them further as a part of Britain's cultural heritage (Schofield 2004: 3-4). Additionally, other European countries have conducted single studies on selected structures, such as the Ijsselline in the Netherlands.

The Cold War heritage is also a heritage of alliances. Therefore, the international connection is as important as the national one. However, the question of ownership might appear to be a problem. Since 1991, the Department of Defence in the US has been engaged in what they call the Legacy Resource Management Program, the stated purpose of which is to "inventory, protect, and conserve the Department of Defence's physical and literary property and relics associated with the origins and development of the Cold War at home and abroad" (Cocroft 2003: 264). The American ambitions to protect their interests abroad have sometimes resulted in disagreements of ownership in foreign countries. For example, in Berlin, the preservation of Cold War icons such as Checkpoint Charlie and the Berlin wall have been disputed (Franzmann 2008: 3).

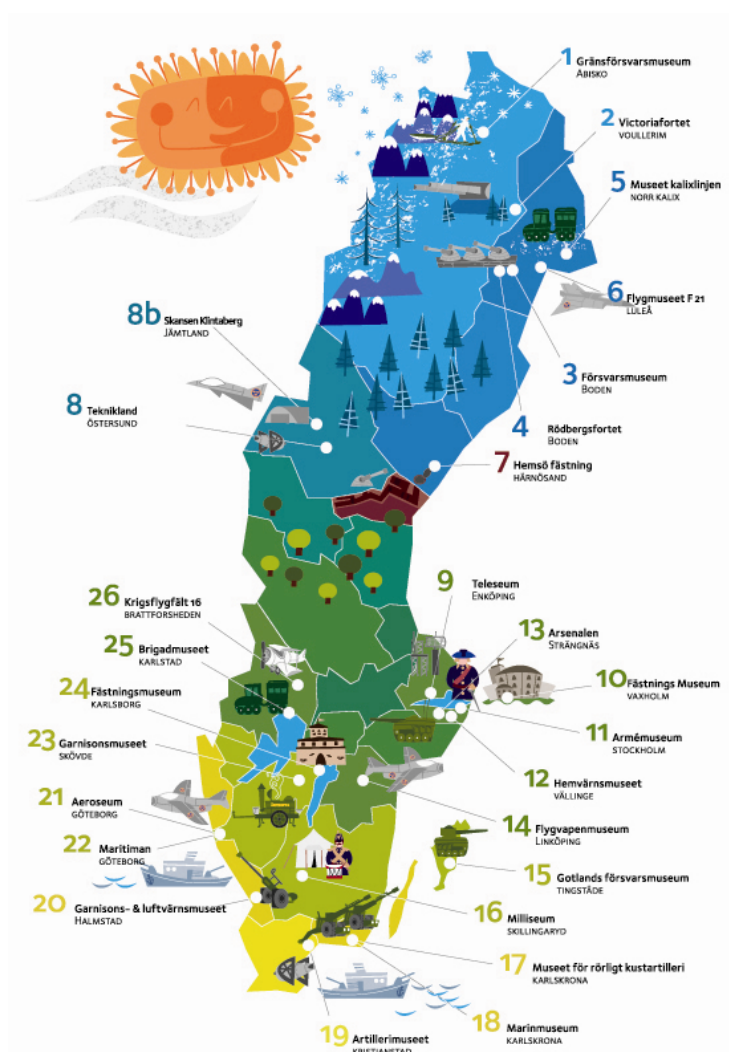
The Scandinavian countries undertook a comparable heritage process concerning their Cold War heritage. The conversion process had a major impact on the fixed fortifications along the extended Scandinavian coast line, basically the coastal artillery, including subterranean bomb shelters, artillery and other weapon systems, lodging barracks, service structures, training establishments, and coastal reconnaissance stations. They were particularly important for the invasion defence during the Cold War. Cocroft suggest a broad definition of Cold War "monuments" which is useful for this article, that is, "structures built, or adapted, to carry out nuclear war between the end of the Second World War and 1989" (Cocroft 2003: 3).

In a Swedish context, the Swedish Fortifications Agency (FORTV) was commissioned to identify which military bases were valuable enough for preservation, early in the 1990s. The aim was to: "from a national perspective, ensure the preservation of representative buildings that are able to demonstrate the development of the art of fortification". The outcome of this commission was a report which had fundamental importance to the next step in the process. The authors note that modern fortifications from the late 1800s to modern times have not received any interest. They stress that these are a forgotten and hidden cultural treasure that must be saved from perishing (*Från Oscar-Fredriksborg till Ersta* 1994: 6).

This investigation formed the basis of the National Heritage Board's (RAÄ) proposal that followed in 1996. The National Heritage Board made a selection of forty items that they felt should be listed as historic buildings, with most of them

from the 1900s. Since then, the government has declared fifteen of these to be of national interest.

Parallel to the phasing-out of fortifications, another institutional restructuring process took place between the Armed Forces and cultural heritage institutions. A workgroup was commissioned to prepare a proposal for a general preservation of the Swedish military heritage, and to find new forms of collaboration. The proposal also included deposited military material. A large number of local military-historical museums were finally reduced to a handful of representative museums as a consequence of the investigation made by the workgroup, which also suggested that the Cold War should be the main theme (*Försvar i förvar* 2005: 5). A network named the Swedish Military Heritage (SMHA) was founded in 2008, and was a joint project of the National Museums of Military History (SFHM) and the National Maritime Museums (SMM).



Map representing the network of military-historical museums facilitated by the Swedish Military Heritage. Source: SMHA.

Hence, the streamlining of the armed forces in the 1990s not only implied a phasing-out of military bases, but also an identity-rated rationalization of the Swedish Defence. The decommissioning of military units led to the dissolution of military regiments, but also, to the dissolution of local military-historical museums. Before the restructuring, local military museums – often associated with military units – were primarily museums *for* the military. Since then, they have undergone an “evolutionary process of military-historical museums” of which only a few have been upgraded to professional museums. After this streamlining, the remaining military museums changed character, and became more professionalized and more focused on cultural history (*Försvar i förvar* 2005: 6, 15-20).

After a series of enquiries, the National Property Board was finally commissioned to investigate the conditions for the preservation and valorization of the seventeen major military bases that were built during the 1900s. The investigations were carried out in collaboration with several other related culture heritage institutions. The final report from the National Property Board was presented in 2007, with cost estimates and assessments of the task of preserving and managing these buildings. It is now the principal document for the ongoing heritage process to convert some of the structures into museums.

The rationalization of the armed forces in Sweden and elsewhere nevertheless had consequences on a purely individual level. The armed forces and the defence industry lost many jobs through rationalization, when military units closed. Dismissals were followed by a renegotiation of both identity and professions. In the middle of their careers, many officers were suddenly forced to change their livelihood.

The book *Solen skiner alltid på en kustartillerist* is perhaps the best depiction of the process of dismantling the coastal artillery in Sweden. It describes the changeover process at an individual and personal level. The photographer Martin Naucmér and journalist Jan-Ivar Askelin made a series of visits to secret caves of the coastal artillery which have now been disarmed and closed. They followed the persons who once built and managed the coastal artillery structures, but also those who finally were tasked to dismantle them.

The title of the book means “the sun always shines on the coastal artillerist”, that is, the sun always shone on those who had been selected to manage the coastal artillery, despite how difficult it might be to remain underground. The expression still exists even though the military is gone. The Swedish Coastal Artillery was built up in stages during the 1900s. It was a huge project; built in great secrecy during the Cold War and then dissolved into oblivion: “We were secret and now it is all gone and no one has seen it”, says Leif Cimrell, who is one of several personal portraits in the book and the one who received the directive to organize the dismantling of the coastal artillery guns. When precision weapons were mentioned during the Gulf War in the early 1990s, many coastal artillerists realised that an era had come to an end. But the death blow came with the Defence deci-



sion in 2000, and the major dismantling was then carried out (Askelin & Naoclér 2007: 129-30, 157, 163).

### **Mouldering Processes: The Aesthetics of Decay**

Naoclér & Askelin's neatly packaged narrative of dismantlement, depicted by images of rusting cannons and humid rock shelters, is very similar to the narratives of the industrial heritage which have been explored since the 1980s. From an aesthetic point of view, Naoclér and Askelin's book follows the same visual formula of how industrial ruins of dirt and rust and emotional moods of transience are usually depicted in photography, such as Bernd and Hilla Becher's pioneering documentation of the disappearing industries in the 1960s. Paul Virillio, contemporary of the Becher's, included similar aesthetic contemplations on the remains of Hitler's Atlantic Wall in France. The geometric harshness of the bunker form merges with melancholy and dreamlike bitter sweetness. Later, he gathered his photos and thoughts in the book *Bunker Archaeology*, which was groundbreaking in the way in which it re-validated the modernist military-historical landscape of WWII (Virillio 1975).

Robert Willim has described the rediscovery of industrial society and the popularization of it. In *Industrial Cool*, he creates a post-industrial exposé which goes from the Bechers' photographic depictions to today's recycling of obsolete factories (Willim 2008: 92-7). There is an aura over abandoned sites such as factories and bunkers in dilapidation which evokes feelings of nostalgia, declination and mutability, similar to the ruin-aesthetics of the late 1700s. There is an excitement in digging in "the dustbin of history", as seen in the book *Övergivna platser* (Abandoned places) by Jan Jörnmark (2007). The text is a personal reflection on recent Swedish de-industrialization, illustrated with pictures of decay which encourage a contemplative mood.

A similar depiction of ruins romanticism and nostalgia is given by the Swedish journalist Peter Handberg, who traced the locations of the nuclear bases in the Baltic States using GPS. He ended up with a series of reports based on interviews with the locals and former Soviet officers (Handberg 2007). Most of the military bases such as Forst Zinna in former GDR (Boulton 2007: 181), are either being totally dismantled or left to decay, while others are being reused. Literature like Jörnmark's and Handberg's, and film documentaries such as Angus Boulton's *Cood Bay Forst Zinna* (2001) are all important *depictions* used to popularize the heritage, and thus, are an integrated part of the heritage process.

It is not unusual that abandoned environments like these ones work as free zones and hideaways – found spaces – where youngsters can express their creativity or destructiveness: secret parties, spontaneous grilling, rock climbing, and graffiti. Bunkers are popular places for subculture groups looking for vanished environments that are cordoned off and abandoned, so-called *urban exploration*.



The aesthetics of decay. Mouldering processes at the abandoned battery of Jutudden, Aspö, Sweden. Photo: Per Strömberg.

These types of activities are often radically opposed to the view of the authorities as to how cultural heritage should be used and operated.

The decommissioning of military structures creates a historic landscape in which many of these become ruins and relics of a bygone era. It is a military-historical landscape which is basically a cultural landscape: shaped by the human influence of military activities but adapted to the geo-topographical conditions of place (Roll 2000: 142). The ruins are considered authentic evidence of military activity in the past. They may be perceived as an antithesis to preservation. But the ruins are not left alone without intervention. The Armed Forces and the heritage institutions are required to make the military-historical landscape harmless to people by the preservation law. In many cases, barbed wires and destructive vegetation have been removed so that they do not harm people, or the structure itself. According to Andersson & Bodin, a few years without dehumidification will obliterate all chances to preserve modern subterranean fortresses. Hence, the mouldering process of the Cold War heritage is fast and aggressive in comparison to similar elder monuments (Andersson & Bodin 2008: 94).

A common strategy of the Norwegian antiquarian authorities is to avoid human impact on the remains of *Regelbau*, the Atlantic Wall. Lisen Roll states: "[military buildings] are beautiful in the way they are dissolved into dust. But they will for a foreseeable future remain as interesting traces in the landscape, both as a source of knowledge and experience" (Roll 2000: 142). This approach implies a sort of "fossilization" which is culturally productive. Decay does not signify an antithesis

to preservation; it can instead imply a lower degree of preservation which offers a secure and aesthetically considered decay. Thus, processes of wearing and tearing are culturally productive in that they are able to appeal to nostalgia (Löfgren 2006: 53).

Naucclér & Askelin's coffee-table-like book on the transition process and the dismantling of the coastal artillery is very much seen through the contemplative mood of nostalgia. Not only in this case, but also in general, nostalgia has always been an unspoken and culturally productive undertone in the heritage process.

## **Defining the Cold War Heritage**

The Cold War heritage, including closed batteries and fortresses, abandoned areas for military shooting exercises and ramparts, involves visible remnants in the military-historical landscape. Some military buildings have become ruins, others museums. During the past fifteen years, an entirely new genre of cultural heritage has emerged as a consequence of the restructuring of the national defences. It raises two main questions.

First, what kind of knowledge does this heritage possess? Why is it important to tell the story about “the war that never came”? Of course, there are different national agendas involved in defining a Cold War heritage; nationalism is one of them. The Cold War formed a backdrop to many spheres of national life – political, economic, scientific and cultural – rising to the fore in times of tension between the superpowers. Hence, it is important in order to understand the historical conditions of the today's society. This is one of the main arguments outspoken for preserving a Cold War heritage (See Fairclough 2007: 30).

The first Swedish heritage report from 1994 speaks about “a neglected heritage”, which the authors believe the public should be introduced to. Even follow-up investigations consider the Cold War era to be an important culture-historical starting point in depicting a larger narrative of the Cold War and its importance to the emergence of the Swedish welfare state in the course of the 20th century. One common argument – i.e. used by the stakeholders of Hemsö fortress – is the value of understanding the breadth of the efforts of war preparation, but more important, to inform the tax-paying citizens as to what their money finally was spent on and how it affected the landscape in some places.

There are more arguments in favour of bringing out this heritage. Samuel Palmblad calls attention to the value of understanding the complexity which characterizes the military structures and how the total defence system worked in practice. He states that the artifacts are important in a historical perspective as they highlight a willingness to defend national independence. At the same time, the artifacts revitalize a historical period which was characterized by nuclear doomsday prophecies at times (Palmblad 2005: 8-10). All of these arguments are reasonable, but there are also counter-arguments which bring out the problems of

prioritizing assets and the discourse of negative heritage. For the Baltic people for example – unless one takes into account the Russian minority – the heritage of the Cold War is not a primary object of remembering, but of forgetting, or, of locating pro-Soviet counter-histories (Hackman 2003: 88-9).

Secondly, in what way was the cultural-historical value of the modern military facilities created, and how has it been deployed? The institutional procedure of identifying, selecting and declaring the cultural heritage are important parts of the upgrading process, but it is not the only basis for value creation. The culture heritage of the Cold War was developed through a deeply centralized and selective process directed by heritage institutions. In Scandinavia, as in the UK, a series of valuating investigations were crucial to the foundation of the cultural heritage.

My study has shown that the military bases in Sweden have been upgraded to historical buildings and developed into tourist destinations at different rates and levels. Before the transition process started, there were few modern military structures considered to be historical. The reason why the heritage process started as late as in the 1990s was because of military confidentiality and inaccessibility. Obviously, many of these structures were still in use. But there might be other reasons as well. They are not as monumental and visible in the terrain as older fortifications, and, perhaps they were not considered to have any aesthetical values.

The selection process has implied a range of institutional negotiations focusing on *historical value*, *responsibility* and *costs*: on the one hand, national institutions such as FORTV, SFV and RAÄ, and on the other hand, regional cultural heritage institutions and private initiatives. The valuation basis generally applied in cultural heritage institutions (rarity, representative, originality, continuity and architectural value) was adjusted in the initial report. An important basis for selection was to protect at least one of all common types. Geographical distribution, proximity to valuable natural areas and established tourist destinations have also been indicative, while architectural importance was toned down in the selection process because of the motivation that aesthetic matters were rarely considered when the modern fortresses were constructed. SFV's follow-up investigation had a somehow pragmatic approach to the selection process. The authors balance criteria of *quality* with *costs* in order to sort out objects in good condition to make preservation a realistic alternative (*Kostnader för att bevara och levandegöra försvarsanläggningar* 2007: 17-22).

A fundamentally important part of this maturation process is the formalization procedure, i.e. when the buildings are formulated in legal terms as a cultural heritage by administration authorities and cultural heritage institutions. However, the selection process was influenced by certain persuasion campaigns and preservation actions initiated by local stakeholders such as retired officers and local authorities. In many cases, it was the officers – retired or still active – who initiated the rescuing campaigns of spare parts and furnishings. Their actions helped to



generate a cultural and historical value as much as the heritage institutions did. In my view, they functioned as a catalyst in the heritage process. There are cases – such as Hemsö fortress or Arholma battery outside Stockholm – where local driving forces and the municipality influenced the cultural heritage institutions to finally recommend a heritage declaration. In this way, other parties are deeply engaged in the process of *formulating* the culture-historical value before it finally was *formalized*.

There are several examples of spontaneous rescue actions. When the coastal artillery unit of KA2 on Aspö was shut down, a group of historically interested officers managed to rescue military material and spare parts for the mobile coastal artillery museum on the island of Aspö. The retired officer Olle Melin is one of the driving forces behind a group of enthusiasts who are interested in the military history of Aspö. He tells the following story about the coastal reconnaissance station on Aspö:

With the help of the retired officer at KA5 who was appointed to deliver the used material to Estonia and Latvia, we got out with enough spare parts. So that we can run the station and show: this is reconnaissance; get the magnetron out so that we do not interfere with current Navy reconnaissance frequency. [...] We can go down with a guided group and start the station. We can, with radar screens and everything, show how we looked for enemies during the Cold War in the 1950s; like today, but with a little bit more sophisticated equipment. I think that would be an aha-experience. (Interview with Olle Melin, 06-10-2008)

In secret and against all odds, driving forces have sought to rescue the cultural heritage of the Cold War from vanishing. In this way, each preserved screw nut holds a symbolic meaning: Is there a feeling of existential security in knowing that the station actually can be started up again? On an imaginary plane, the control lamps have never gone out. At the same time, this is an expression of resistance and counter-powers in the struggle against the course of history, but also, against the authorities – their defining power – and the structural dismantling of the defence systems. Psychologically and metaphorically speaking, the battle is not lost, because there are still enough spare parts. The coastal defence is still intact and nothing is in vain.

Behind these preservation actions there is a strong interest in history, but also emotional ties and personal relations to the environments which were the place of work for many of the enthusiasts for many years. Melin continues:

I have a passion for Aspö as a preserved object. There is an emotional connection. Furthermore, I consider it this way; you can preserve the citadel of Drottningsskär, dating from the 1600s; everyone regards it as history. But in a hundred years, at that moment, all modern buildings have become history. Therefore, there must be something left to remind us about this époque. The longer you wait, the harder it becomes to document. People who have worked here, they are gradually disappearing. We, the enthusiasts, who work at the museum on Aspö, are really worried, not for the museum, but for the competence of the military material. So, today, we are a group of five to ten persons. The youngest one is about 58 years. No one has thought of engaging new people. What shall we do then, in ten years? (Interview with Olle Melin, 06-10-2008)



The retired officer Olle Melin is one of the driving forces at Aspö who are striving for a preservation of the coastal reconnaissance station. Photo: Per Strömberg.

Cultural heritage is usually a result of crises and structural changes in society (Aronsson 2005: 20). At the same time, it is a reflection of the same. Times of rapid modernization and structural shifts often evoke feelings of loss and create a need to freeze the state of things, as in the quoted conversation. Memory is an important part of this mental conversion process. Memory is a cultural process of both remembering and forgetting, which is fundamental to our ability to conceive of the world (Misztal 2003: 1).

In line with this description of rescue actions, Smith argues that there are subaltern and dissenting heritage discourses complementary to the authorized one which critiques the nature, meaning and use of heritage. But, she adds, such initiatives tend to be assimilated by the institutional top-down structure (Smith 2006: 29, 35-7). Likewise, Peter Aronsson argues that the formation of a cultural heritage does not always undergo the same formalization process. He observes at least three fundamental perspectives in the establishment of a cultural heritage. First, there is a *pragmatic* perspective which includes what people generally regard as *their* heritage, without any interference from the government or cultural heritage institutions. Second, there is a *scientific* perspective, which identifies cultural heritage through an academic discussion. And third, a *normative* perspective in which cultural heritage is directional for the future. In this case, political and economic functions in society, such as rural politics and regional-economic development, play a greater role in the foundation of a cultural heritage than what actually happened (Aronsson 2005: 25).



Considering the cases of Aspö and Hemsön, all of these three perspectives interact with each other, albeit with different emphases and timetables. The fortress of Hemsö was proposed as an object for preservation early in the process by the Swedish Fortifications Agency. Pending the decision of preservation, the Ministry of Culture in Sweden was called on by a group of representatives from the regional county council, the municipality of Härnösand, the Northern Naval Command, and the local friendship association of the fortress lead by a former officer. The group presented a request in which Hemsö fortress is suggested to be recognized as a historic building (Interview with Hemsö Skärgårdsförening 01-09-2008). This local initiative placed the pressure on the decision-makers. Consequently, it resulted in a national heritage declaration of Hemsö fortress in 1998. It has been of great importance for the subsequent process. In comparison, a couple of the military facilities on Aspö were also mentioned in the initial report from 1994, but they were finally up-graded to national historical monuments much later, in 2003. By taking rapid action, Hemsö fortress had a five-year head start in attraction and destination development compared to Aspö because of the meeting with the Minister of Culture.

### **Redefining Military Space: Displaying the Cold War**

The creation of museums is a fundamental part of the definition process. It is the ultimate affirmation of the value of a heritage in the authorized heritage discourse. As Hodgkin & Radstone (2003: 12-3) state, “memorials and museums represent public statements about what the past has been, and how the present should acknowledge it; who should be remembered, who should be forgotten; which acts or events are functional, which marginal.” The artifacts on display give material form to the past and anchor authorized and official collective memory (Davison 2005: 186).

Cold War museums have become a new genre of museums around the world, from national Cold War museums to local military-historical museums related to specific sites. In Sweden, 25 museums are included in the military-historical museum network of SMHA, which was a result of national rationalizations. At least 22 of them have a Cold War-connection in one way or another, and half of them have the Cold War as their main focus. Thus, there is a remarkable emphasis on the Cold War.

In the UK, preservation and museum display have so far largely been through private initiative, such as at Anstruther in Fife. In Canada, the Diefenbunker near Ottawa is nowadays a Cold War museum of national interest, and in the US, preservation has focused on saving and interpreting a number of monuments, i.e. the Nike missile site near the Golden Gate Bridge. Within the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, protocols did allow for the preservation of a limited number of sites, such as the South Dakota Minuteman II missile launch facility. Additionally, for



Stevnsfort was Denmark's only subterranean fortress during the Cold War. Nowadays, it is a popular tourist attraction and a Cold War museum.

Photo: Per Strömberg.

the nuclear powers such as the US and Russia, there are historical nuclear testing sites which are commemorated with somewhat simplified narratives of heroism and national pride (Cocroft 2003: 267-8).

For the united Germany, the Cold War monuments seem to be of great importance. Not less than 26 museums have been established along the German East-West Iron curtain. Berlin has a special focus, even though the cityscape has been transformed since the end of the Cold War. The Stasi headquarters and a small part of the wall still remain, while the security bunker of Erich Honecker has been sealed. In Nemenčinė, Lithuania, there is a rare and somehow odd example from the cultural heritage industry, where a Cold War drama of oppression is acted out in a Soviet bunker. Otherwise, there are very few military-historical museums with a Cold War focus in the Baltic States, apart from the national museums of occupation.<sup>3</sup>

So, what happens when buildings shift and lose their original functions, for example, becoming museums? The closing of military bases after the end of the Cold War and the succeeding national declaration of historical buildings have implied a spatial, social and cultural redefinition of space. People's attitudes towards the buildings and their spatial behaviour have radically changed. Previously, military barriers, roped-off areas, safety regulations all structured the social practices of both soldiers and civilians, inside and outside of the fence. Foreigners were prohibited to stay in military security zones, and photography was generally forbidden. Today, everyone can visit these same areas.



Reconsidered space. Yesterday, no photo, cameras strictly forbidden. Today, the camera is the primary tool for tourists visiting the heritage site.

Photo: Per Strömberg.

The former roped-off areas of secret military activities also had a symbolic meaning during the Cold War. Secrecy was part of the Cold War image, propaganda and the protection-culture in Sweden. The former ideology of representation was based on invisibility and secrecy, but also marked boundaries. Historian Magnus Rodell believes that bunkers and fortresses also work as mental instruments to define limitations and borders by their locations and physical presence, which also tells us about times past, political agendas and power (Rodell 2007: 72-3).

There is a contradiction within these sites. Once, they were roped-off by fences, and now they function as attractions for tourists whose main tool of processing the tourist site is the camera. However, the hush-hush atmosphere that surrounded military activities during the Cold War is also used in marketing the attraction. Hemsö fortress was earlier promoted by the catchy slogan: “Visit the Cold War secret”. It is an example of how associations, nostalgia and collective images of secrecy can be turned into an argument for visiting the site.

Since the County Museum became the principle of Hemsö fortress in 2009, the concept of being a museum has been strengthened. What once was a workplace has now been turned into a tourist attraction. The County museum introduced a new museum concept by installing barriers and pedagogical tools such as film projectors, loudspeakers and other kinds of museum equipment. The intention was



to let visitors to stroll on their own inside the building, not to experience the fortress with the help of guided tours.

But by installing this entire museum apparatus, the historical building has shifted function and spatial conception in such a way that it affects its *user identity* as a military building. At the same time, this encroachment challenges its fundamental cultural value, which once was the basis for the declaration of cultural heritage. In my view, the county museum of Murberget has adapted the subterranean fortress to the museum function, and not the reverse, adapting the museum function to the building and its former user value. This is a common practical problem for military structures whose spaces are complex and specific, and therefore, difficult to adapt to the museum function.

Preservation principles and safety regulations might to some extent inhibit use. According to law, a building which is declared as historically valuable shall not be “demolished, filled, corrupted or transformed”, and all the furnishings shall be preserved on site (*Framställning om byggnadsminnesförklaring* 1998). When the military bases were in service, servicemen and military personnel were not included in normal safety regulations. Bases are usually extra-legal jurisdictions not subject to civil law. One of the enthusiasts at Aspö states in an interview on the possibilities of re-opening an old coastal radar station, *Gruvan*, as a tourist site: “If you have to adapt Gruvan to disabled people. Well, then we can forget this.” (Interview with Olle Melin 06-10-2008) Regulations of historically valuable buildings as well as accessibility, fire and safety regulations all limit the possibilities of reutilization.

The redefinition of space is also a production of space in a new social context. The way space is divided into and defined as a social zone has been described by Henri Lefebvre in his analysis of the relationship between spatiality and social life. There is a change in meaning – a conceptualization – but also a change in spatial performance, when space acquires new values of representation through



The main entrance to Hemsö fortress, in service 1957- 1989.  
Photo: Per Strömberg.

the process of becoming a cultural heritage. Visitors activate learned schemas of watching, touching and moving whilst they enter the fortress of Hemsön. It occur new social zones when the fortress suddenly represents history rather than national defence. Today, the batteries protect memories, not borders.

## **Destination Development, EU-projects and Archipelago Politics: The Islands of Aspö and Hemsön in Comparison**

Castles and fortresses have always fuelled local tourist industries. The valorization of cultural heritage through attraction and destination development is an important aspect of the heritage process; it's where the heritage is performed, stated and made in practice. The term "valorization" is defined as any activity that aims to improve the knowledge and conservation of cultural and environmental heritage, and which will increase its fruition. To only identify and preserve military structures are not enough to establish a heritage. These structures also must be conceived and perceived as a heritage. As Birgitta Svensson claims, it's not the traditional institutions of heritage preservation which primarily create the experience values which today attract people to the Swedish heritage sites, but the tourism industry (Svensson 1999: 110).

As the Cold War heritage is a recent genre, there is not really any acknowledgment among people that this is a heritage worthy of preservation, Palmblad argues. It is difficult to engage people and politicians, and to emphasize the incentive of identity creation, as the heritage is highly unknown and still invisible and unreachable (Palmblad 2005: 12). Nevertheless, Svensson states that it is in rural areas and economically disadvantaged parts of the country, for example Härnösand municipality, where regional developers are the most eager to take advantage of the heritage for the purpose of regional tourism development. These projects are of course most important in places with high levels of unemployment, or when residents have lost their previous employment (Svensson 2005: 158-9).

The past military presence on the islands of Aspö and Hemsö was a part of everyday life and the local context. Today, the bunkers still exist, like emotional reminders of a bygone era. However, their symbolic significance for the islanders of Aspö and Hemsö has not been reduced because the military base was closed down. Especially the entrepreneurs see the chances to take advantage of the symbolic value: bike and kayak renters, restaurant- and youth hostel keepers. For them, the closing of the military base appears to be a symbol of optimism and new opportunities. But what role do the local administration and regional heritage institutions actually play regarding destination development in these two cases?

In recent decades, the archipelago outside Karlskrona, including Aspö, has undergone a structural change which has caused the disappearance of three primary industries: the coastal fisheries, agriculture and the Defence. In an attempt to stimulate new industries, the municipality of Karlskrona carried out an IT-venture in the archipelago area, but with a mediocre outcome. The former cultural manager in Karlskrona, Ivar Wenster, considers the "Stavanger-model" to be an ideal model for community planning in areas of stagnation. The model primarily uses available resources in order to develop new industries.

Nonetheless, Wenster is not convinced that tourism is the only, or the best, solution for islands like Aspö, or the Karlskrona archipelago. "Karlskrona is great at

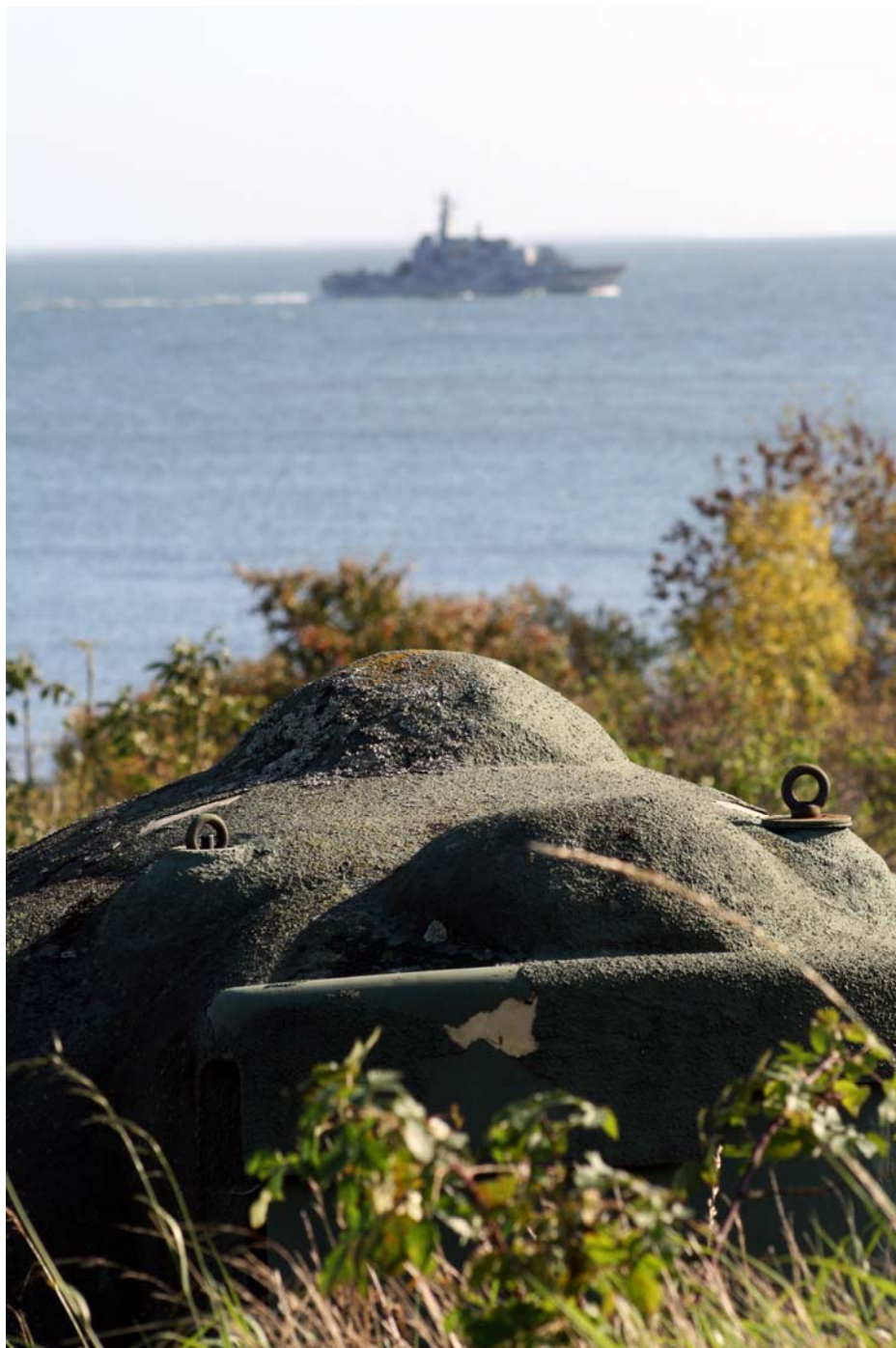
cultural heritage”, Wenster says. In 1998, Karlskrona was upgraded to UNESCO’s world heritage list with the name *The Naval Port of Karlskrona*. The world heritage list consists of many cultural objects of international interests. In this way, Karlskrona is “great at heritage”. However, Wenster argues that the city does not have the experience necessary to become really good at tourist hospitality. The world heritage is geographically limited to the area close to Karlskrona, but is also limited in time to the period before 1870s, which excludes Aspö from the world heritage. He doubts whether the modern military facilities on Aspö really are valuable enough to belong to this group (Interview with Ivan Wenster 7-10-2008). Wenster’s opinion is significant for the local administration’s attitude towards the Cold War structures located outside the city.

Investigations carried out by SFV point to Aspö’s proximity to the world heritage as a major success factor in order to revitalize the heritage on the island (*Kostnader för att bevara och levandegöra försvarsanläggningar* 2008). However, it would legally be difficult to extend a world heritage site. Among the public institutions, it is rather the Swedish Property Board (SFV) than the city of Karlskrona and the main heritage institutions (SMM, SFHM, SMHA) that has run the development of preservation and revitalization of the military history on Aspö. For example, SFV has invested quite a bit in the restoration of the old citadel of Drottningsskär, on which SFV created a small exhibition on Aspö’s military heritage during the summer of 2008. According to one of the driving forces involved in the Aspö-process, there are nearly no initiatives coming from the municipality; “It is a priority issue”, Wenster declares. Karlskrona municipality geographically includes thousands of similar facilities on both a large and small scale, together with the world heritage. From that point of view, the proximity to the world heritage is rather a disadvantage.

Since there is no permanent connection to the mainland, Aspö can finance their projects with structural funds from the EU: “Objective 2 Islands 2000-2006”. The development projects on Aspö have had – directly or indirectly – a connection to tourism, but not especially to the military-historical heritage: the construction of a marina, the preparation of bike paths, a tourist guide for mobile phones, and the formation of women’s network for entrepreneurs (*Genomförda projekt* 03-09-2009).

Hemsön is also covered by EU-support for rural archipelago areas because the inhabitants must take the ferry to the island. Structural funds did have a major role in the development of Hemsö fortress as a tourist attraction. Since the fortress successfully was opened to the public, the archipelago association of Hemsön, together with the municipality of Härnösand, have successively in a period of 1998-2008 applied for and received money for this purpose. The projects included construction of parking places, signage, guide teaching, inventory care, and exhibition production on a basic level.





Attractive surroundings. One of many Cold War installations on Aspö island. There are still military presence at Karlskrona naval port, which has become a UNESCO World Heritage. Photo: Per Strömberg.

The Rural Development Agency is responsible for the EU-programs directed towards the Swedish archipelago. They have identified three success factors for a positive use of the archipelago's natural and cultural assets. First, *collaboration* and *support* are important to development processes. Ideas and commitment

comes from the islanders themselves. The best results occur when the islanders organize themselves in associations. Second, a focus on *long term commercial projects* in which stakeholders also take charge of what is offered. And finally, the *municipality* plays an important role as a supporter of projects and a promoter for regional actions (Normark & Lindgren 2008: 35).

Both Aspö and Hemsön have elements of the Rural Development Agency's recipe for success. For example, both have groups of active islanders who are involved in long-term projects. The projects related to Hemsön tend to be more or less related to the fortress, while the Aspö-projects are characterized by more general projects which indirectly may benefit the hospitality industry.

In conclusion, an active role of the local authorities and support from the regional heritage institutions may result in heritage declarations and generate EU-funding which are crucial for destination development. The local support from the municipality and the regional heritage institutions as well as the well organized friendship association has also been very important for Hemsön. Aspö, in comparison, lacks support from the local authorities and central heritage institutions, even though there are local entrepreneurs and groups of driving forces who are willing to explore the possibilities of the new heritage. As it seems to be a question of priority, the world heritage essentially drains local initiatives in the archipelago, both morally and economically.



Restaurant Örnästet (Eagle's Nest) at the exit of Hemsö fortress. The new entrepreneur of the restaurant has taken over the service of the museum from the County museum. He is an important stakeholder for destination development at Hemsön.

Photo: Per Strömberg.

## Post-societies

One essential conclusion of this study is the fact that the making of Cold War heritage is similar to industrial heritage in view of the heritage process. However, in Sweden, the Cold War heritage has emerged through a more centralized process than the industrial one, principally because the military structures are a matter of national property. Focusing on the similarities, there are many interesting parallels between the industrial and military rationalizations made in the last few decades. What's more, there are resemblances on the structural level in society.

Since the 1960s, a major part of industry (i.e. shipyard, textile, and mining industries) has been moved from Western countries to low-wage countries, which produce goods more effectively and geographically closer at lower costs, while harbour functions have been relocated to the outskirts of major cities. Western industries have changed and become more knowledge-intense and demand high-technology. Due to these structural changes, many industries have closed, been destroyed, moved or have been converted into new functions.

This stage in industrial development in the West has earlier been studied by Daniel Bell in his book *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society* (1973). The notion of *post-industrial society* was coined in order to describe economic changes in society, in which Bell saw an occurring economic transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy, a diffusion of national and global capital, and mass privatization (Bell 1973: 14). Globalization, digitalization and technological development as well as urbanization, are important key words that have appeared in the past few decades to describe these structural changes.

There are many remarkable similarities between the *post-industrial society* and that of the *post-military society*, which is an equivalent notion coined by Martin Shaw (1991). During the last decades, political and economical developments have led to a general and consistent industrial and military structural change which has many things in common. Sometimes, the two areas even converge in mutual dependence as a powerful *military-industrial complex*, to quote President Eisenhower's famously warning in his farewell address in 1961.

Post-militarism, much like post-industrialism and post-modernism, is a defining characteristic of the end of the 20th century, a structural transition from the Cold War era, Shaw argues. But just as post-industrialism does not abolish industry, or post-modernism modernity, so, too, post-militarism, while it transforms the military and militarism, does not remove them from central positions in the social structure. Shaw describes post-military society as having two faces. The first is about the new national Defences which are to a large degree professionalized, smaller, with high-tech armaments of unprecedented destructive power. The other face of post-military society is the growing space for non-militarized life which has been opening since the end of the Cold War (Shaw 1991: 184-5). These structural changes also concern the military objectives of European countries with a

greater focus on international conflicts than on national defence. Thus, the national defence seeks new tasks abroad. From that point of view, globalization is another face of the post-military society.

Another important characteristic is technological development. More rational and cheaper production methods have made many Swedish industries superfluous in the same way as many military bases are today. For instance, precision bombing has made subterranean fortresses useless, and the new political and military strategic situations have made officers unemployed. Digitalization and advanced technology have replaced human labour and soldiers in military operations – such as American war drones – in a similar way as in traditional manufacturing industry.

The consequences of these structural changes in post-societies are astonishingly analogous even at the cultural level. One consequence is the large quantity of buildings which have become “vacant” after the former activities have been shut down, and relocated to other geographic areas in the world. These industrial left-over spaces in the outskirts of city-centres command high prices of land, while former military facilities often are located at places in the nature landscape which are low-populated and inaccessible but astonishingly attractive with a low level of exploitation.

This vanishing process creates a *mental distance* from the former activities. Robert Willim argues that industries are more invisible and anonymous today for ordinary people, even though they do exist, but are distant, or have become “clean” and transparent. Noisy and dirty industrial environments have disappeared. What is left are the traces of an industrial past which is now looked upon with distance and nostalgia. These processes imply a kind of *cultural sorting* which selects and extracts positive aspects out of context (Willim 2008: 123-4).

The industrial materiality embraces a lot of connotations which are today aesthetically explored and exploited in new different contexts: factories become galleries in the same way as military bunkers become design hotels such as the fortress of Fårösund. The materiality of leftover spaces functions as a scenography for new cultural activities, urban lifestyles and businesses. It is a form of *aesthetization*, that is, whenever former activities and spaces are being redefined, considered from a mental distance and related to consumption, entertainment, excitement, joy and recreation. But for others, the expressions of the post-societies are equal to economic decline and alienation in society, or, to negative memories.

This mental distance is also a condition for the creation of new *cultural heritages*. In Sweden, the interest in industrial society emerged in the 1970s. It was later absorbed by the heritage institutions in the late 1990s through a series of cultural projects (such as the ISKA-project) and scholarly conferences (Alzén & Burell 2005: 11). A growing number of industrial environments have been inventoried and upgraded as historical buildings since then (Dahlström Rittsél 2005: 68-72). The equivalent remains of the Cold War have gone through the same process



from the beginning of the 1990s. The table summarizes the similarities between these two types of post-societies in the West.

The post-industrial society	The post-military society
<p><b>1) Political-economical changes: de-industrialization</b></p> <p>A straightforward decline in the output of manufactured goods or in employment in the manufacturing sector; a shift from manufacturing to the service sectors. New strategic demands of mobility and flexibility (for companies).</p>	<p><b>1) Political-economical changes: demilitarization</b></p> <p>End of war preparation in large scale; reduction of nation's army, weapons, and military vehicles to an agreed minimum of weapons and troop forces; professionalization and end of conscription. New strategic demands of mobility and flexibility (for the Defence).</p>
<p><b>2) Globalization: economic &amp; geographic expansion</b></p> <p>Industrial outsourcing and move to low-wage countries; expansion of a global market; multinational companies.</p>	<p><b>2) Globalization: economic &amp; geographic expansion</b></p> <p>Global warfare; move from invasion defence to an internationally engaged input defence; enterprises of national rebuilding after conflicts.</p>
<p><b>3a) General technological development</b></p> <p>Better industrial production and process methods.</p>	<p><b>3a) General technological development</b></p> <p>Better industrial production and process methods; development of weapons with more fire power and more precision.</p>
<p><b>3b) Digitalization: the digital revolution</b></p> <p>Digital technology replaces human labour.</p>	<p><b>3b) Digitalization: the digital revolution</b></p> <p>Digital technology replaces soldiers; development of digital precision weapons, remote-controlled weapons, drones; development of a "digital fortress", a defence against cyber attacks.</p>
<p><b>4) Consequences</b></p> <p>The appearance of mental distance and alienation; creation of a new culture heritage; aestheticization, valorization and regeneration processes; appearance of "vacant spaces".</p>	

The table summarizes the similarities between these two types of post-societies.

## Conclusion

The Cold War heritage with its redundant military facilities is an expression of a post-military society. It is a heritage born out of crisis. Simultaneously, it's a reflection of structural change in society, like its analogous twin heritage of the industrial society. It is also the heritage of secrecy, invisibility and silence; built in great secrecy during the Cold War, mostly invisible to its citizens, and dissolved into oblivion. Also, it is a heritage of reassurance, or oppression, depending on who you are asking.

The aim of this paper was to describe the making of the Cold War heritage through a range of processes which imply a shift of *function* (spatially, legally and socially), a shift of *representation* (culturally and emotionally), and finally, a shift of *management* (administratively and economically). With the industrial heritage

process in mind, the case studies have shown that the making of the Cold War heritage depends on an analogous authorized heritage discourse, to employ the notion of Laurajane Smith. The “post-military” landscape of bunkers and rusting barbed wires is regarded with the same romanticism and with similar preservation ideology and economical interests as the post-industrial landscape earlier was. Similar negotiation issues appear, and the negotiations are made by similar stakeholders.

The discourse includes heritage grammar based on a series of repeated notions and practices based on a common two-step-change: First, from military building to heritage – a conversion process which implies practices of *identification* and *selection* (investigations by cultural heritage institutions and researchers); *declaration* (up-grading decision-making by the authorities); *salvation* (emotional preservation actions by private initiatives and driving forces); *depiction* (nostalgic and popularized presentations by artists, authors and directors) – and secondly, from heritage to attraction: *preservation* (protection and management by cultural heritage institutions); *valorization* (implied by regional planners, museums and tourism entrepreneurs); and finally, *education*, *sensation* and *socialization* (activities by visitors on the site).

All these practices are directly related to the spatial transformation of the military buildings, more precisely, how the representational space of the military base – with its former collective symbols of national defence power, masculinity, reassurance, resistance, etc. – is transformed into a tourist site with new meanings for visitors and former officers. This does also entail a change of spatial practices, namely, how newly founded military-historical museums re-consider military space and divide it into (social) zones for exhibitions and guided tours, and how visitors finally perform and take it into possession. The foundation of a new heritage does as well imply new representations of space which are implemented by the heritage institutions when space is intellectually conceptualised as the abstract notion of a heritage.

What actually differs is that the heritage of the Cold War was developed through a deeply centralized selection process directed by administration authorities. One of the reasons is that the military heritage was, and still is in many cases, a state property, while industrial buildings for the most part are privately owned without institutional control. Retired officers and local driving forces are an essential but not decisive factor in defining military bases as a heritage. Persuasion campaigns and preservation actions are the means by which the heritage and its cultural value are negotiated. Together with support from the municipality and local, the driving forces form lobby groups that place pressure on politicians and heritage institutions. The making of a cultural heritage is ultimately not only an institutional but also an individual matter.

Finally, why should one tell the story about the war that never came? It’s difficult to recognize a cultural heritage that was scarcely experienced by the public.



But as Andersson & Bodin states, it's an essential key to understand contemporary society. Other large civilian building projects in the Swedish society at the time, such as the nuclear plants and the housing programs, are not possible to understand if you don't relate them to the large military projects. The Cold War narrative is both extensive and complex – and international. A narrative about the subterranean fortresses in Sweden must include the supposed “enemy”, the threat from the Baltic nuclear silos of the USSR (Andersson & Bodin 2008: 93-4). But for the new entrepreneur at Hemsö fortress, who wants sell the secrets of the Cold War, the narrative of the past is just a way to create a new future.

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## Notes

- 1 The project was financed by Stiftelsen för kunskapsfrämjande inom turism, Sweden, in 2008.
- 2 The recognition of the concept “negative heritage” is connected to the inscription in 1979 by UNESCO of Auschwitz Concentration Camp as a World Heritage Site (Dolff-Bonekämper 2002; Roth & Salas 2001).
- 3 Gruta Park and Museum of Genocide in Lithuania are among the exceptions.

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(for a complete list used in the original report, see Strömberg, 2009)

- Framställning om byggnadsminne m.m. av Hemsö fästning (1998): Regeringsbeslut 1998-09-10.
- Från Oscar-Fredriksborg till Ersta. Rapport från utredningen avveckling av fästningar (1994): Fortifikationsförvaltningen.
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## Interviews

(for a complete list used in the original report, see Strömberg, 2009)

- Interview with *Hemsö skärgårdsförening* (SO Eriksson, Karl Bäcklund, Torsten Norberg, Roland Eriksson) tillsammans med Ulf Wessling, SFV, the 1 of September 2008.
- Interview with Olle Melin, the 6 of October 2008.
- Interview with Ivar Wenster, kulturchef Karlskrona kommun, samt Richard Bauer & Hans Lineskär på Marinmuseum Karlskrona, the 7 of October 2008.



## **Soviet Lithuanians, Amber and the “New Balts”: Historical Narratives of National and Regional Identities in Lithuanian Museums, 1940–2009**

By Eglė Rindzevičiūtė

### **Abstract**

In the twentieth century Lithuania emerged from the crumbling Russian Empire as a post-colonial nationalising state. Its short-lived independence (1918–1940) featured attempts to assemble the material foundations for an imagined community of Lithuanians, however in 1940 this nationalist project was disrupted by Soviet occupation. However, this article argues that regardless of the measures taken against political nationalism by the Soviets, the material work of assembling the Lithuanians as a historical and ethnic nation was not abandoned. The study analyses the ways in which Northern and Baltic categories were used to regionally situate the ethnic identification of the Lithuanian population in Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian museums. The cases of the Historical-Ethnographic Museum and the Museum of Amber reveal that Northern and Baltic dimensions had to be reconciled with the Soviet version of the Lithuanian past. The resulting assemblage of Lithuania as a synchronic and diachronic community of inhabitants who defined themselves through shared Baltic ancestors and centuries-old uses of amber was transmitted to the post-Soviet museums. The most salient post-Soviet changes were, first, the rewriting of the relations between Lithuanians and the Nordic countries in positive terms and in this way reversing the Soviet narrative of Lithuania as a victim of aggression from the North. Second, the Soviet construction of amber as a material mediator which enabled Lithuanians to connect with each other as a synchronic and diachronic imagined community was somewhat pushed aside in favour of the understanding of amber as a medium of social and cultural distinction for the ancient Balts and contemporary Lithuanian elites.

**Keywords:** Baltic identity, Lithuania, amber, national museums, Soviet material culture



## Introduction

During the 1990s the idea of a Baltic identity came to play an increasingly important role in official and public discourses in Lithuania. In 1993 the Lithuanian government programme declared that one of the goals of state cultural policy was “to ensure historical continuity of Lithuania’s culture” and “to guard the Baltic identity of Lithuania’s culture” (Lietuvos Respublikos... 1993). The year 2009 saw something of an apotheosis of Baltic-centred expressions of Lithuanian national identity as Lithuania celebrated the millennium of her name.<sup>1</sup> Countless exhibitions, publications and events sought to historicize and otherwise articulate the meanings of Lithuanianness. For instance, the catalogue for a widely advertised international travelling exhibition, *Lithuania: Culture and History*, placed Baltic identity at the centre of Lithuania’s history. The history of Lithuania was narrated as a teleological process during which a centralized Lithuanian state emerged from the ancient Baltic tribes. The world of the Balts was contrasted with both the world of Christianity and the Slavonic, proto-Russian tribes (see Daujotytė 2009: 8). Although “Baltic” identity was claimed on linguistic grounds, it was rarely mentioned that the term “Baltic” originally emerged to describe Baltic Germans.<sup>2</sup>

Belonging to a family of supra-national categories, which are used to strengthen and amplify national identities, such as Slavs and Scandinavians, the development of a notion of Baltic identity as an amplified Lithuanian national identity presents a fascinating puzzle for historians. First of all, production of a Baltic identity, unlike Lithuanian national identity, remains underexplored. Often described as a quintessential case of ethnic nationalism, which is based on a myth of common descent, language and culture, Lithuanian national identity has been analyzed as a centripetal mechanism which was effectively mobilized to build a strong sense of distinction among the local population (Balkelis 2009). It was thanks to the ethnic identity of Lithuanians as a synchronic and diachronic community united by their unique language and folk culture, it was argued, that the people of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) maintained a vision of independence from the Soviet regime (Hiden & Salmon 1991; Vardys & Sedaitis 1997; Misiunas & Taa-gepera 2006). More sinister sides of Lithuanian national identity were also pointed out as the ethnic Lithuanian version of a history of the country failed to recognize its heterogeneity, particularly the contribution of Jews, Poles and even Russians.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is lack of knowledge about the ways in which constructions of an exclusive Lithuanian national identity were positioned in relation to broader regional categories. This is particularly true in the case of the Baltic component of Lithuanian national identity. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Baltic, and occasionally Northern, categories came to occupy strong positions in Lithuanian foreign and domestic policy discourses. Interest in the history of the Baltic and

Northern dimensions of Lithuanian national identity is therefore first and foremost driven by recent geopolitical developments, such as the establishment of the Baltic Development Forum in 1998, and most recently the formulation of the European Union strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in 2009. To be sure, one must remain aware of the dangers of retrospective projections in history writing. Nevertheless, the recent rise of the importance of the Baltic and Northern dimensions is a good stimulus to revise the history of the conceptual and material construction of Lithuanian national identity in relation to these broader regional categories.

In doing so, this article aims to contribute to the expanding field of historical studies of region-building, which seek to transcend the prevailing nation-state centred historiographies. Kristian Gerner and Sven Tägil (1999) and Timothy Snyder (2003) attempted at writing a history of East Central Europe by incorporating the territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (henceforth GDL), Poland and Ukraine in one narrative. David Kirby analysed international relations, trade and cultural exchanges as region-building forces in the Baltic Sea area (Kirby 1995; Kirby 2000). Comparative studies of national historiographies, both globally and in European countries, including the Baltic and Northern European areas, have been recently undertaken in order to understand meaning-making mechanisms in the formation of states and regions (Berger 2007; Knell, Aronsson & Amundsen 2010). Other scholars, mainly political scientists, inspired by the geopolitical orientation of the governments of the Baltic states in the early 1990s, scrutinized the history and politics of the idea of a Baltic region,<sup>4</sup> which encompassed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (Loeber 1987; Motieka 1997; Žalimas 1998; Miniotaite 2003; Laurinavičius, Motieka & Statkus 2005) or focused on changes brought about by European integration (Lehti & Smith 2003; Smith 2005). Some went as far as treating the notion of Baltic identity as a given phenomenon and used it as an independent variable in their analyses of political processes in the area (Clemens 1994).

This study adds to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting pragmatic and material aspects of the formation of the Baltic Sea region through distribution of historical narratives to inhabitants of this area. Today history narratives reach populations through a variety of means which range from school textbooks to tourist guides and digital media. Nevertheless, an old institution of enlightenment, the national museum, can still be regarded as a particularly important mediator in this field of distribution (Bennett 1995; Aronsson 2010). Sanctioned and funded by the state, national museums are important agents in the public uses of history. It has been argued that nation-states actively create their nations or imagined communities. The imagination of the nation relies upon complex material conditions, such as technical publishing networks or material objects, which can be used as proofs of identity (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992). As they are dedicated to the collection, storage, preservation and investigation of material objects which provide foundations for historical facts (Pearce 1992; Bennett

2004), national museums arguably embody and materially perform the existence of the nation-state.<sup>5</sup>

The history of Lithuanian national museums is particularly instructive as a case of the construction of statehood as a process, one which relies upon historical narratives that both draw upon and actualize material objects. The case of Lithuanian nationalism clearly demonstrates the relational character of national identity: construction of the Lithuanians had to explicitly address both national and international dimensions. The relation between Lithuanian and wider regional identifications was revised as political regimes changed, and there was no shortage of such changes. Soon after Lithuania's declaration of independence in 1918, in 1920 Poland annexed Vilnius, the historical capital of the GDL. Vilnius was returned to Lithuania in 1939, but at the cost of incorporation of the country into the Soviet Union in 1940. In 1990 Lithuania seceded from the Soviet Union, but to a large extent maintained the same borders as the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR). These shifting political regimes did not only seek to create the country anew by redrawing maps and rewriting historical narratives, but also, as the case of amber demonstrates, attempted to ensure a sense of the continuity of the national community.

Focusing on the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, this article explores the ways in which the categories of Balticness and the North were connected with Lithuanian identity in two of the most important LSSR museums. The Lithuanian SSR Historical and Ethnographic Museum (henceforth HEM), the largest and arguably the most important museum in the LSSR, was established by uniting several collections shortly after the Second World War. Renamed as the National Museum in 1992, HEM should be understood as no less than a sensitive litmus case which reveals the work of political negotiation about the past. The organization of HEM's displays inevitably oscillated between meeting political demands, the material conditions of museum work, and the norms of professional historiography. The second case study concerns The Museum of Amber, which was founded in the 1960s, a period of economic growth and increasing interest in the welfare of the population. The Museum of Amber had actively contributed to establishing amber as a material medium which tied in the natural history of the territories of contemporary Lithuania, the Soviet Lithuanians and the ancient Baltic tribes into both a synchronic and diachronic national community.



The Lithuanian National Museum, Vilnius. © Photo: Eglė Rindzevičiūtė



The Museum of Amber, Palanga. © Photo: Danutė Mukienė.  
Courtesy of the Lithuanian Art Museum.



Printed museum catalogues and guides constitute the main primary sources for the analysis of narrative explanations of exhibits at HEM and the Museum of Amber. The conclusions drawn, to be sure, should not be considered as representative of all Soviet Lithuanian museums. The Soviet museum scene was quite heterogeneous and it can not be excluded that other museums produced different narratives of the Balts, Lithuanians and the North. A study of the reception of museum displays, surely a very important aspect of the distribution of historical narratives, was beyond the scope of this article. Despite these limitations, the cases analysed demonstrate that there were several different narrative and material techniques which, depending on the profile of the museum, were used to construct national and regional identifications under the Soviet regime and which did not lose their power during the post-Soviet transformation.

### **The Making of Authoritarian Museums**

The introduction of the Soviet museum system in Lithuania is inseparable from the story of occupation and the building of an authoritarian regime (see Bagušauskas & Streikus 2005). It has to be recalled that Soviet cultural policy was not limited to censorship and control. Lenin's government espoused a strong belief that a cultural revolution, which involved both fine arts and culture as a way of life, was an intrinsic part of the building of communist society (Fitzpatrick 1970). Heritage, first and foremost the royal palaces and noble estates, were nationalized; all cultural organisations were transferred to the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*), headed by Anatolii Lunacharsky (Gardanov 1957:12, 14–15). Echoing political rationales of the French Revolution which contributed to the opening of the Louvre as a national gallery in 1793 (Duncan 1995), the Communist Party programme described the nationalisation of art collections and heritage as an act of social justice. Museums were to play an important part in this cultural revolution:

Besides natural treasures, working people inherited large cultural treasures: buildings of distinctive beauty, museums, full of rare and beautiful things, which are educational and uplift the soul, libraries, which store great spiritual valuables etc. All of these now genuinely belong to the people. All of these will help the poor man and his children to quickly exceed the former ruling classes in their education, will help him to become a new man, an owner of the old culture and a creator of a yet unseen new culture. Comrades, it is necessary to be alert and protect this heritage of our people! (Narkompros, "To Workers, Peasants, Soldiers, Sailors and All Citizens of Russia" (3 November 1917), cf Gardanov 1957:10)<sup>6</sup>

The Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940 brought an already quite settled system of centralized museums. Existing Lithuanian museums were "nationalized" or centralized under the new communist government, a process which entailed looting, destruction, firing or executing the staff, and placement under the direct administration of the Agency for Art Affairs and, since March 1953 of the All-

Union and union-republic Ministries of Culture.<sup>7</sup> Putting violence aside, centralization came as a shock to local museum workers who had been relatively independent of both national and local governments (Mačiulis 2005).

Perceived as instruments for popular education and ideological instruction, the Sovietized museums had little choice but to drastically revise interwar narratives about the geopolitical orientation of Lithuania.<sup>8</sup> Any positive references to the interwar statehood and cultural forms that were classified as Western capitalist, such as the modernist style in the fine arts, or abstract painting, were carefully eliminated. Although this censorship constituted a strong blow to professional artists, it has to be remembered that professional arts were not perceived by the interwar government as an especially important instrument in nation-building. In the context of the decline of the world economy and the complicated local geopolitical situation, the Lithuanian government made little commitment to heritage protection. At the same time, many interwar professional Lithuanian artists found their inspiration in folk culture and folk culture objects were chosen to represent Lithuania internationally, for example, in the world fairs. (Mulevičiūtė 2001; Jankevičiūtė 2003; Mačiulis 2005).

This traditional emphasis on Lithuanian folk culture resonated with the Soviet encouragement of expressions of ethnic cultures. The Soviet definition of ethnicity was limited to language and folk culture, which was “national in form, socialist in content” (Suny 1991). Conceived in such a way, ethnicity was not perceived by Soviet ideologues as politically dangerous. The Soviet approach to ethnicity as a cultural and strictly non-political phenomenon allowed museum workers to continue the assembling of Lithuanian identity on linguistic and archaeological grounds. For example, even in the politically uncertain 1950s, the hard-line communist historian Juozas Žiugžda criticized the former Vytautas the Great Military Museum in Kaunas because they integrated a section “The formation of the Baltic tribes” into the department of ideological and social relations. The Baltic tribes, wrote Žiugžda, actually belonged to the narrative of ethnic development (“čia yra aiškiai etnogenezės klausimas”). Moreover, he further advised the museum to organize a separate section called “The Balts” (“Atsiliepimas...” 1953).

Beginning with the temporary relaxation of ideological control in the 1960s the interest in the pre-modern Baltic past of Lithuania started to gain momentum (Rindzevičiūtė 2008: 187). Regional historical studies started to appear; for example, a collaborative book *The Routes of the Development of Capitalism: Caucasus, Central Asia, Russia and the Baltic Sea Region* (in Russian, *Pribaltika*) was published in Russian in 1972. In 1977 the first conference for the study of Baltic ethnic history was organized in Riga; the 1980s saw an explosion in studies of the pre-history of Baltic tribes from the Mesolithic period to the tenth century A.D.<sup>9</sup> These explorations of pagan culture were tolerated by the Soviet ideologues, probably as part of their anti-Catholic policies. On the other hand, a cautious writer could rather easily combine the history of pre-Christian cultures with



the Soviet historical narrative of the Germans as historical enemies by emphasizing that “pagan Lithuanians” fought “German” crusaders (Weiner 2001; also Wendland 2008; Rindzeviciute 2011). Similarly, explorations of Lithuanian folk culture were integrated with a Marxist approach as historical studies of the working class. Articulations of relationships with the North, however, remained difficult, because now Northern countries lay beyond the Iron Curtain and belonged to the hostile capitalist West.

This, to be sure, is not to suggest that Baltic studies thrived in Soviet Lithuania, because this was clearly not the case (see, for example Švedas & Gudavičius 2008), but rather to point out that the Baltic component could be retained and cultivated as part of officially legitimate expressions of Lithuanian ethnicity. Nevertheless, as the case of HEM details below, the choice of whether to articulate the Baltic and Northern dimensions strongly depended on the situation in a particular museum.

### **Soviet Lithuania at the Mercy of Foreign Powers: the Case of HEM**

In 1941 and just before the outbreak of the Second World War, a newly established LSSR Academy of Sciences (LAS) organized a historical museum under its history department.<sup>10</sup> Collections from the Vilnius Museum of Antiquities (est. 1855) were joined with collections accumulated by Vilnius’s societies of Lithuanian Science (1907–1938) and the Friends of Science (1907–1941). At the same time the LAS ethnography department organized an ethnographic museum. In 1952 the Museum of Ethnography was merged with the Museum of History and renamed the LSSR Museum of History and Ethnography (henceforth HEM). A cultural historian, Vincas Žilėnas, was appointed as director and, typically of Soviet leadership, remained in this position for more than two decades as he retired only in 1973. Organized in archaeological, ethnographic, history, iconography and numismatic sections, in 1963 HEM was transferred from LAS to the LSSR Ministry of Culture.

Both HEM’s physical location and self-identification in narratives of its origin aptly spoke about the national significance of this institution. Situated at a complex of buildings called the New and the Old Gunpowder Houses (these buildings dated to the 1500s–1700s and were also known as the Arsenal), HEM found itself at the foot of Gediminas Hill, near the castle and the Cathedral at the heart of Vilnius Old Town. Although first established in the early 1940s, HEM celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1980 and in this way affirmed its genealogy from the Vilnius Museum of Antiquities (1855). Indeed, the word “national” (in Lithuanian *tautinis*, *nacionalinis*) had already been carefully introduced into the notion of HEM in 1970:

The Lithuanian SSR Historical and Ethnographic Museum (HEM) is a “*national museum*” because it is first and foremost concerned with collecting, storing and displaying those cultural monuments which are directly and indirectly related to the past and present of our nation. (Bernotienė, Mažeikienė and Tautavičienė 1970: 7, original emphasis – E.R.)

HEM’s curators described the museum as the key site for assembling the history of the Lithuanian nation. The curators acknowledged that this was not an easy task and complained that it was “close to impossible” to organize HEM’s permanent display in such a way that it would be able “to speak the history of our nation to our visitor”. This actually was a hint at the crucial importance of written commentaries, the key instrument of propaganda.

In the Soviet Union geopolitical narratives intended for public distribution were formulated in the disciplinary frameworks of political economy and history. Although universities played an important role in dissemination of these narratives, the key producers were ideological secretaries at the All-Union and Republic Central Committees and their departments (Bumblauskas & Šepetys 1999; Bagušauskas & Streikus 2005). By way of the Ministry of Culture these secretaries provided museum workers with methodological guidelines which, often in minute detail, specified which historical periods and narratives to include in museum exhibitions (“Dėl respublikos...” 1952). Being clearly top-down, this process of ideological regulation of public history did not run smoothly. Indeed, there was little agreement and often quite a lot of friction between the ideological requirements channelled from Moscow and local historians (see Bumblauskas & Šepetys 1999; Švedas 2009). The centrally shaped Soviet ideological version of history was often translated, modified and subverted by local actors.

Local translation was a risky project, especially from 1944 to the early 1950s, which were marked with anti-Soviet resistance fights in Lithuania (see Statiev 2010) and, following the death of Stalin in 1953, political destabilisation. Soviet Lithuanian historians were understandably careful to avoid any ideological errors. Although the first conference about the periodization of the history of Lithuania was organized in 1952, it seems that Lithuanian historians opted to wait for political stabilisation and clarification of ideological guidelines: the first official history *The History of the Lithuanian SSR* was published only in 1957.<sup>11</sup> Museum workers were similarly cautious. HEM opened its first permanent exhibition surprisingly late: on the threshold of the end of the Thaw, November 1968. Although this exhibition was retrospectively described as a “non-ideological” display (Būčys 2008:44–45), obligatory dues were paid to the Marxist-Leninist narrative and political risks were carefully balanced.

The first permanent HEM exhibition was cautiously limited to a period between the settlement of Lithuania’s territory, 10 000 BC, and the October revolution in 1917. This display was located in seven halls; the eighth hall was reserved for temporary exhibitions. The first hall was dedicated to 10 000 BC-1300 AD, at the end of which the first Lithuanian state was formed. Besides the dominant narra-

tive about economic and political progress from the natural to the feudal system, and from the capitalist to the communist system, the exhibition guide featured a narrative about Nordic and Baltic connections.<sup>12</sup>

The northern dimension was introduced into the history of Soviet Lithuania through accounts about natural history, material exchange and, most predominantly, military conflict. According to the guide, the geological history of “Lithuania” began with the ice age when glaciers came from “Scandinavia”.<sup>13</sup> Featuring the modern names of cities and rivers, the ice age map directly connected pre-history with the post-1944 territory of the LSSR. This diachronic connection eliminated all the sweeping changes that the territory inhabited by historical and modern Lithuanians underwent.<sup>14</sup> Besides moving glaciers, the LSSR’s connection with “Scandinavia” was assembled through the medium of archaeological findings. Although the majority of archaeological exhibits were used to emphasize Lithuania’s trade relations with the Roman Empire, from the eighth century the name “Scandinavia” started to appear in the material history of Lithuania. The objects of Scandinavian origin were military in function, such as swords, spurs, spearheads, sheaths, and decoration (brooches) (Bernotienė, Mažeikienė & Tautavičienė 1970: 18, 22, 25). These Scandinavian findings were interpreted as proof of material exchange between Nordic people and “Lithuanians”. No attempt, however, was made to compare Lithuanians with Scandinavian or Viking people. Indeed, the exhibition catalogue did not specify the ancestor population as “Baltic tribes”. The pre-modern inhabitants of the Lithuanian SSR were simply referred to as “the people living on the Baltic shores”.

Besides archaeological findings, a manuscript was displayed to illustrate the difficult connections with the Nordic countries. As very few written sources from 10 000 BC-1300 AD had survived it is quite significant that one of these rare sources referred to the aggression of “Sweden” against “Lithuania”. In the mid-ninth century the Swedish king Olaf attacked and took power over the Curonian castle Apuolė (in Latin *Apulia*) (Bernotienė, Mažeikienė & Tautavičienė 1970: 8). This hostility, according to the guide, was an example of the Northern peoples as a negative factor in Lithuania’s history.

The concessions to pro-Russian ideology were made in the HEM guide’s account of Lithuania’s regional position in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the interwar historiography this period was defined as the peak of Lithuanian statehood and power, as the GDL stretched quite far into Muscovy and encompassed the Western part of Ukraine. The guide, however, was very laconic about this period during which Russia was weak. Much more information was provided about Lithuanian and Russian relations in the sixteenth century when Russia started to emerge as a significant military power. At the same time, this was the period of Lithuania’s decline. The guide described the Vasa rule (1587-1648) of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (PLC) as “the most miserable for Lithuania”, because Lithuania was entangled in war with Sweden and Russia. The Swed-

ish occupation was described in emotionally charged terms: “a marching army of foreigners” which “looted and destroyed the country” swarmed through Lithuania. In relation to these events the exhibition displayed a picture depicting the 1656 Lithuanian-Swedish battle and Swedish money.

The anti-Nordic stance was further articulated in an account of the Northern War (1700–1721) and the partition of the PLC, presented together in one display “The Period of the Northern War and Partition” (Bernotienė, Mažeikienė & Tautavičienė 1970: 42–43). Explanation of the partition, which ended the GDL’s statehood, was a difficult puzzle for Soviet historians and museum workers. Partition was described as the most negative event in interwar historiography, however, Soviet ideologues required that incorporation of the GDL into the Russian Empire be presented as a “progressive event”. This, as Mečislovas Jučas retrospectively noted, was resisted by Lithuanian historians. Instead of openly glorifying the incorporation of the GDL into Russia, historians used intentionally vague phrases to narrate the partition such as “Lithuanian and Russian feudalism found some points of agreement” or that “Lithuanian people joined the all-Russian fight against imperialism” (Jučas 1999: 18–19).

By the early 1970s a consensus about the official narrative of modern Soviet Lithuanian history was already established and could be institutionalized in the museums. In 1972 HEM reorganized the display of Lithuania’s history to reflect changes in the historical interpretation of socialism introduced by Leonid Brezhnev’s doctrine of “mature socialism”. A new display “The History of the Soviet Society, 1940 to the present” was opened later in 1976 and included several themes: “The Victory of the Revolution and the Beginning of the Creation of Socialism in the LSSR (1940–1941)”, “Lithuania during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945)”, “Creation of the Basis of Socialism and Completion of Socialism (1945–1961)” and “LSSR National Economy and Culture under Mature Socialism (1961–1975)” (Žilėnas 1980).

The reformed HEM systematically Lithuanian-ized the history of the LSSR and in this way resembled the 1940s’ strategy of Sovietization, as it exclusively focused on Soviet Lithuanians and minimized visibility of non-Lithuanian ethnic groups, such as Poles and Jews (Weeks 2008). The new exhibition catalogue strikes the reader with the absence of any regional categories in relation to Lithuanians. The term “Baltic” appeared to be abandoned and the guide only made reference “Lithuanians” and “Lithuanian tribes”. Spatial categories were abandoned in favour of a narrative of economic growth illustrated with new types of material objects, such as high-tech Soviet Lithuanian produce (television Temp-6 and Elfa tape recorders) (Žilėnas 1980:23). This universalising discourse of modernisation as economic growth did not replace the emphasis on linguistic and cultural ethnicity. Rather, it continued to assert the diachronic unity of Soviet Lithuanians with their past, faced with dangers from the North.

## The Rise of Baltic Ancestors and Post-Soviet Revisions of the Northern Dimension

From 1992, after achieving independence from the Soviet Union, HEM was re-named the National Museum of Lithuania (LNM). Shortly before the millennium celebration of the name (and perhaps the state) of Lithuania, the LNM arranged an exhibition about Baltic archaeology entitled *Curonians: the Vikings of the Balts* (*Kuršiai – Baltų vikingai*, Vilnius, 19 November 2008-15 March 2009).<sup>15</sup> The curators sought to “inscribe the Baltic tribes on a map of civilizations, on which the territories inhabited by the ancient Balts are not yet marked” (“Britų...” 2009). The exhibition *Curonians* perpetuated the notion of the Balts as a people whose identity was uncontested and strongly supported by material evidence. The historical presence of the Balts was not to be doubted, but highlighted. The Balts were not presented as “rough barbarians” or people without history who lived at the impassable, swampy and forested edge of Europe, but as a tribe able to produce “jewellery, which demonstrates wealth, power, a great sense of aesthetics” and their weapons revealed their “military force and power” (“Pristatoma...” 2008).



A poster and an exhibition *Curonians, Vikings of the Balts*, Vilnius, 2008.

© Photo: Eglė Rindzevičiūtė

This conjecture of the unquestionable historical presence and high cultural status of the Balts-Curonians was accompanied with revision of the relation between the Balts-Lithuanians and Northern Europe. Focusing on the period 500–1200 AD, the exhibition featured archaeological findings, such as artefacts from bronze, stone and amber, and black and white photographs of archaeological sites, mainly castle mounds. A map outlined the Curonians’ territory which stretched from the Eastern coast of the Baltic Sea and extended across the current border between Lithuania and Latvia. The exhibition text emphasized trade relations between Curonians and “Scandinavians”, the story of which went as following. Between



500 and 850 Scandinavian merchants settled in Curonian lands and bought local jewellery and weapons. This period of peaceful trade was disrupted in the second half of the 800s, when Scandinavians mounted war campaigns against Curonian and other lands on the Eastern shore. In turn, Curonians started their own military campaigns in Scandinavia and their power peaked in 900–1100s. However, in 1422 Curonian lands were divided between Lithuania and Livonia. Curonians became assimilated with Samogitians, a West Lithuanian group. By 1600s the Curonian language became extinct. This story of the rise and fall of the Curonian tribes was framed by the exhibition text as a case of interaction and cultural exchange between Scandinavian and Baltic tribes, a process that was most evidently revealed in styles of jewellery and the production of miniatures.

The exhibition *Curonians* mobilized history in order to construct a three-fold relation between contemporary Lithuania and the Nordic countries. First, the exhibition drew attention to material cultural exchange by means of trade and stylistic influences. Second, the exhibition emphasized that the tribe of Curonians/Balts was an active agent and considerable military power in the Baltic Sea, because this tribe was able to loot and instil fear on the Swedish coast. It was not Olaf, who burned Apuolė, but Curonians who looted the Öland islands who were the focus. Thirdly, to frame the exhibition, the organisers used the widely recognisable brand of “the Vikings”, a concept which is widely used to brand Norway, Denmark and Sweden. This reference to Vikings, consequently, suggested that the Baltic identity contained a “Scandinavian” dimension or, at least, that the history of Baltic tribes was comparable to that of the Vikings.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in 1991 Gričiuvienė had already applied the analytical framework developed within Scandinavian studies to analyse and display a history of the Baltic tribes. The exhibition *In Search of the Baltic Ornament* aimed to identify a unitary visual culture which would enable the Baltic tribes to be distinguished in a manner similar to the way Celtic ornaments enabled Nordic peoples to be distinguished.<sup>17</sup>

HEM eventually redefined Curonians as metonymically related with both the Baltic tribes and contemporary Lithuanians. In the post-Soviet context of the revised Northern orientation of Lithuania, the story of the Curonians turned out to be quite useful for constructing new narratives of Lithuania as a country of militarily assertive and civilized people. A few decades earlier, amber was performing a similar role, acting as material proof of the territorial presence and diligence in international trade of the Baltic tribes.

### **The Community of “Northern Gold”: The Case of the Museum of Amber**

The organisation of the Museum of Amber is a fascinating case of the material construction of the Lithuanian people which was possible within the framework of Soviet ethnic and cultural policies.<sup>18</sup> The initiative to organize the Museum of

Amber belonged to the director of the Lithuanian Art Museum, Pranas Gudynas, assisted by his deputy director Romualdas Budrys (Jakelaitis 1998: 11). Opened in 1963, the Museum of Amber was established at the premises of count Feliks Tyszkiewicz's (Feliksas Tiškevičius, 1870–1932) neo-baroque summer palace. Built by the German architect Franz Schwechten in 1897, the palace was situated in gardens designed by the French landscape architect Edouard Francois Andre. It was thanks to the Tyshkiewicz family's efforts that the sleepy fishing village of Palanga emerged as a sea resort in the 1870s–1880s (Striuogaitis 2008). The count himself was a passionate collector of archaeological findings and his collections included valuable prehistoric amber artefacts (Tranyzas 1998).

The opening of the Museum of Amber coincided with changes in Soviet economic policy. In 1957 Nikita Khrushchev started economic decentralisation, delegating the administration of many sectors to territorial and not branch organs. This reform entitled LSSR authorities to more autonomy in management of republican industries and especially allocation of resources in the civil sector. It is therefore not surprising that the late 1950s and 1960s saw the construction of many new museums.

Another interesting coincidence was that in 1963 the Lithuanian SSR Economic Council took charge of the world's largest amber producer, the Kaliningrad Iantarny Amber Mines. Capitalising on this expansion of the Lithuanian amber industry, the Museum of Amber skilfully combined its goals as a natural scientific laboratory and a disseminator of ethnic nationalist values.<sup>19</sup> In doing so the Museum was particularly successful in mobilising popular tales and lending its scientific authority to legitimize existing and widespread popular practices of gathering and using amber in the everyday life of Lithuanians. Being an elegant, but also entertaining and reasonably quirky place to visit (think of a tractor made with amber and magnified prehistoric insects stuck in amber), the Museum of Amber perfectly fulfilled the economic rationale of Soviet cultural policy, according to which cultural organisations had to provide workers with enlightened recreation during their holidays (White 1990).



Baltic Amber, ca 50 million years old. © Photo: Antanas Lukšėnas.  
Courtesy of the Lithuanian Art Museum.



“Tractor” by Mečislovas Sirukevičius. Amber, wood, metal, 16 x 20 cm. Obtained  
by the Museum of Amber in 1969. © Courtesy of the Lithuanian Art Museum.

The identification of amber with Lithuanian territory and its inhabitants is a rather new phenomenon. It was only in 1923 that Lithuania gained the Klaipėda (Memel) region and access to the amber rich coastal area of the Baltic Sea. Besides this new geopolitical situation, there emerged influential literary discourses which established a connection between Lithuania and amber. The most salient example is the poem “Free Lithuania” (*Lietuva laisva*, part of *Bolševiko kelias*, 1940) written by a prominent pro-Soviet poetess Salomėja Nėris (1904–1945). Included in all Soviet school textbooks (Mažeikis 2007: 257), this poem did not lose its canonical status after the collapse of the Soviet Union and was still used in lectures dedicated to patriotic upbringing, particularly in primary school teaching (see, for example Strelčenko 2003). A recipient of Stalin’s prize for literature, Nėris described the LSSR in line with the Soviet discourse of “the little homeland” (in Russian, *malaia rodina*, see Sandomirskaja 2001). The poem emphasized the smallness of the country and cosiness of local identification, which was secured by membership of the Soviet Union. The name of Lithuania was coupled with amber through the metaphor of a tiny object which could be easily handed to “a friend” (the poetess meant Stalin):

How beautiful our small country is!  
Like a drop of pure amber.  
Since long ago I admired my home-country in textile patterns  
And in songs from my native village.

I am bringing to you a little piece of amber,  
Which is a pale drop of the Baltic Sea –  
And the gentle name of Lithuania  
I am bringing to you as the sun in my hands.  
(Nėris 1940/1984: 30)

“Free Lithuania” was cited in the Museum of Amber’s guide, written by eminent Lithuanian museum worker and heritage preservation specialist Pranas Gudynas and an art historian, Stasys Pinkus (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:42). According to the guide, the Baltic Sea shore (including Kaliningrad, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) contained “the best kind of amber” or succinite, known by scientists as Baltic amber (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:19). Called “the northern gold” Baltic amber was described as being at the heart of Lithuanian national identity:

Amber is found in many countries in the world but nowhere is amber so deeply rooted in people’s everyday life, folklore, literature and the arts as it is in Lithuania. Since ancient times amber was used to create beautiful artefacts and works of art. It is not by mistake that Lithuania is called an amber country and the Baltic Sea shore [is called] an amber shore. (...)

The fact that Lithuanian people foster love for amber is not a contingent phenomenon, but a tradition, which is cherished by the people who lived on the amber rich shores of the Baltic Sea and who related their joy and sadness with amber. This is eloquently exemplified by archaeological burial sites, containing amber jewellery for men and women and also weapons and horses, which are found in the territory of the republic. For a Lithuanian person, a piece of amber or a pretty artefact made of amber is not just a beautiful thing, but also part of the country’s cultural history.



Amber wrote the name of Lithuania in books from antiquity. The fame of its beauty and value attracted ships of antiquity traders to the Eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, inhabited by Lithuanian tribes. (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:2-3)

This quote reveals the Museum of Amber's ambition to insert amber into the historical narrative of the Lithuanian population. Amber, it was suggested, was material proof of the presence of Baltic tribes in the territory of the LSSR. Consequently, it was inferred that the connections between the Balts-Lithuanians and the outside world could be traced through locations where amber artefacts were found.

Amber, in other words, made Baltic-Lithuanian people visible.<sup>20</sup> For example, the guide insisted that that the first mentioning of the "ancestors of Lithuanians" was found in Tacitus *Germania* (98 AD). Tacitus, according to the guide, described the *aestii* tribe (in Lithuanian "aisčiai") as "good farmers", who collected amber in shallow parts of the Baltic Sea and transported it to faraway lands to sell it (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964: 9). This was, however, largely a creative adaptation of Tacitus for a retrospective construction of Lithuanians. In his *Germania* Tacitus wrote:

To the right-hand shore of the Suebic Sea: here it washes the tribes of the Aestii; their customs and appearance are Suebic, but their language is nearer British (...) they ransack the sea also, and are the only German people who gather in the shallows and on the shore itself the amber, which they call in their tongue "glaesum". Nor have they, being barbarians, inquired or learned what substance or process produces it: nay, it lay there long among the rest of the flotsam and jetsam of the sea until Roman luxury gave it fame. To the natives it is useless: it is gathered crude; is forwarded to Rome unshaped: they are astonished to be paid for it. (Tacitus 45, cf Bojtár 1999:30)

In *Germania* Tacitus did not mention either the Baltic Sea (although it is agreed that by Suebia he meant the Baltic Sea); he called the *aestii* "Germans", who spoke "British". Furthermore, Tacitus did not describe the assumed Lithuanian "ancestors" as "good farmers", but rather as crude barbarians. Finally, he actually did not specify in which way amber reached Rome.

The image of the Lithuanians-Aestii as far-travelling merchants, therefore, was a fictitious construction. Historians do not agree whether one can establish a certain connection between Tacitus's *aestii* and the Balts-Lithuanians. Some suggested that *aestii* referred to the Prussians, others thought that *aestii* described the Estonians or even Slavs (see Bojtár 1999: 104–107). The guide, however, did not offer any hint about the questionable interpretation of which ethnic group *aestii* referred to. Instead, it asserted the roots of Lithuanians as Baltic people who traded amber. The guide referred to amber interchangeably as "Northern gold" and "Lithuanian gold".





A map of amber trade routes. © Source: E. Jovaiša, A. Butrimas (eds) *Lietuva iki Mindaugo*, Vilnius: Elektroninės leidybos namai, VDA leidykla, 2003. Courtesy of the Lithuanian Art Museum.

Baltic amber materialized natural and social exchanges. For instance, the formation of Baltic amber was explained by the leak of tar from forests which grew on the contemporary territory of Sweden in the Paleogenic period, which lasted for forty-two million years (Baltrūnas 2003: 21). The guide also emphasized that Neolithic amber artefacts from what is now Lithuanian territory were found in Denmark, Sweden and Great Britain (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964: 39). The latter was interpreted as proof of the international activities of Balts-Lithuanians:

The amber trade and its routes witness not only to the extraction, processing and use of amber in the current territory of the Lithuanian SSR, but also speaks about the relations of this country with other far-away lands, with which not only amber, but also other mutually valuable goods were traded. What was lacked at home was imported, and, on the other hand, a significant input was made into the treasury of world culture by establishing amber trade relations with centres of civilization and culture at that time. (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:41)

These narratives produced by the Museum of Amber should be understood as part of the nationalizing process (Brubaker 2004) in the LSSR. As Bojtár insightfully pointed out, the construction of “Baltic amber” as a marker of “the Baltic people” was not supported by chemical evidence: not only Baltic amber contains succinic acid. Therefore the reconstructions of “amber routes”, proudly displayed in the Museum, were little more than hypotheses of settlements, travels and relations of the Baltic people (Bojtár 1999:26–27).

In nationalising amber as the Northern-Lithuanian gold, the Museum of Amber actively downplayed the role of Baltic Germans in the economic and cultural histories of amber. The history of amber in East Prussia stretched back centuries: since the thirteenth century amber collection was increasingly regulated by the Livonian order, which held exclusive rights for mining and trading with amber.<sup>21</sup> From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century Königsberg, East Prussia, was the centre of both the amber industry and scientific research. The first book about amber, *A Aurifaber: Succini Historia*, was published in Königsberg in 1551 (Bojtár 1999:29). True, the guide did mention the role of German scholars, but only in passing. It seemed that the guide was so keen to find Lithuanians in the history of amber, that it discussed at some length the contribution of a Lithuanian writer, V. Kalvaitis, which was hardly an example of great scholarship. In 1910 Kalvaitis published *A Granary with a Lithuanian Name*, a collection of essays about amber as told by fishermen and a description of one amber mining company. However, it is possible that the guide gave scant information about the German amber industry in order to make the “progressive development” achieved by Soviet industries more plausible. The German contribution to the amber industry was quite tellingly described as involving cruel oppression of the working class (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964: 47).

Besides making historical narratives to fit Soviet, but also ethnocentric constructions of Lithuania,<sup>22</sup> the Museum of Amber performed an important role in constructing a banal nationalism (Billig 1995). Located in Palanga, the most popular summer resort seaside town, the museum was frequented by holiday makers. About 600 000 visitors visited the museum during the first five years (Palangytė 2008). The location of the museum in a seaside resort enabled active visitors to engage with amber: the museum was located on a route through the park which lead straight to the beach where pieces of amber could be collected. The Museum elevated the banal object of amber, a common possession of every woman in the shape of earrings, rings and necklaces, to the status of a marker of participation in the history of amber and ancient Lithuanian people. The Museum constructed amber both as an object of natural history, which informed a visitor about the geology and biology of the current territory of the republic, and as an object of cultural history and part of folk culture (see Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:6–7). The guide contained several folk tales which featured amber. In 1968 the Museum opened a

permanent exhibition of Lithuanian folk art in addition to the amber collections (Palangytė 2008).

The prominent American archaeologist of Lithuanian origin Marija Gimbutas was particularly optimistic about the power of amber to establish connections. In her letter of congratulation, Gimbutas encouraged the newly opened Museum of Amber to “take care, love and use the most precious treasure of your land, because with its help we can travel all over the world” (“Kalba muziejū...”: 1966: 107). In 1969 the Museum mounted a new, enlarged permanent exhibition which contained three thousand pieces of amber. The notion of an amber route was further developed in an edited collection of archaeological research about the trade relations of “Lithuania’s inhabitants” in the pre-modern period, 100–1200s.<sup>23</sup> The Museum display was expanded in 1986 to exhibit 4500 exhibits in fifteen halls which narrated the natural and cultural history of amber, stretching from pre-history to the present day (Palangytė 2008).

### **Amber during the Post-Soviet Transformation: Making the “New Balts”**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union both amber and the Museum of Amber were repeatedly placed on the government’s agenda. In 1998-1999 the destiny of the Museum of Amber suddenly was uncertain because a descendent of Tyszkiewicz’s family reclaimed the palace as it was illegally nationalized by the communist government. However, an agreement was reached that the palace was a state protected monument and that the inheritor would withdraw his claims. The public importance of the Museum of Amber was asserted. Another eloquent example of the closure of amber as the material core of Lithuanian ethnic identity was revealed in a parliamentary debate about an official definition of precious metals and stones. In 1998 the government presented a revision of the definition passed in 1995, according to which amber and pearls were defined as precious stones. The new suggestion that amber should not be classified as a precious stone stirred a heated (and somewhat amusing) debate among members of parliament, which is worth quoting at a greater length:

*MP:* Honorable members of Parliament, I strongly doubt the suggestion that amber does not have the qualities of precious stones. I am really sorry to see that amber is made equal with clay, sand, dolomite, water and any other geological body. Nevertheless from an aesthetic point of view, from a cultural point of view, amber has always been the pride of Lithuania: “The Amber Lithuania”, “The Amber Baltic Sea”, and “The Amber Tuba”. I could mention many other examples of uses of our amber, such as myths and cultural events. Honorable Sirs, of course, one can laugh at these things, but I do not find it funny when the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania makes amber equal with clay, sand and water and in this way creates the possibility of exporting amber just like a lump of soil from Lithuania. This is why I think that my suggestion is absolutely serious and that we do not need to remove amber from

the list of precious stones, but instead we should leave it on the list as perhaps the only precious stone found in Lithuania.

*Parliament Speaker:* Honorable colleague, if you think that I am laughing at you, please note that I am actually laughing at your colleagues' comments, which I happened to hear. This has nothing to do with my lack of respect for amber whatsoever. (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas 1998)

Another MP suggested creating a new, special classification of precious stones, which would enable Lithuanians to appropriately evaluate "their most valuable natural resource" (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas 1998). Although the Parliament removed amber from the official list of precious stones, amber remained a valuable resource in the material and discursive production of Lithuanian national identity. Similarly, the earlier cited passage from Tacitus' *Germania* retained its role as a vehicle which brought together amber, *aestiis*, the Balts and the modern, now post-Soviet, Lithuanians together.

In summer 2009 the Museum of Applied Art (a branch of the Lithuanian Art Museum, which is one of four national museums) in Vilnius mounted an exhibition *The Art of the Balts* (*Baltų menas*, 5 July 2009 – 20 April 2010), which immersed the visitor in a multimedia experience of sounds, moving images and archaeological objects. The exhibition was explicitly related to the celebration of Lithuanian sovereignty: the opening of the exhibition was scheduled to take place on the eve of the Coronation day of Mindaugas, celebrated on the 6th of July. *The Art of the Balts* was scheduled to travel in the national museums abroad and visit Warsaw, Gdansk, Tallinn, Riga, Berlin, Copenhagen and Stockholm in 2010–2011.

Organized by the Vilnius Academy of the Arts and curated by a historian, Adomas Butrimas, the exhibition contained a section "Tradition of Amber in the Baltic Lands". Here the Baltic lands were mapped on the basis of linguistic groups and included the contemporary territories of Lithuania, Latvia, Kaliningrad and North Eastern Poland. The architecture of the display featured two corridors formed from black coloured stands. In line with the fashionable trend of "black baroque", the exhibition colour scheme was monochromic: the display stands featured black-painted matt and glossy surfaces, dimmed lights and black chandeliers decorating vaulted ceilings. In this dark and expensive-looking space spotlights highlighted archaeological exhibits, which were made of amber, silver, bronze and copper. The display also featured the section "Baltic motifs in the contemporary art", which included a video installation showing re-enactment of Baltic cultural rituals, such as Midsummer's Day: bonfires, light night in a forested countryside, white-dressed people singing folk songs. As it appealed to almost all senses, *The Art of the Balts* continued the path of defining the Balts as amber trading tribes, and presented them as an undisputed source of Lithuanian identity.

The Soviet narrative, which constructed amber as both a metaphor of the Lithuanian state and a banal object of everyday life which made visible the diachronic and synchronic imagined community of Lithuanians, was strongly modi-



fied. *The Art of the Balts* constructed amber not as a universal marker of all Lithuanians, but as a marker of a particular social group, the military and social elite. As the exhibition architecture brought to mind a high-fashion store, it can be suggested that the organizers wanted to remove amber from the banal context of the everyday life of Lithuanians, who use amber as inexpensive jewellery. Instead, the exhibition framed amber as a genuine Northern gold: a valuable stone which hints at luxury and an item of refined aesthetic contemplation.



The exhibition *Art of the Balts*, Vilnius, 2009. © Photo: Eglė Rindzevičiūtė  
An amber jewellery stall in Vilnius Old Town, 2010. © Photo: Eglė Rindzevičiūtė

The exhibition did feature the famous Tacitus quote. However, Tacitus's quote was explained in a way that was different from the 1960s version. Tacitus described *aestiis* as a “savages, who were not interested in the nature of amber”. The exhibition curators translated this lack of intellectual interest and craftsmanship into a positive statement. The exhibition website described the raw “Baltic amber artefacts” in line with contemporary “eco-friendly” discourse. According to this view, raw amber was the result of a conscious effort and a choice based on a particular taste: “the Balts tried to keep the shape of amber as natural as possible” (“Gintaro...” 2009). An art historian clearly articulated the aesthetic value of “Baltic amber”:

One of the themes [of the exhibition] is dedicated to amber, a material which is associated with Balticness, both in professional and popular cultures. Although our ancestors chose to export amber to faraway lands and not to polish it themselves, these amber necklaces which shine in black display windows suggest that these may be examples of a more subtle understanding of the beauty of amber and the level of its processing than the understanding that we have today. (Iršėnas 2009: 24)

Crude amber artefacts, according to this exhibition, showed that the Balts were not savages, but rather a developed civilisation. Furthermore, *The Art of the Balts* did not stop with pre-history, but went on to establish a diachronic link between the Baltic tribes and Lithuanian sovereign statehood: it described the GDL elite as a “Baltic aristocracy”. “The Baltic elites which created the state of Lithuania”, emphasized the exhibition organizers, “accumulated massive wealth”.<sup>24</sup> Heirs not



of savages, but civilized Baltic tribes, modern Lithuanians were constructed as the “New Balts”, a historical community and rightful members of the Northern part of Europe. Here it has to be noted that this museum discourse about the Balts was significantly different from the approach advanced by some professional Lithuanian historians, who emphasized the “uncivilized” and “savage” character of the Baltic tribes in their work (see Manvydas 2006).

## Conclusion

It is not a paradox that although Lithuanian ethnic nationalism first emerged at the end of the nineteenth century its institutional and cultural expressions finally developed under the Soviet regime. It was under Soviet government that a fully fledged system of Soviet Republic (or national) museums was created in Lithuania. Although highly restrictive, Soviet encouragement of the expression of apolitical ethnic cultures enabled LSSR museums to further articulate Lithuanianess and Balticness within a conceptual and material framework, which was rooted in the nineteenth century and the interwar period (Misiunas and Taagepera 2006; Rindzevičiūtė 2009). The exhibitions *Curonians: the Vikings of the Balts* and *The Art of the Balts* can be understood as statements which summarized a century-long negotiation of regional location and the material performance of Lithuanian national identity.

HEM and the Museum of Amber adopted two different strategies to situate the history of Lithuanian nation-building regionally. The Museum of Amber actively combined natural history with historiography and literary discourses to construct the Soviet Lithuanians as heirs of the imagined ancient Balts. As it principally dealt with the history of political events, HEM was in a more difficult situation than the Museum of Amber. During the Soviet period the history of Lithuania’s regional ties with the Baltic Sea Area and Nordic countries was a political minefield and HEM therefore preferred to wholly abandon regional categories in favour of a Lithuania-centred story. To invoke any connections between Balticness and the area beyond the Iron Curtain was politically too dangerous, unless the museum could rely on natural history, such as glacial shifts or the formation and distribution of amber.

The Northern dimension did not play an especially important role in the Soviet museum version of Lithuanian history. Those few connections between Lithuania and the North were mainly articulated through negative events. HEM integrated the Northern dimension into Lithuanian history through the narrative of external enemies that threatened the sovereignty of Lithuania. Consequently, Russia, and later the Soviet Union, was described as a guardian of Lithuania’s security. The biggest challenge for Soviet narratives was to explain centuries-long military conflicts between Lithuania and Russia. This was achieved by downplaying these events and instead focusing on other conflicts, such as the Northern Wars.

On the other hand, in the Soviet period the positive dimension of the North was mobilized in attempts to articulate Lithuania as a Northern country. This was achieved by the Museum of Amber, which used the natural and cultural histories of amber in order to canonize this stone as the core material of Lithuanian ethnic identity. Through amber Lithuania defined itself as a country of Baltic people who were seen as Northerners, at least by Tacitus. The Museum of Amber suggested that it was amber which made Lithuania visible in the age of pre-recorded history, both for contemporaries of the Balts and for modern Lithuanians. Here the Museum of Amber stood in stark contrast with HEM, which did not articulate clear connections between modern Soviet Lithuanians and the Baltic tribes.<sup>25</sup>

The Museum of Amber, it seems, succeeded in developing a powerful and lasting nationalist narrative. This narrative relied on the notion of Lithuania as a Baltic country, defined geographically (by the Baltic Sea), linguistically (Baltic languages) and by confession (Baltic pagan religion). Amber was nominated as *the* substance which materialized the existence of Baltic tribes and, later, Lithuania and Lithuanians. The function of amber as a bridge, conceptualized earlier by Marija Gimbutas, was used to bring together the two “European Capitals of Culture 2009”, Vilnius and Linz: the Museum of Amber exhibited parts of its collection at Biologiezentrum, an institution of the Upper Austrian Museums, and affirmed once again that “Lithuania” was “a country near the amber Baltic Sea” (see Makauskienė 2009: 35). The narrative of the amber-rich Balts was further reinforced by a revised narrative of Lithuanian-Northern connections. The Soviet narrative which defined both West and Northern Europe as historical enemies of Lithuania was softened or, as in *The Art of the Balts*, wholly abandoned.

These constructions of a history of “the New Balts” demonstrated a good deal of reflexivity. Curators were explicitly open about their goal to come up with new narrative nodes which would revise the traditional narrative of a victimized Lithuania, which was at the mercy of foreign powers. The short-lived military prevalence of the Balts-Curonians in the Baltic Sea area was mobilized to underpin the new pride in Lithuanian national identity.<sup>26</sup> However, in doing that curators were less explicitly aware that they also revised a working-class centred Soviet approach. Together with this approach a democratic articulation of Lithuanian-Baltic nationalism as something which was shared by any member of the nation was disassembled. The narrative of *The Art of the Balts* was based on modernist bourgeois values: it made the rough amber works perform the disinterested aesthetical gaze of the Balts. In addition, both exhibitions explicitly promoted social and political distinction. Little irony could be detected in the way in which *Curonians* boasted about the wealth and military might of the prehistoric “Baltic elites”: “Violent people who are pagans, have a lot of wealth and the best horses live in Curonia” (Griciuvienė 2008:28).

Having charted the trajectory of the Baltic component of Lithuanian national identity and its situation in relation to the North during the Soviet occupation and

after, this article cannot do full justice to the centuries-long history of the discursive and material production of Balts-Lithuanians. Further studies are needed of the economy and politics of the Baltic identity as a meaning-making project, which draws both on natural scientific and literary discourses. Particularly instructive would be a comparative study of articulations of Balticness-Northernness as they are revealed in different institutional and geographical contexts, such as formal education in Lithuania, but also Latvia and Germany, and, last but not least, Lithuanian émigré communities. Just like the imagined Baltic amber, the production of Baltic-Lithuanians has to be treated as a multifaceted project which, on the one hand, appears as an amplification of ethno-centric nationalism, but also, on the other hand, contains possibilities for opening multiple connections and revisions of Lithuanian national identity as an ever changing relational constellation.

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## Notes

- 1 One thousand years ago the word "Litua" was written in the Qeudlinburg Annals (1009): "Litua" referred to the lands in which a monk on a Christianising mission, St. Bruno (Boniface), was killed.
- 2 The identification of the Baltic with the Baltic Germans was widespread in the history of art and applied arts. For example, a catalogue of silver artefacts, published by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London emphasized that it was necessary to interpret Scandinavian silver in the context of Baltic artefacts. It meant silverware made by Riga-based Baltic Germans (Lightbrow 1975).
- 3 See Budryte (2005). For an excellent study of Lithuanian Jewish history and historical critique of ethnocentric Lithuanian nationalism see Nikžentaitis, Schreiner & Staliūnas (2004).

- 4 Due to limited space, it is impossible to do justice to the richness of the meaning of the term “Baltic” here. It suffices to note, that according Endre Bojtár, the origins of the term “Baltic” is not entirely clear. As Bojtár put it, “the term of mare Balticum is an artificial construction. None of the peoples who lived in the region in historic times called themselves ‘Baltic’, nor did they refer to the sea by that name”. Indeed it was German nobles, settled in Livland, Estland and Kurland, who first started to use the term to describe themselves in around 1600. Only after the Paris peace negotiations in 1919 did “the Baltic” come to be used to refer to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This coincided with the rise of Baltic philological studies (Bojtár 1999: 6, 10–11).
- 5 For performative theories of identification as a meaning-making practice see Butler (1997) and MacKenzie (2009)
- 6 All translations are the author’s unless indicated otherwise.
- 7 The year 1946 saw increasingly anti-Western policies in the Soviet Union: such Western sciences as sociology were banned and pre-war sociological museum theory suffered as well. In the mid-1950s the first studies about the history of Soviet museums were published, but sociology was not rehabilitated until the early 1960s. In the LSSR the field of museum studies started to emerge by the mid-1960s: publications about the history of museums appeared and social surveys of museum visitors were initiated.
- 8 Many of those narratives positioned Lithuania as either a bridge between East and West or proposed a self-centred and isolationist view of the nation. For more see Leonidas Donskis (1999; 2002) and Egle Rindzeviciute (2003).
- 9 See the anthology *Ethnogenesis of Lithuanians* which summarized the results of ten years’ research on Baltic pre-history, published in Vilnius, 1987 (Šimėnas 2008). The conference on Baltic studies could be compared with the foundational ethno-linguistic congress of Germanists in Frankfurt (1846) or the Pan-Slavic Congress in Prague (1848). The Baltic movement in the Soviet republics was probably inspired by systematic efforts to render visible the autonomous history of “Baltic nations”, undertaken by Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian exile intellectuals. The Association for Advancement of Baltic Studies, for instance, was founded in the United States in 1968.
- 10 The first director was J. Petruelis.
- 11 For more about spatial and chronological narratives in Soviet Lithuanian historiography see Aurimas Švedas (2009). For general features of the all-union Soviet historiography see Gita Deneckere and Thomas Welskopp (2008: 153–158).
- 12 The guide authors were the heads of: the ethnography section (Stasė Bernotienė, 1926-2001), the history section (Ona Mažeikienė) and the archaeology section (Bronė Tautavičienė).
- 13 For an attempt to archaeologically construct the Baltic Sea and East European areas see the classical study by Marija Gimbutas (1956). Gimbutas’s all-inclusive approach, however, was later criticized by Lithuanian archaeologists.
- 14 Similarly the museum’s guide used the modern Estonian names of cities: Tartu not Dorpat, Tallinn not Reval.
- 15 The exhibition *Curonians* was organized by archaeologists Eglė Gričiuvienė, Gytis Grižas and Zane Bruža in collaboration with the Latvian National Museum (LvNM).
- 16 It has to be noted that the accompanying text mentioned Ugro-Finnic tribes only very briefly, as northern neighbours of the Curonians, with whom “Baltic Vikings” sometimes engaged in fights.
- 17 In 2009 a review of an exhibition *The Art of the Balts* cited Polish archaeologist Ludwik Krzywicki (1859–1941) who famously stated that “we can talk about the culture of Lithuanians in the same way as we talk about Celtic or Scandinavian culture” (Iršėnas 2009: 25).
- 18 In Lithuanian “amber” is *gintaras*, in Latvian is *dzintars*, and in the now extinct East Prussian it is *gentars*.

- 19 Although the initiators of the Museum were not particularly interested in the industrial side. Budrys, for example, applied to the V. Muchina Applied Arts Institute in Leningrad to write a doctoral dissertation about Baltic amber workshops. The Institute turned down Budrys's application stating that it concerned an unimportant subject and proposed he write about the amber industry instead. Budrys chose not pursue this research career (Jakelaitis 1998: 11).
- 20 Gimbutas traced the Lithuanian and East Prussian amber trade with Northern Finland and Russia, mainly conic amber beads, to the Neolithic Age (Gimbutas 1956:180–181). However, the notion of amber trade routes was criticized by Katinas (1983) and Bojtár (1999).
- 21 See Baltrūnas (2003: 76–77).
- 22 A good summary of the Soviet Lithuanian version of ethnocentrism was retrospectively made by the Lithuanian historian Edvardas Gudavičius, who pointed out several normative statements around which Lithuanian history-writing was organized: "First and foremost, 'Lithuania which stretches from one sea to another sea with Vytautas the Great'. On the other hand, 'Two wonderful decades of Lithuanian independence'. This 'image' did not capture the gentry and the culture of noble estates, because these were understood as 'Polish'. Meanwhile peasants were seen as 'very good and beautiful, because they spoke Lithuanian and fostered our culture'. These contexts defined a search for Lithuanianess" (Švedas & Gudavičius 2008: 135)
- 23 See Mykolas Michelbertas (1972).
- 24 See <http://www.baltumenas.lt>
- 25 In 2005 the exhibition of the period between the Middle Ages and 1795 was reorganized in the following way: the chronological principle was dismantled in favour of thematic organisation of the display. Two themes were selected: the political development of the state of Lithuania and the "ethnic-confessional diversity" of the GDL. Interestingly, the Vasa dynasty was again presented mainly as part of the military history section. Nevertheless, some objects from the Vasa period were used to illustrate the everyday life of the royals. It is interesting that a written presentation of the reorganized exhibition did not contain any references to "Baltic" tribes or regions. It seems that the new display continues the project of Lithuanisation of the history of Lithuania. See Vidas Poškus (2005).
- 26 It is interesting to note that amber was selected as a mascot of the national Lithuanian basketball team for Eurobasket 2011. The chant goes like this: "Amber is basketball, Lithuania's precious stone" (In Lithuanian: "amberis – tai krepšinis, Lietuvos brangakmenis").

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## **Dressed in a Present from the Past: The Transfers and Transformations of a Swedish Bridal Crown in the United States**

By Lizette Gradén

### **Abstract**

Ever since the emigration from the Nordic countries the Old world and the New world have maintained an exchange of ideas, customs, and material culture. This cultural heritage consists of more than remnants of the past. Drawing on theories of material culture and performance this article highlights the role of gifts in materializing relationships between individuals, families and organizations in the wake of migration. First, I build on a suggested coinage of the term heritage gifts as a way of materializing relationships. Thereafter, I map out the numerous roles which a Swedish bridal crown play in the United States: as museum object, object of display and loaned to families for wedding ceremonies in America. The transfers and transformations of the bridal crown enhances a drama of a migration heritage. This dynamic drama brings together kin in Sweden and America and maps specific locations into a flexible space via the trajectory of crown-clad female bodies.

**Keywords:** Gift-giving, heritage gift, performance, the dressed body, Swedish-America

## Introduction

In April, 2002, at the age of 82, Marie Ylinen (born 1920) took center stage as bride at the American Swedish Institute (ASI) in Minneapolis for the second time in her life. On her head she wore the same Swedish bridal crown that she wore when she married Arthur Ylinen in this historic house and cultural center in 1952. While the crown was the same, the 2002 event was a symbolic wedding, a staged ceremony dealing with a different sort of marriage; the matrimony between the province of Värmland in Sweden and Swedish America. In 2002, the governor of the Värmland province, Ingemar Eliasson, crowned Marie Ylinen (nee Olsson) as “the Värmland Gift Bride”. The ceremony marked the highlight of the ASI’s fiftieth anniversary celebration of Värmlandsgåvan, a collection of 3000 greetings, 200 volumes of books and 300 artifacts, all selected by the parishes of Värmland to represent both the typical and spectacular of present and past parish life. A replica of the bridal crown in Karlstad Cathedral was selected a gift from the entire province in addition to the individual parish gifts of textiles, paintings, ceramics, glass, photo albums, miniature houses and birch bark items. The Värmland Historical Association (Värmlands Hembygdsförbund) presented this collection of gifts to the American Swedish Institute at a ceremony in Minneapolis in 1952, a gift-giving act in which Marie Olsson’s wearing of the bridal crown played a key role.

The ceremony in 2002 was a restaging of the gift-giving performance in 1952, which can be said to centre around one star actor—the bridal crown. This particular artefact was presented by the gift-givers in 1952 as “an emblem of a desire that the ties between American and Swedish citizens of the same tribe shall be joined generation after generation”<sup>1</sup> Since its arrival in Minneapolis in 1952, the bridal crown has been displayed at ASI as part of several exhibitions. It has also been loaned to families of Värmland descent to use for wedding ceremonies in America: rituals where the crowned body becomes a performance of connectivity. The crown enhances a drama of migration heritage that brings together kin in Sweden and America and maps specific locations and ties them into a flexible space via the trajectory of crown-clad female bodies.

Ever since the emigration from the Nordic countries the Old world and the New world have maintained an exchange of ideas, customs and material culture. Even though the relationships between the individual nation states have been frosty at times, the Nordic countries have remained for numerous descendants of emigrants from there the standard bearer of culture. This cultural heritage consists of more than remnants of the past. It can be described as culture selected in the present and projected into the past, and simultaneously, the past congealed into present culture (Comaroff 2009: 10; cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 149). Moreover, such culture is often materialized and involve our senses by being for example touched, worn, and viewed. These materializations may be are understood as stylized expressions of who we are (Küchler & Miller 2005; Miller 2005, 2009; Damsholt 2009) and



effects of previous materializations (cf. Latour 2005). Hence, heritage solidifies contemporary perceptions of our past into material culture and such material heritage is apt to reconfigure perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, our senses of belonging.

Museums and exhibitions are by definition selective and material. They are also theatrical, observed American folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 3), and the theme of this special issue of Culture Unbound is the ways in which museums, events and objects are made to perform Nordic spaces. As part of such discussion, I will explore how a Swedish bridal crown gives rise to multiple performances in the United States and generates a sense of history that differs from that of museums, exhibitions, monuments and archives. By following one single object, I explore how its role changes over time, and illustrate how it fosters a long-term dynamic relationship between “geographical Sweden” and “imaginary Sweden” and their counterparts in North America. The study will show how the bridal crown enables an emotionalized kind of cultural performance where heritage rests on the heads of brides, creating magic bonds with the local and regional, pre-national past.<sup>2</sup>



Marie Ylinen crowned as the Värmland Gift bride 2002.  
Photoalbum in Ylinen's private collection; Photo: Lizette Gradén

## Heritage Gifts and Migration

Gifts hold the promise of furthering relationships, and the giving of gifts to museums may be seen as a plea for a presence in the future. Gifts played a major role in the founding of cabinets of curiosities and many collections in art and cultural history museums in Sweden were originally gifts (cf. Svanberg).<sup>3</sup> The same gesture of gift-giving that creates cultural connectivity among people and institutions in a particular nation or region also strengthens ties between emigrants and their homeland. Many of the Nordic immigrant historic houses and museums in the United States can be described as gifts. The Turnblad mansion, later named American Swedish Institute, was a gift to the “Swedish people in Minnesota and their descendants” from Småland immigrant and newspaper publicist Swan J. Turnblad. The mansion, originally Turnblad’s home, was intended as a space where Swedish literature, art, crafts and music could be developed and material culture of Swedish immigrants could be collected, preserved, and displayed. Today a thriving cultural institution, the ASI describes itself as a historic house with a collection.<sup>4</sup> By this donation, he envisioned his former home as a monument of Swedish culture in Minneapolis. Implicitly he called for a space where his deed and dedication could be reciprocated by being performed over and over again.

The idea of gift-giving as means to further relationships is not new. Particularly the idea of reciprocity has its own heritage. In the Nordic realm, the principle for generating relationships through reciprocity appears for example in the Poetic Edda. It says “with weapons and weed should friends be won, as one can see in themselves, those who give to each other will be friends once they meet half way” (The Poetic Edda: 40). In a similar vein, anthropologist Marcel Mauss’s analysis demonstrates that reciprocated gifts further relationships and build community (Mauss 1990).<sup>5</sup> In other words, he pays attention to what the gift is capable of doing, how the gift-giving as performance is an effect of a previous performance. Building on Marcel Mauss’s concept of the gift as something that can bind people together, along with the assumption that objects increase in cultural value through their appropriation and socialization (Appadurai 1986; Miller 2001), I use the term “heritage gift” to describe a gift which biography builds cultural relationships over time. Like diplomatic gifts, heritage gifts require specific cultural competence which includes detailed uses of the past. The uses of past in this case can be defined as a performance intended to amplify cultural recognition, connectivity and collaboration. Corresponding to the quite similar restitution process, however, the heritage gift is less oriented towards the juridical rights to the object. The heritage gift refers to an object selected to recognize human beings, objects or events with a specific emphasis on the past. The gift-giving act refers to a method of negotiating future recognition and cultural connectivity.

## Performing Gifts

Performance is an efficient way of communicating ideas and values related to heritage and history. Drawing on the works of Richard Schechner, I understand performance as an activity that is framed, presented, high-lighted, and displayed before an audience (Schechner 2006: 2, 28). According to Schechner, who borrows his view from Erving Goffman, any behavior, event or action can be studied “as” performance (Schechner 2006: 40; Goffman 1990) so also the crowning ceremony, as it contains and enacts multiple performances presented in various places, at various times and in various situations. As Schechner points out, the boundaries between performance and daily life can be unclear. What takes place in performance effects life outside the actual performance (Schechner 1985: 125, 2006) According to Schechner, objects and spaces also “perform” as part of their interaction with human beings. He writes:

They are regarded as practices, events, and behaviours, not as “objects” or “things”. [...]. Performance studies inquires about the “behaviour” of, for example, a painting: the ways it interacts with those who view it, thus evoking different reactions and meanings, and how it changes meaning over time and in different contexts; under what circumstances it was created and exhibited; and how the gallery or building displaying it shapes its presentations. (Schechner 2002: x, cf. Latour 2005)

Framed as performance, in Schechner’s sense of the concept, the bridal crown when on display, handled, or used in weddings performs on people who come into contact with it. It performs history in action and invokes a drama of loss and re-connection, a hands-on sensory and emotionalized kind of cultural performance. Deliberately or not, the crown put to use performs who we are or want to be, that is here Swedes and Americans with a flexible past, including both pre-national and migration heritage.

Performance is thus understood in this context to mean stylized communication that takes place front stage, following Goffman (1990), i.e. in rooms that are accessible to the public to a greater or lesser extent. Gift-giving performances such as the handing over of the bridal crown at the ASI in 1952 with the Olsson Ylinen wedding, as well as the crowning ceremony in 2002, are part of the front stage. Some of these performances also take place in other areas where the objects are handled and thereby framed – rooms considered backstage for the museum visitor. In the case of the crown, these spaces include storage, offices and places outside of the museum such as family’s homes. Moreover, I suggest that both participants in the study and the researcher when dealing with the crown take on roles as collaborating actors performing on stages, adding yet another dimension to the drama studied.

## A Swedish Bridal Crown as Heritage Gift in America

Taking into consideration the strained relationship between Sweden and America during the Second World War, the choice among the gift-givers to “perform” the province of Värmland rather than Sweden as a whole probably contributed to the bridal crown’s success at the ASI at this time.<sup>6</sup> The strong emphasis on family values in both Sweden and the U.S at the time may have contributed as well. In hindsight, the bridal crown was granted a diplomatic status in both official and private settings.

Even today, the bridal crown plays a key role when the history of the American Swedish Institute is communicated. Early on in my fieldwork at ASI the curator and volunteers presented the Värmland gift collection as the most important part of the ASI collection and the crown as the key object of this particular collection.<sup>7</sup> These verbal performances most typically took place in back-stage areas such as during coffee breaks at the kaffestuga before museum opening hours, in the curator’s office, or when we were working in storage. These performances transformed these spaces from back-stage to front-stage; profession-specific stages on which staff which handled and cared for the bridal crown could act. These verbal performances brought forth several actors. Highlighted was the province of Värmland where the crown was made by local artists. Similar to the second act in a play, it was not until later on in my fieldwork process that the museum staff presented the crown as a paradoxical object in the museum.



The bridal crown as accessioned into the museum collection. Photo: Lizette Gradén.



The crown, like other objects that arrive at the American Swedish Institute, or any other museum for that matter, is moved through the rite of passage of accessioning. This ritual performance, when the museum registrar inscribes a newly arrived object with a number-combination and notes it as part of the collection is not just a transaction between donor and recipient: it is a performance of ownership that separates a museum object from objects outside the museum sphere. This act explicitly performs how objects are transformed into heritage —how this particular object is worth being part of a collection from the past, cared for and carried into the future. Unlike most museum objects, however, the bridal crown was also circulated outside the museum sphere. The circulation can be seen as an effect of a written performance from 1952. In the official gift letter that accompanied the bridal crown to the United States, the gift-givers in Värmland performed their intended aim with the crown as follows:

Folk of kinship in the province of Värmland send to the people of Värmland heritage in the United States a greeting with a gift from the old ancestral home. The gift is a reproduction of the bridal crown from Karlstad Cathedral. It is an emblem of a desire that the ties between American and Swedish citizens of the same tribe shall be joined generation after generation.<sup>8</sup>

The letter of intent may be interpreted as the gift-givers performance of fear to be left in oblivion by relatives, friends and their descendants who had created a new life for themselves in America. It can also be understood as a wish to reproduce a piece of material culture from Värmland in America. Moreover, and perhaps most important here, it may be seen as a performance of connectivity based on kin (Mauss 1990; Easterson 1992: 3–4). After all, Värmland had lost one-fourth of its population to emigration between 1869 and 1930, an emigration which separated numerous families and households. In this context the bridal crown takes on a role as a potential unifier.

In Sweden (as well as in America) folklore archives, ethnological literature, and museum exhibitions have lavishly described weddings in the past, some which include ornaments of the body and the dressing of the bride. In recent years a growing interest in materializations of culture has spurred a renewed interest in the bread and butter of weddings. As ethnologist Eva Knuts points out, a woman does not need a ring or a dress in order to be legally married; her choices to materialize the event are culturally governed (Knuts 2006). Similarly, there is no need for a bride in Sweden or America to wear a silver crown to be legally married.

Instead of taking the wedding as my vantage point and explore what materials and actors such event requires, I being with the single material object. As a symbol of status and virtue the bridal crown has a heritage of its own dating back at least to the 16th century and the writings of Olaus Magnus (Resare 1988:77). These previous acts have an effect when the crown takes center stage as cultural heritage also in the present. In ethnological literature the bridal crown is put forth as a distinctively Scandinavian or Nordic custom (Resare 1988:77–95; Noss 1990; Knuts 2006) which parallels the idea of a crown in the Swedish-American setting.



The replica of the bridal crown in Minneapolis refers to the bridal crown in the Karlstad Cathedral, where it was received as a gift from a local family and inaugurated in 1931. Like any other congregation at the time, this practice of offering a specific crown can be understood as the Karlstad Cathedral's congregation's performance of themselves as an honorable community. As an object, writes Anna-Maja Nylén, the silver bridal crown is regarded as the strongest symbol of virginity, and of all the ornaments for the body, the silver bridal crown was worn only during weddings, as a badge of honor. Nylén (1962, 1971) points out how churches in Sweden in the early twentieth century increasingly loaned or rented out their bridal crowns made of precious materials. Karlstad Cathedral was one of these churches to receive a crown as a gift to transform women in the congregation to honorable brides and wives.

But the crown as a symbol of purity and virginity has also been challenged in performances where the American Midwest has served as center stage. A silver bridal crown plays a key role when author Vilhelm Moberg in his novel *Nybyggarna: Sista brevet till Sverige*, first published in 1959, resurrects the honor of Ulrika of Västergöhl, who was regarded a whore in her home parish in Sweden. First, Moberg transforms Ulrika into a crown bride in America and thereafter to a donor of a "gift from North America to Ljuder church", a bridal crown of silver and precious stones to be loaned to "those brides who are known for their virtue, honor and good manners" (1984/1959: 242–249), a return-gift by a woman of transformation to women back home.<sup>9</sup> The transformations may be interpreted as Moberg's performance of America as the land of possibilities and the potential for women to re-stage themselves outside their parish, region, or nation, here in a Swedish-American setting.

In the same way as previous ethnological studies demonstrate the silver crown's transformative force, the crown becomes a vehicle for the transforming women's view of themselves. If its transformative capacity makes body ornamentation perhaps the richest category of material culture (Eicher 1995; Baumgarten 2002; Küchler & Miller 2005; Shukla 2008), this richness is reinforced when the object of adornment is a heritage gift. Keeping in mind that many emigrants from Värmland after 1890 were single women (Måwe 1971; cf. Lintelman 2005), it is likely that the women in the province were familiar with the impact of the tradition and possibly considered the social consequences for women whose families did not have access to their own silver crown. When worn in the American context, the bridal crown performs the bride's past as honorable all the way from Scandinavia.

## A Contested Object

The bridal crown was not without controversy at the outset. People involved in having it made and donating it, of course, appreciated the gift. Among these were John Bryntesson of Svaneholm's manor and Axel Westling, the Värmland governor. Museum representatives in Sweden, however, reacted strongly to the initiative of the Värmlanders to provide their relatives and friends in the United States with a bridal crown linked to the province. The bridal crown brought forth high levels of emotions.

Albin Widén, Swedish author, curator, and scholar of Swedish-America wrote:

It has been mentioned that a bridal crown is the main item in the Värmland Gift. In recent years, several bridal crowns have been donated to Swedish-America and one of the donors is a female member of the Institute's Board. Should girls of Swedish ancestry in Minneapolis wish to borrow a Swedish bridal crown, they already have access to one. [...] Export art and handicrafts, but leave Swedish peasant culture at home! (DN 6 April 1952)

Carl A. Boberg, a Värmlander and returnee from Chicago, replied:

According to Dr. Widén there is already a bridal crown in Minneapolis, to be used by Swedish descendants who want to marry. Who cares? It is not from Värmland! The crown to be sent is meant for the girls from Värmland. That is the great difference. Värmland is the crown among Svearikes länder! Bryntesson from Svaneholm, who has donated the crown, is a Swedish-American and he knows what he is doing. (NWT 8 April 1952)

The Governor of Värmland, Axel Westling, responded:

Our goal with the Värmland Gift to the US has been to provide expression of a personal connection through traditions and community history. [...] Doctor Widén is seething over the fact that they are sending an expensive bridal crown, when Swedish-America is already in disposition of several such crowns. He seems not to have understood that what is intended here is to convey an idealistic connection with Värmland, to provide a breath of their native home. It is none other than the bridal crown from Karlstad Cathedral that they wish to send over. (NWT 10 April 1952)

These men play both official and private roles, and their altercation over the bridal crown expresses high levels of emotion and different perceptions of heritage. Albin Widén, scholar at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm and at the time head of the Swedish Information Bureau in Minneapolis (hosted by the ASI), takes on a role of Swede with cultural competence about the Swedish museum sphere as well as the Swedish American ditto. Does he really find the crown to be unfit for export to America because of its provincial origin? So it may be. More likely, Widén's objection stems from his official role to promote Sweden as a modern society in America, marked by high culture, technical innovation and social progression rather than family traditions and peasant heritage. The governor, on the other hand, is the official spokesperson for a region, and takes on the role of the gift-giver and promoter of community, beyond the nation state. Carl Boberg, an immigrant and returnee, embodies the emigrant/immigrant role and performs the role of the culture broker. The debate over the suitability of the bridal crown as a

gift appears to perform a region's challenging and increasingly centralized view of the modern nation state.

## Performed and Embodied Heritage

Since the 1970s, the ASI has struck a balance between the museum's task of caring for and displaying the crown and the intention of the donors to provide women from Värmland in the US with their own bridal headpiece. Keeping the crown in storage has become a way to balance between preserving and providing access to the crown, without marketing the object. Storing it in a locker outside of public view but accessible for those who know about its existence, the bridal crown appears more precious than when put on display for the public in the exhibition area at the museum. In this sense the museum has transferred the bridal crown from an object of display to a semi-public object.

When studied as performance, the activities that frame the bridal crown reflect the cultural order of the museum, the gaze of people who can perform in this space. Judging from the object's present careful placement in a locker, in its original transportation box and in relation to other objects on adjacent shelves, the bridal crown still plays a key role to the ASI. The careful placing of the object, of giving it space, communicates care in a historic house with a collection, a building that lacks the facilities of a museum crafted to care for collections. Although away from public view, the crown becomes a display for selected view such as curators and visiting researchers like me. Following Goffman, the showcasing of the bridal crown in the storage area transforms this part of the museum from backstage to front stage (Goffman 1990), from storage to a semi-public space, where museum staff and researchers can act. In this area, during one of my visits, the curator carefully pulled down the paper box from the 1950s, opened it and lifted out the crown in a manner that demonstrated familiarity – and great respect. The curator Curt Pederson declared:

As you know [referring to my learning about the object through archival material, photos and its placement in storage at the ASI] this beautiful headpiece is very different from other bridal crowns in our collections. It is unique! It is a gift from the people of Värmland, ordinary people to the people from Värmland living over here. The crown stands 3½ inches high and measures 3 inches in diameter. It is made of gold filigree over silver and is inset with rubies and rhinestones. It was designed by artist Oscar Jonsson and made by goldsmith Thure Ahlgren, both from Värmland.<sup>10</sup>

While setting and performance are crafted to attract an audience, the back stage belongs to those working to prepare the public performance (Goffman 1990: 107–112), hence the objects' display, exhibitions and programs. Places such as the storage area that are back stage in daily life at the museum become transformed into front stage when curator and researcher venture into the Värmland Gift collection. This shift appears most clearly in explicit performance. The curator's verbal presentation of the bridal crown reinforces the crown's preeminent status. As a

researcher I take the role of the listener, the audience and apprentice. Through this collaborative act, Curt Pederson and I, the curator and the researcher, further strengthen the notion of the object's importance as heritage gift, an act which makes us both actors in the drama of heritage preservation.

The curator hands the crown over to me. The silver feels cold as the crown rests heavy in the palm of my hand. The crown and the stories about it perform on me, the mere touch makes the past feel eerily present, perhaps in a similar way as an archeologist holding his still soil-covered find from a dig. When holding the crown, its mere materiality in hand makes me think about how the crown now connects me with women who have previously handled it, imagining myself into yet another phase in its long, complex biography: a biography spanning its making in Värmland, rite-de-passage and inclusion in the museum collections, display in the museum, circulation among brides across the United States and return to museum storage and to performances and exhibits there. As a learner of things through touch I am convinced that objects have close to magical power to generate emotions and imaginary spaces. In the next moment and because of the crown's weight I spontaneously exclaim: "It's so heavy – how on earth could a bride keep it on her head?" a statement that brought yet another actor on stage in the storage room. One of the volunteers let us know that in the 1950s and 1960s, when the crown was frequently used in weddings, the American Swedish Institute referred brides-to-be to the beauty salon at Dayton's department store, whose hairdressers had learned how to use "doughnuts", rings padded with flax or horse hair to fasten the crown. In this case, the bridal crown itself becomes an actor (Schechner 2002: x) with a biography which also influences the hairdresser's performance, i.e. how the bride's body is dressed. It also connects the American Swedish Institute with Dayton's department store in a relationship of business exchange where heritage takes front stage.

Like a costume in a play, the bridal crown and the presented details of it dramatize the story. Along with its careful placing in metal storage, away from public view, the curator's presentation of the crown's biography (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) to the listening researcher and her response to the materiality of the crown, all contribute to its aura of being different from other bridal crowns in ASI's collections and therefore unique. By stating the exact measurements of the crown and describing its surface and luster, proportions and specific workmanship, the curator demonstrates his curatorial expertise, including the in-depth knowledge about the object. His presentation conjures up the crown's past as values that performs regional space down to the soil where it was made and where its makers lived, connecting people from Värmland within the United States with Värmlanders in Sweden. In addition to verbal presentations, the crown takes front stage also in written and visual performances.

## **Doubling and Parting as Strategies for Unified Heritage**

The ways in which the bridal crown becomes a key actor is also apparent in written wedding announcements. The following example is found in the Minneapolis paper *The Tribune*. In this particular announcement, the crown is carefully combined with another transatlantic object, namely one half of a table cloth made in Norway and brought to the United States. While the crown materializes culture, it is also an important instance of its embodiment. The crown as heritage gift allows heritage to be embodied, the word to become flesh.

A Swedish crown from the province of Värmland and one half of a table cloth woven almost 200 years ago, by a former Bishop of Norway, lent a Scandinavian touch to the wedding Friday evening of Mary Kirsten Towley of Hopkins and David Robert Swanson of Cokato, Minnesota. The bride, daughter of Mrs Carl Kahrs Towley, 246 N. 6th Av., Hopkins, and the late Mr Towley, wore a crown presented to the American Swedish Institute by the Swedish province. (The bride's maternal grandfather, Dr. P. A. Mattson, came from this province, entitling her to wear the crown)." (*Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, 30 July 1961)

Like a press release or written review for a theatre production, the wedding announcement communicates and legitimizes that the production actually took place. The wedding announcement articulates exclusivity tied to the crown, as the museum applies particular rules for its usage. As stated in the quotation, the bride is "entitled" to wear the crown because of her maternal grandfather's coming from Värmland, a concept of heritage that brings to mind inheritance of reigns among royalty in Sweden as well as festival royalty in Scandinavian America.

But mostly the description offers insights into how doubling (not duplicating) of objects, through parting or replication, increases symbolic value. The meaning invested here in the bridal crown challenges a common perception of museum objects as unique and intact, while it also challenges the logic of collections, where each piece ought to be unique (Stewart 1993: 161). I would like to suggest, using the bridal crown, that the doubling of the object through replication is crucial to how people in the new land value it. The doubled object, of which one remains in the homeland, performs a particular pre-eminent connection between the individuals that come into contact with it. The replica or clone increases rather than decreases the value of the earlier versions, because it shows that the first object is worth replicating and in this case that both are performances of culture in the same vein, created by the same artists, formed by the same hands. Whereas the first version is kept at the Karlstad Cathedral and used only in weddings held there, the replica moves across space more freely than the previous version, while literally allowing it to perform on a larger number of people as well as being touched by them. While the bridal crown as gift to the Karlstad Cathedral becomes an instrument for embodying gender and kin, the replica becomes a return gift embodying lineage overseas, an act of ritual performance that puts descendants' heritage into place.





Ragnar E. Olsson, president of Värmlandsförbundet at the ASI receives the bridal crown from Axel Westling, county governor of Värmland. Their photo may be viewed as showing a political agreement as well as the joining of Värmland and the USA in a political agreement and in symbolic matrimony. Photo by courtesy of the Swedish American Center.

The ways in which the bridal crown performs heritage also echo in photographs. In the visual documentation of the 1952 Värmland Gift exhibition at the ASI, the bridal crown appears time and again. In one of the photographs from the gift-giving performance in 1952, the bridal crown is literally elevated when handed over from the county governor Axel Westling to the president of the Värmland association Ragnar Olsson. Thus the bridal crown was granted a special position, even photographically. The photo resembles how successful political agreements or business deals are performed – two individuals, both holding onto a symbolic document, book or object (Becker 2000), here two men holding onto the bridal crown. But this photo also has a sense of intimacy more characteristic to wedding photos. Just as a wedding photograph plays a crucial part in the wedding ceremony in the western world (Eicher & Ling 2006; cf. Kjerström 1993: 145–167; Knuts 2006: 100–103), the photograph with the governor handing over the bridal crown to the president of the Värmlandsförbundet plays an important role in confirming to future generations that the official marriage ceremony took place, that the Värmland descendants and receivers of the crown said, “I do!”

## Heritage Renewed – Performing Patriarchal Heritage

In the early 2000s, several young women in the Midwest showed an interest in wearing the Värmland bridal crown for their weddings. According to ASI staff, these requests (phone calls) came from women whose mothers or grandmothers had worn the crown at their weddings. Besides pointing out family relations, the bridal crown seemed attractive for future brides who wished to have what they described as “all-Swedish weddings”, or to make their weddings “totally Swedish”. These young women seemed to follow the trend for large, costly weddings as well as an interest in theme weddings, much popular among brides in the Midwest where clothing, table settings and choice of party facility all articulate relationships to fairytales, music and specific eras (Winge & Eicher 2003: 207–218), or in the case of the bridal crown, that something Swedish is taking place.<sup>11</sup>

As I have shown in my analysis of the Värmland Gift the provincial connotation of the entire collection means it being both uniquely Swedish, and of an area of authentic heritage, at the same time an apolitical, non-nationalistic or partisan. This connotation frees the collection for broad and inclusive cultural uses (Gradén 2010). The bridal crown, being the object selected as the gift from the entire province, epitomizes this process. In Sweden the province of Värmland along with Dalarna and Småland are used more often than other provinces (see Aronsson 1995; Häggström 2000). When Värmland is highlighted in America such performances may be interpreted as mirroring the activities in Sweden. The situation is, however, not certainly so. The transfer of the bridal crown from Sweden to the United States, from Värmland to Minnesota, from exhibit to storage and further to private homes and individual bodies, demonstrates how the bridal crown is a force in the performance of heritage. In the Värmland example it is the migration heritage which is emphasized, the connectivity between emigrants and family back home. The bridal crown draws in and touch people on both sides of the Atlantic, also today. Perhaps therefore the bridal crown performs a different job than many other heritage gifts. It is a very hands-on and emotionalized kind of performance where history rests on the head of brides, creating a magic bond with Värmland, but also with a family past rooted in Värmland with branches both in Sweden and America. It shows that history can be embodied as heritage gifts, the heritage gift as heritage – how the word can become flesh.

On one level, the bridal crown from Värmland becomes attractive to young women in Minnesota because a theme wedding offers a playful, creative and carnivalesque alternative to a traditional wedding that is often perceived as serious, conformist, and ritualized. However, just as a traditional wedding communicates who the bride and groom wish to be, the Swedish theme wedding in the United States stages the wedding couple’s values and ideals.

Although the term “theme wedding” may be new, weddings have long been a venue for womens’ performances of heritage. Among women living in the United States, the desire to wear the Värmland bridal crown is not new. It has been popu-

lar in the past, also during times when bridal crowns were considered out of fashion. In the summers of 2006 and 2009, I interviewed women who had worn the crown, whereupon new performances involving the crown emerged. When Marie Ylinen (nee Olsson), at aged 82 was crowned "Värmland Gift Bride" by the county governor Ingemar Eliasson in 2002, that performance contained a series of performances from the past.

Marie Ylinen presented the crowning in 2002 as follows:

I was honored and it was very festive with a nice dinner, toasts and the whole bit. Being re-crowned was like being confirmed – like I have lived the Swedish-American life I was expected to live...that my father expected me to live (laughs). For this rich life, my heart is overflowing with thankfulness for God's protection, His provision and the promise of His love.<sup>12</sup>

While the story Marie shared with me is rich in narratives and dramatic turns and deserves an analysis in itself, what is important for this study is how crucial it was to her and her father that she be the first. Marie reflected:

In 1952, when the Värmland Gift was on its way to Minnesota, my father was the director of Värmlandsförbundet and I was about to get married. As it was John Bryntesson of Svaneholm, who had enabled my father to emigrate from Värmland, who also had paid for having the crown replicated, the crown meant a lot to my father. To him, it was a direct connection to the man whom my father throughout his life credited his courage to leave Sweden and succeed in America. I met him, a very nice man, when I spent the summer in Värmland, at 19. My wedding took place right here (she makes a large, sweeping gesture towards the floor before the fireplace where Marie had chosen we'd sit during the interview, that is in the ASI Grand Hall), and opera singer Helga Görlin, who was the first woman to wear the bridal crown of Karlstad Cathedral in Sweden, sang Swedish hymns at my wedding.<sup>13</sup>

A crowning, a confirmation, a renewal of heritage – the bridal crown continues to be a performative force for revitalized connection between Värmland and the United States. In her recollection of the crowning ceremony in 2002, Marie Ylinen presents the event as a confirmation. On another level, the re-crowning demonstrates features similar to the performance of heritage as staged in the election of the festival queen in Lindsborg, Kansas. There, a senior citizen reconfirms heritage by blood/lineage in combination with long-term commitment to and involvement in activities perceived as Swedish (Gradén 2003; cf. Larsen 2009). The re-staging in 2002 of the gift-giving performance in 1952 can be seen as a contractual return gift (Mauss 1990: 6–8), which recognizes both the givers, the Historical Association in Värmland (Värmlands hembygdsförbund) and the people of Värmland who presented the gift in 1952 and the recipients. Moreover the re-crowning further strengthens the crown's role as inalienable object (Miller 2002), making possible the exchange needed to create the mutual relationship referred to as a shared heritage.

The re-staging of the gift-giving performance enable social mobility and elevated status in the Swedish American community. As such, the re-crowning can be seen as the institution's return gift to Marie Olsson Ylinen, a compensation for

the Swedish-American life she has performed for herself, her father and others, a performance enhanced by her wearing the crown for her wedding, held at the American Swedish Institute in 1952 and the re-crowning carried out by Governor Ingemar Eliasson at the American Swedish Institute in 2002. Finally, the renewal of ties in the re-staging the gift-giving performance unites Varmlanders in Sweden and the U.S. in symbolic matrimony, just as the original performance did in 1952. The re-crowning of Marie may therefore be understood as a renewal of vows – a performance of revitalized connection between Värmland and Minnesota, and Sweden and the United States, performing the transformation of two separate places marked by migration into one transatlantic space, through the body of a woman.

Unlike the curator's performance, where the bridal crown is presented as unique and one of a kind, Marie emphasizes the doubling effect; that the crown she wore was indeed the replica of the crown from Karlstad Cathedral. She makes the point that Helga Görilin, the opera singer at her wedding, was the first woman to wear the crown of Karlstad Cathedral in 1931, and that she was the first to wear its replica. Marie Ylinen's wearing of the replica makes the connection between the two crowns. The value she grants the replica is inextricably linked to the fact that its twin is located in the Karlstad Cathedral and used by Helga Görilin, both of them being "the first" and subsequently followed by women in Värmland and the Midwest.

Because Ragnar E. Olsson, Marie's father, was a founding member of Värmlandsförbundet and a man of status in the Swedish-American community, his daughter was able to be the first bride in America to wear the crown for her wedding in the ASI's Grand Hall. In her story about the wedding she emphasized that she had musicians play "Finlandia" by Sibelius to honor Arthur Ylinen, her husband-to-be, who identified himself as a "Finn from the Iron Range". Apart from that, she explained, the entire wedding was "Swedish-to-the-max", including a color scheme of blue and yellow. In the words of Marie, she said "yes to her future husband and to her Swedish background".<sup>14</sup> The framing of Marie's wedding was a performance of Swedishness, the crown expressed the second-generation immigrant bride's regional connection and gave her heritage a definite place of origin. Other women have followed in the footsteps of Marie Ylinen's heritage performance. Marcia Linnér Swanson, who wore the crown in the late 1950s, emphasized that the choice to wear the crown at her wedding was more important to her father than anything. Her father, who held a prominent position in the Swedish-American business community in the Midwest, insisted she should wear the Värmland bridal crown. She felt, however, wearing a crown was out of fashion, and that the crown in particular did not fit with her wedding dress. She said:

The privilege [of wearing the crown] was extended to me because my father's grandparents were born in Sweden. When requesting the crown we presented my father's family tree. We brought in all the papers we had, and I don't know for sure



that all my relatives came from Värmland. We were kindly granted the loan of the crown and I wore the crown to honor my father and his family background – it was much more important to him than it was to me.<sup>15</sup>

According to Goffman (1990), we always prepare ourselves for the stages we are to act on, and Marcia's dress and body ornaments can be seen as strategies for performance to ensure success. This is not unique. Like people of all times, places, and social milieus, Marcia Linnér Swanson and her fellow women of Swedish descent dress for the stage in the United States on which they are to act, modifying or supplementing the body in specific ways. The selecting of clothing and accessories are ways of creating a cultured body. As an ornament supplementing young women's bodies, the Swedish bridal crown articulates a wedding celebration and a new stage of life. Marcia makes a particular decision on what to wear – a white long-sleeved dress with a narrow waist and wide skirt – a dress seemingly inspired by the New Look, launched in 1947 by Dior.

Marcia Linnér Swanson had to dress for two stages. While she describes the crown as being out of fashion, she also speaks of the wearing of the crown as a privilege, extended to her by her father's family, whose family tree they had brought to the museum to get access to the crown. Although the Värmland heritage here is embodied by Marcia Linnér Swanson wearing the crown, the wearing takes place by the agency of her father and his grandfather's parents.



Marcia Linnér Swanson was dressed for two stages, and has saved images from these events.  
Photo: Lizette Gradén Lizette



A father's actions and values are prevalent also in a man's story about the bridal crown. Nils Hasselmo, who was born in Sweden and emigrated to the United States in the 1950s, presents how he and his wife selected the crown for their 1950s wedding in the Midwest in the following manner:

As I remember this selection it was the memory of my father's work to assemble the Värmland Gift which made us think about using it. A friend of ours who traveled from Minneapolis brought it along for the wedding. To borrow the crown was an easy procedure at the time! I also believe the crown had received a lot of publicity. For me, the crown provided an interesting link to Värmland, now when I was to marry in Diaspora. As you know, my wife was interested in her Swedish background too.<sup>16</sup>

The stories show that, although the bridal crown is worn by women, there is also a strong patriarchal connection, where the words of the fathers are materialized and embodied in the bride's wearing of the crown. Like Marie Ylinen's, Marcia Linnér Swanson's recollections of the crown present how they as brides in their respective weddings acceded to their fathers' wishes and to his sense of heritage in Värmland. In Nils Hasselmo's recollection, however, the father of the groom is at the center of the request for the crown, and it is because of Nils Hasselmo's background, and not hers, that he and his wife are granted the crown. The regional connection is emphasized when Nils Hasselmo describes his marriage to a spouse of Swedish background as one in the Diaspora, implicitly suggesting that the bridal crown has the power to transform her into a woman of Värmland heritage.

The bridal crown can be seen as materializing or invoking the Swedish woman as embodied transatlantic life. The women's similar relationship to the crown is closely connected to their relationship to their father, as an authority, and in turn to their fathers' relationship to the native country. Wearing the bridal crown, the woman becomes the bearer of an imagined heritage that includes location and heritage by blood.<sup>17</sup> When the ASI required documented blood relations to Värmland as a premise for lending the crown, heritage performed as blood relations is made a powerful force in defining heritage as parish, town, province and country and maps a dynamic transatlantic relationship.

Approved loans from the 1950s and 1960s illuminate this relationship. The bridal crown was lent to daughters of men who have sat on the Board of ASI, been ASI sponsors, and held prominent positions in Swedish-American cultural and business life. In cases where families have failed to demonstrate their relationship to Värmland, loans have not been approved.<sup>18</sup> The bridal crown and people's handling of it thus connect generations of women of Värmland descent—families with Swedish backgrounds—with the museum and its interested parties and donors. Evident in the wearing of the bridal crown is a sense of care and pride and a sense of understanding family as a unit that bridges the living and the dead and spans several locations.

## **Embodied Migration Heritage in Real and Imagined Spaces**

In this article I have shown how women and men choose a bridal crown to perform their Swedish or Värmland heritage in public and private settings in the United States. By following the crown in and out of these performances makes it possible for us to observe some of the forces that create community in a Swedish-American society. It also helps us understand the ways in which the Old World and the New World have created and recreated cultural connectivity through their exchange of performances where close attention to the givers performance and to material culture play key roles. The article shows that as an actor, the bridal crown has the capacity to influence people to act in particular way. Understood as a heritage gift from a province in Sweden to kin in the United States, the bridal crown reinforces the wedding act as ritual performance – the father giving away his daughter to become the bride of a future husband, and the governor giving away the bride to become the embodiment of the diplomatic Värmland Gift. The Värmland bridal crown not only connects women of Värmland with women of future generations through a patriarchal relationship; the crown also has an impact on how these women (and men) view themselves. The crown as heritage gift and lead actor in the drama of migration transforms unmarried girls into brides and married women embodying a heritage of both countries.

The bridal crown shows how a particular heritage gift, now in the hands of the gift-givers' successors, create transatlantic spaces based on kin in both Sweden and America. It presents the provincial heritage as apolitical, non-nationalistic or partisan, hence flexible and fluid in America when performed in institutional and private settings. At ASI the crown plays a lead role in the museum collections. Like a remount of a classic show; the old is renewed and once again made relevant. By drawing in actors such as the spouse of Marie Ylinen and the table cloth from Norway the crown also includes Finland and Norway in performing the past. Taken together the many uses of the bridal crown brings to the fore migration heritage as a shared Nordic experience and illuminate historical process from the individual actors' point of view.

The connections that the bridal crown maps out create a transatlantic space in which crucial meanings related to migration are embodied, acted out, integrated with the present, and made accessible for interpretation by members of the community and others (Schechner 2006). By being used at weddings across the United States, the bridal crown ties together generations of people and places, of emigrants and immigrants, of old and new lands in a drama about connectivity – all in the body of a woman but through the agency of a father. The crown, thereby, makes what at first seems to be a dramatized performance about migration heritage carried forth by women. On closer look, however, the crown proves to be validated by a patriarchal relationship, and performs a relationship between embodiment and place making. It is an emotionalized kind of performance, a history in action where heritage rests, literally and symbolically, on the head of brides,

creating a magic bond with Värmland, and also with a family past with deep roots and branches both in Sweden and America. The uses of the bridal crown in institutional and private settings over more than fifty years show how history is embodied as heritage, heritage as heritage gifts – how the word become flesh.

Dress and ornaments are objects that make the body visible, perhaps more so when selected deliberately in the wake of migration. Based on this study I would suggest on one hand that embodiment, here of migration heritage in the United States, can be seen as a form of creating space. Embodiment creates a trajectory through space, thus connecting locations and making a coherent transatlantic space, which negotiates territorial boundaries such as those of nation states. On the other hand, one may say that the bridal crown creates space for embodiment.

Whereas transnational labels such as Nordic, Scandinavian, and Swedish-American by immigrants from Sweden and their descendants illustrates the flexibility of these framings in different political settings, and demonstrates that ideas of Norden, Scandinavia and Sweden expand beyond the territorial borders of the Nordic nation states to include numerous cultural spaces (cf. Gradén & Larsen 2009: 1–7),<sup>19</sup> this article shows that heritage gifts worn on the body play a significant role in negotiating and materializing such cultural spaces. Real Värmland and imaginary Värmland are not easily separated. The stuff of a place is not only material, it is imaginary as well. Imaginary spaces, like the ones which have the crown as gate keeper, are not a turning one's back on real spaces, but a way of coming into contact with them.

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## Notes

- 1 ”Den är en sinnebild av en önskan att banden mellan amerikanska och svenska medborgare av samma stam måtte förbliva fasta släktled efter släktled” (official gift letter, ASI archives)
- 2 The example of the bridal crown as heritage gift and performance dealt with in this article are taken from my ongoing research on heritage gift exchange at sites for heritage preservation in Sweden and America. To read more about the project *Nordic Spaces in the North and North America: Heritage Preservation in Real and Imagined Nordic Places*, please visit [www.nordicspaces.com](http://www.nordicspaces.com).

- 3 Fataburen, for example, lists gifts received by the museum until the 1970s.
- 4 Artur Hazelius, founder of the Nordic Museum and Skansen in Stockholm in Sweden, presented the collections as a gift to the “people of Sweden” (Medelius, Nyström, Stavenow-Hidemark 1998).
- 5 As I have discussed elsewhere (Gradén 2010) in this view at the time, the gift stands in opposition to the commodity, which aim is to create monetary profit. This oppositional view has been questioned in recent scholarship. French Philosopher Jacques Derrida claims there is no such thing as a free gift (1992: 14) and criticises Mauss by saying “Mauss does not worry enough about the incompatibility between gift and exchange or about the fact that an exchanged gift is only a tit for tat, that is, an annulment of the gift” (Derrida 1992: 37). Derrida, however, writes about giving from his own culture’s context where gifts and exchange is not conflated whereas Mauss is trying to understand giving and receiving from a perspective in which gifts and exchange are not separated.
- 6 As highlighted by Byron Nordström in the American Swedish Institute’s 80th anniversary exhibition in 2009: *Between 1941 and 1945*, the Institute’s ability to interact with Sweden was made difficult by the war. Its image was complicated by the reactions of some to Sweden’s (so-called) neutrality. Many Americans and Swedish-Americans alike could not understand how the country could stand outside the struggle against the Nazis.
- 7 During my fieldwork period which started in 2006 I have worked primarily with curator Curt Pederson and volunteers Phyllis Waggoner and Elsa Petersson. Elsa Petersson, who passed away in May 2009 at the age of 89, had been responsible for the care of the Värmland Gift Collection for 25 years. In addition to fieldwork, I am indebted to archivist Marita Karlisch for excellent guidance in printed material on the Värmland Gift as well as to the collection of some 200 books which was part of the gift.
- 8 The Värmland gift letter of intent. *Gåvoboken*. ASI archives.
- 9 It is possible that Moberg had heard about the Bridal crown, as the arrival of the Värmland gift received a lot of publicity both in Sweden and Minnesota at the time.
- 10 Fieldnotes taken during work on the Värmland gift with volunteers and curator Curt Pederson, ASI.
- 11 In a similar manner, old-fashioned Finnish-Swedish weddings were popular among couples of Finnish-Swedish background living in Sweden in the late 1990s (Larsen 1998).
- 12 Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen, June 2009
- 13 Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen, July 2006, June 2009
- 14 Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen July 2006, June 2009.
- 15 Author’s interview with Marcia Linnér Swanson, July 2006
- 16 Author’s interview with Nils Hasselmo, August 2006
- 17 Following Regina Bendix, I understand authenticity as representing an experience, not as something objective or factual. (Bendix 1997: 13)
- 18 Interviews with Sandra Schwamb, former secretary to the ASI directors and staff member who administered the lending of the crown at the ASI in the 1950-1970s, July 2006, June 2009.
- 19 The Norden Association was established in 1919 to stimulate cultural cooperation between the Nordic countries and has since established a gift-exchange in the form of cultural houses in Iceland, the Faroes, Greenland, Åland, and Finland.

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## Captives of Narrative: Scandinavian Museum Exhibits and Polar Ambitions

By Anders Houltz

### Abstract

This article compares the histories of two museums of polar exploration, both founded in the 1930s but based on well-known expeditions dating back to the decades around 1900. The first is the Fram Museum in Oslo, centered around the famous Norwegian polar ship, the second is the Andrée Museum in Gränna, combining accounts of the ill-fated balloon expedition with a polar centre reflecting more recent polar research activities.

The aim of the article is to analyze the relationship between museum and narrative. Museums are shapers of narrative but at the same time shaped by the narratives they relate. The article explores the symbolic and medialized dimensions of polar research, expressed in museums, as well as the way in which museums interrelate with national identities and self-images.

What does it mean to be a modern polar nation? And how is such an identity expressed in cultural terms? In which ways can museum institutions and exhibitions be used as means for such expressions? And how do “the grand narratives” of Sweden and Norway relate to the epic representations of polar activities, presented by the museums?

**Keywords:** Polar museums, polar history, narrative, nationalism, The Andrée Expedition 1897, The Fram Expedition 1893–96, Oslo, Gränna

## Introduction

In March 2009, the search for a pyromaniac was headline news in Norwegian media. A series of fire incidents had occurred on the museum-dense peninsula of Bygdøy, close to central Oslo. The main target appeared to be the Fram Museum, one of Norway's foremost tourist attractions. Four times in five weeks, night-time attempts were made to set fire to the conspicuous building, containing the world famous polar ship, commissioned by Fridtjof Nansen and used on three legendary Norwegian polar expeditions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (*Aftenposten* 2009-03-11).

While the police investigation proceeded, an animated debate stirred over the national cultural values at stake, had the fire not been put out in time. Papers described the Fram Museum as a "National treasure" and the director-general of the National heritage board, Nils Marstein, stated in a press-communicé that "The Fram Museum contains national gems representing Norway as a coastal nation. The Fram is a national icon connected to the Norwegian discoveries and scientific expeditions in the polar areas." (<http://www.riksantikvaren.no>, 2009-03-11).

The affair reached its outcome some weeks later, when a remorseful teenager admitted the deeds. As it turned out, the attempt to set fire to the Fram had not primarily been politically or ideologically motivated. Considering the choice of target, however, it was nevertheless a highly symbolic action. The deed, in combination with the various heated sentiments it triggered, can be understood as a confirmation of the strong symbolic position that this museum item retains in modern Norwegian culture. Other examples point in the same direction. When the daily newspaper *Aftenposten* organized a major public vote among its readers about "The Norwegian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century", Fridtjof Nansen ended up in the first place, regardless that his greatest feats as an explorer were all achieved during the previous century (*Aftenposten* 1999-11-13).<sup>1</sup> The narratives conveyed by Nansen and the ship Fram remain forceful and seem to stay in remarkable harmony with the modern Norwegian self-image. In other words, the Fram Museum is a Norwegian national monument.

The closest Swedish equivalent to the Fram Museum is not located in the capital, but in the provincial town of Gränna, on the eastern shores of Lake Vättern, in the county of Jönköping. Around the findings from the Gränna-born engineer Salomon August Andrée's ill-fated balloon expedition to the North Pole in 1897, a museum and polar research centre has been created, which constitutes the most prominent public manifestation to be found anywhere over Swedish research activities in the Arctic and Antarctic. If the Fram Museum enjoys a more or less unchallenged position in Norway, the Andrée Museum (officially the Gränna Museums with Polar Centre and the Andrée Expedition) is contested both in terms

of its purpose, its content and even its existence. What is the reason for this difference?

The international literature on polar research history is extensive; early heroic portraits have gradually been complemented by critical reevaluation and studies aiming at broader socio-cultural contextualization (for instance Wråkberg 1999; Bravo & Sörlin 2002; Avango 2005; Drivenes, Jølle et al. 2005; Friedman 2010). Public museums displaying and commenting polar research and exploration have not, however, to any significant extent been subjected to scholarly analysis (Wheeler & Young 2000, compare Aronsson 2008). Such museums, and the way they materialize and express the narratives generated by polar travel, rather than polar journeys and exploration as such, is the issue at hand in this article.

To be able to present a strong narrative is often described as the foundation for a successful museum display. Both the Fram Museum and the Andrée Museum are indeed each moulded around such strong – and in fact interrelated – narratives. Why, then, are their positions and status so different in a national context? The aim of this article is to analyze the relationship between museum and narrative, based on a comparison between these two museums. It explores the symbolic dimensions of polar research and its museums, as well as the way in which museums interrelate with national identities and self-images. How do museum institutions and exhibitions express what it means to be a modern polar nation?

Polar exploration and explorers must largely be understood as cultural phenomena. As shown by polar historian Michael F Robinson, the most important aid of polar travelers was neither dog sledges, nor sea vessels or other kinds of equipment, but the domestic audience which followed, admired and ultimately financed the adventures of their heroes (Robinson 2006). Robinson stresses that the exploration of the polar areas depended on cultural and political preconditions on a domestic arena. The “Arctic fever” of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was fuelled by home audiences and venture capitalists of the industrialized countries. The Arctic was a distant stage, but its dramas both mirrored and interfered with issues more closely at hand. The “discovered” Arctic was created in the interplay between explorers and their audiences – both before the departure and after the return. In this process, I suggest, museums and their exhibitions were soon included beside other media as active creators of meaning. When the polar expeditions had long-since ceased to be headline news, museums continued to formulate, give shape to and communicate the narratives of the exploration of the world’s most inaccessible places. This process went on, and still does, through the assembling, classification and presentation of collections, through the publication of catalogues and texts, and through exhibitions.

On a general level, museums serve an important role as national showcases, where more or less common identities based on selected knowledge are being negotiated and presented. In Peter Aronsson’s words, “national museums do present an institution where knowledge is transformed, negotiated, materialized,



visualized and communicated with national identity politics, hence producing a legitimate synthesis answering the question of what the nation was, is and ought to be.” (Aronsson 2010: 48) To understand the similarities and differences of museums in the construction of nationalisms, Aronsson proposes an international comparative approach. This article can be described as an attempt in that direction.

In their role as creators of meaning and coherence, museums of polar exploration have actively participated in the shaping of the narratives of polar discovery and their incorporation in the grand narratives of different nations. The discursive character of museum displays has been described by the narratologist Mieke Bal in the following manner:

Exposing an agent, or subject, puts “things” on display, which creates a subject/object dichotomy. This dichotomy enables the subject to make a statement about the object. The object is there to substantiate the statement. It is put there within a frame that enables the statement to come across. There is an addressee for the statement: the visitor, viewer, or reader. The discourse surrounding the exposition, or, more precisely, the discourse that *is* the exposition, is “constative”: informative and affirmative. (Bal 1996: 3)

In other words, the institutionalized setting of the museum implies strong truth claims. While the object supporting the statement is visible, sometimes even tangible, the subject making the statement is usually not, and the same goes for the underlying motives or agenda behind the statement. To this I would like to add another intriguing relationship to consider in order to fully understand an exhibition. Museums are not only shapers of narrative – as this article will show, they are themselves simultaneously shaped, at times even captivated, by the narratives they display.

## Two Strong Narratives

The two museums at issue here each have a basic storyline, to which more or less everything that the visitors experience relates. These storylines are founded in the popular interest in polar exploration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the hero worship of the explorers as individuals that went along with it (Wråkberg 1999). They are also parts of the larger stories about the international race towards the North Pole and about the formation of the modern nations of Sweden and Norway before and after their 1905 secession (Aronsson 2005; Sejersted 2005).

The defining narrative of the Fram Museum is that of the ship’s first voyage. The Fram was used in another two important expeditions in the history of polar exploration – Otto Sverdrup’s extensive mapping of the areas north-west of Greenland 1898–1902, and Roald Amundsen’s successful race against Robert Falcon Scott towards the South Pole in 1910–12 – but more than anything else it is the story of Fridtjof Nansen’s North-Pole expedition 1893–96, that sets its mark on the museum. It was for this purpose, and in accordance with Nansen’s speci-

fied requirements, that the ship was constructed by the shipbuilder Colin Archer in 1892. It is an adventurous success story which connects polar exploration with Norwegian self-esteem (Nansen 1897; Christensen 1996; Huntford & Christensen 1996; Huntford 1997).

Nansen's plan was based on at the time unproved theories about Arctic sea-currents. The idea was to travel as far east as possible through the North-East Passage along the northern coast of Siberia, and then, deliberately, let the ship get caught by the pack ice, in order to slowly drift towards the North Pole by means of the motions of the icecap. If necessary, the last stretch would be covered on skis and dog sledge.

With a crew of eleven, the *Fram* sailed out from Tromsø in northern Norway in August 1893. In September the ship was fixed by the ice, as planned, in the East Siberian Sea. However, after eighteen months of ice drift, it stood clear that the ship was passing too far to the south to reach the Pole. Together with one of the crew members, Hjalmar Johansen, Nansen decided to leave the *Fram* in order to reach the goal on their own. After a few weeks they had reached a record-breaking north latitude 86° 14', but were forced to give up the try and return south. Meanwhile, the rest of the crew had drifted ahead onboard the *Fram*, and were finally, after nearly three years, relieved from the grip of the ice north of Svalbard. For Nansen and Johansen, the return was extremely difficult. They spent the winter of 1895–1896 on an island of Franz Josef Land, before being miraculously saved by a British expedition.

The *Fram* Expedition was reunited in Tromsø, and started a triumphant return tour from harbor to harbor along the Norwegian coast, with a splendid public reception in Oslo (then Kristiania) as *grande finale*. Even though the goals of the expedition had not actually been reached, it was the return of a victor, and Nansen's position as a national hero was established. *Fram*, the strongest wooden sea vessel ever built, had proved its ability to withstand the forces of the ice, and was portrayed as a modern equivalent to "Ormen Lange", the legendary ship of the Viking king Olav Tryggvason. Nansen himself was not entirely alien to such associations. In a speech at the festivities in Oslo on September 1896, he described *Fram* as the embodiment of Norwegian national character: "The ship that carried us was sent by Norway – and it was an image of Norway". Just like *Fram*, he maintained, the Norwegian national character was "timbered out of faithfulness" (Arnesen 1942: 164).



The North Pole-race between Fridtjof Nansen and S.A. Andrée was frequently commented by Swedish and Norwegian press. Here in the version of the Swedish comic magazine *Söndags-Nisse* (1895-02-24).

The basic narrative of the Andrée Museum is that of the engineer S. A. Andrée's fatal balloon expedition, which, just like the Fram Expedition, aspired to be the first human beings to reach the North Pole. Not unlike the Fram narrative, this drama was largely played out in front of a public audience, commencing long before the actual departure. Still, the differences are striking – in this case the story evolves around a failure, be it a grand one, and the outcome of the affair reaches the public long after the actual events took place (Andrée, Frænkel et al. 1930; Wråkberg 1998).

Late in the summer of 1896, Andrée and his collaborators were stranded on Danes Island, Svalbard, waiting in vain for favorable winds (Andrée 1896). Here they encountered the happily returning crew of the Fram, and were forced to congratulate the Norwegians to their feat. While the Fram came home in triumph, the Swedes had to return in early autumn with their tail between their legs. Still, Andrée was determined to try again – no doubt further provoked by Nansen's success, and the fact that the final goal still remained to be reached. The next summer Andrée was back at Danes Island, this time more fortunate with the winds. The expedition, consisting of three men, took off to the north. Signs of life

in the shape of a few buoys and letter pigeons from the balloon were followed by prolonged silence and numerous speculations.

Finally, thirty-three years later, on the 6 of August 1930, the crew of a Norwegian whaler incidentally came across the remains of the *Andrée Expedition*, on White Island, northeast of Svalbard. The discovery included considerable amounts of equipment, but also exposed rolls of photographic film, and diaries. “The White Island Findings”, as they were named, became an immediate world-wide sensation, and the long-hidden course of events became public knowledge. The diaries revealed that the balloon trip had lasted only three days, at first above open water but rapidly losing height over the ice. The expedition members finally decided to leave the balloon and start out on foot, dragging heavy loads on sledges, trying to reach solid ground, first on Franz Josef Land to the south-east, then on Svalbard to the south-west. After three months of walking they had reached White Island, where they set camp. Shortly after arrival, the three men died due to exhaustion and disease. The exact death-cause has never been fully proved. The three coffins were received in Stockholm in a ceremony that equaled Nansen’s reception in Oslo in terms of solemnity, if not high spirits (Sörlin 1999).

The main character of this narrative is the expedition leader *Andrée*. His two comrades, Knut Fränkel and Nils Strindberg, play important side roles; their voices are articulated through notebooks and diary entries, not to mention the expedition photographer Strindberg’s images, but they are still only visible in relation to their leader (for an alternative perspective, see Martinsson 2006). The intended main role of the expedition’s vessel, the balloon *Örnen* (The Eagle), is complicated by the misfortune of the endeavor. Its premature miscarriage and abandonment makes it a metaphor over the futile tragedy of the whole expedition, but since it was never recovered by any of the search-parties, the balloon remains a shadow. In the *Fram* narrative, the main characters are two – Nansen himself and his ship. The human individual and the physical object are portrayed as carriers of complementary, sometimes overlapping qualities and traits, while crew members and even Hjalmar Johansen, the man who joined Nansen on the final attempt towards the Pole, are clearly subordinated. Both narratives are firmly tied to notions about masculine qualities and bravery, in line with the predominant explorer-ideal of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Moland 1999).

The stories of Nansen and *Andrée* are involuntarily tied together, just like Norway and Sweden were caught in a union without affinity (Nilsson & Sørensen 2005). Full of differences as the two stories are, they are both heavily framed by a nationalist discourse. The common goal, to be the first to reach the North Pole, was a task where many had failed before. Both chose unconventional methods to reach it. The Norwegian’s plan was to willfully let his ship get stuck in the ice – a nightmare for seamen in Arctic waters – and then use skis and dog sledges for the finish. The Swede, engineer as he was, put his faith in the aeronautic high-technology of the time – the hydrogen balloon. Both methods were met with skep-



ticism by many if not all experts. In retrospect, the very methods have been fitted into a national pattern for each country. This is most evident in the case of Nansen, and also clearly articulated by himself in writing and speech. The Fram represented Norway as a seafaring nation with reference back to the Viking Age, and its exceptionally sturdy construction was a useful metaphor for the nation in its strife for independency (Nansen 1905). Even the name of the ship – meaning “forward” in Norwegian – added to its potential as a national symbol. Skiing was yet another mode of transport loaded with symbolic connotations, cherished by Nansen for reasons both practical and ideological. At the time, skiing was becoming the national sport of Norway, a process in which Nansen was actively engaged. It was no coincidence that his public break-through a few years earlier had been a ski tour – the successful crossing of Greenland on skies in 1888.<sup>2</sup>

Andrée, on his side, was an ardent advocate of a rationalist standpoint in scientific, social and political matters. To him, reason and engineering could overcome all imaginable obstacles, and the balloon voyage was meant as an ultimate proof for this assumption. Trying to reach the goal by air, when many had failed to do so by crossing the icecap, was to trust the new technology with one’s life at stake. If successful, the achievement would doubtless have been seen as a confirmation not only of Andrée as an engineer, but of Sweden as a modern, technological nation.

### **Museum Plans in Sweden and Norway**

Although there had been earlier plans to make museums about both Fram and the Andrée Expedition, it took a number of publicly noticed events around 1930 to trigger their actual implementation. In June 1928, Roald Amundsen, the discoverer of the South Pole, died in a plane accident close to Bear Island, in the attempt to rescue the Italian Umberto Mobile and his wrecked airship expedition. Two years later, Fridtjof Nansen died and was honored as the national hero that he then was, with a grandiose funeral in Oslo on May 17, the National Day, in 1930. On November 26 the same year, Otto Sverdrup, commander of the second Fram Expedition and mate on the first one, also passed away. Within three years, the most prominent Norwegian explorers in history and all three of Fram’s commanders had died. In August, 1930, finally, the sensational discovery of the White Island findings was cabled to newspaper offices around the world. All of these events were covered in detail by an international press. Biographies, homages and recollections were published in several languages. Both Sweden and Norway were taken by a sudden revival of old sentiments. But how were the polar heroes’ memories to be honored and preserved? What monuments would be the most fitting, and where were they to be located?

The Norwegian debate soon focused on Fram itself. The ship was owned by the Norwegian state, and ever since Amundsen’s South Pole expedition, it had been



left with a minimum of maintenance. Preservation initiatives were taken on several occasions, but meanwhile the decay was proceeding at such a rate that the demasted vessel was close to sinking. A committee had been formed already in 1925, headed by Otto Sverdrup himself, but the fund-raising went slowly. After Sverdrup's death, the chairmanship was taken over by first the whaling shipowner and shipbuilder Lars Christensen and later the brewer Knud Ringnes. Together with other influential businessmen and industrialists, they managed to give new impetus to the work. The Ringnes Brewery, once one of the sponsors of Nansen's Fram Expedition, donated considerable capital. In 1931, the state assigned the formal ownership and responsibility for Fram to the committee. A renewed campaign was started, aiming for preservation but also for creating a specific aura around the ship. Newspapers were enrolled, fundraising among the public and a "Fram-lottery" contributed to strengthen the image of the Fram as a concern for all Norwegians, a uniting symbol for the young nation and its people (Arnesen 1942).

The fact that the initiative came from private actors was significant. While the state had neglected the ship, private citizens now seized responsibility for its preservation. The leaflet *Fram-Avisen* urged every nation-minded Norwegian to support the Fram-lottery. The Viking rhetoric from the celebrations back in 1896 was wiped off and given a new lease of life. Fram became the symbolic link between a past Norway, in the shape of the mythical Viking ship Ormen Lange, and a modern nation, illustrated by contemporary Norwegian tank ships. "If we mention the name Fram, Norway with all its thousands of homes arises before our eyes. For it was in that ship that we rediscovered ourselves, to new deeds after our fairytale sleep." (*Fram-Avisen* 1935).

The Norwegian efforts to raise money for a museum and to reconstruct Fram as a national symbol, became a lengthy process. The Swedish issue of a museum over Andrée evolved more rapidly, at least to begin with. Already the day after the news about the White Island Findings reached the headlines, the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* roused the question of a museum. The retrieved artifacts were immediately labeled *relics*, and as such they clearly deserved a fitting repository. The question was where, and under whose responsibility (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1930-08-24).

Many felt summoned. Andreas Lindblom, director of the Nordic Museum (Nordiska museet), Sweden's central institution for cultural history, immediately offered the Main Hall of his museum for an exhibition. He asserted that the impressive room, dominated by a statue of the nation-building king Gustav Vasa, would be appropriate for the purpose: "With its Gustav Vasa statue, it is, after all, meant to be a national monument. An Andrée exhibition, honoring the memory of a great Swede, would be in its proper place in such a surrounding." (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1930-08-24) In the longer term, however, he suggested that the Museum of Natural History would be the most logical hosting institution. There, the

expedition's scientific material could be connected to scientific collections and in time provide the foundation for a major display over polar research.

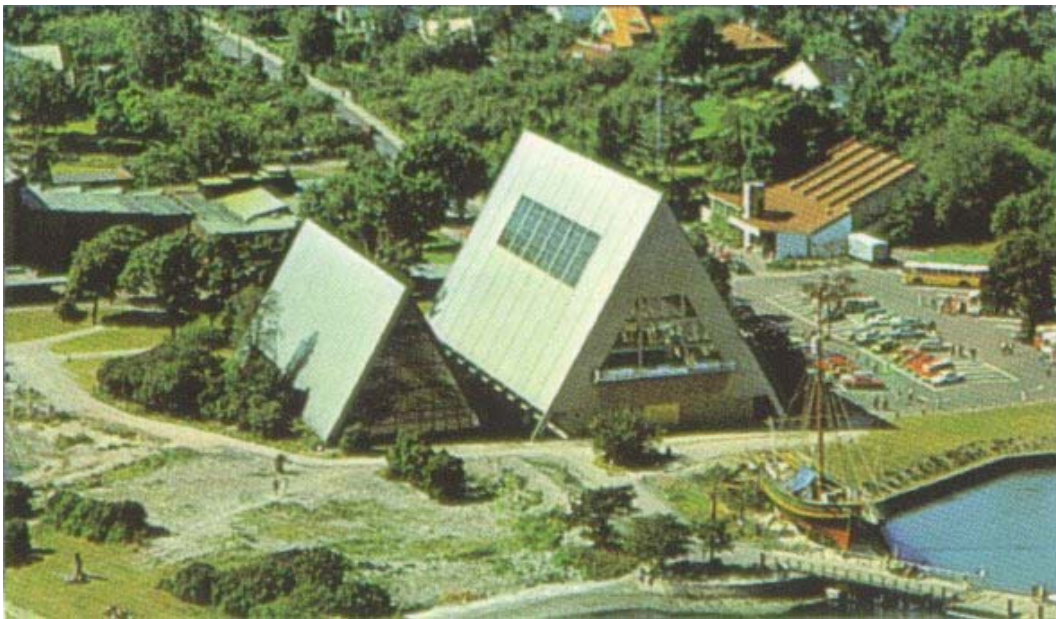
The director of the Museum of Science and Technology, Torsten Althin, in turn, declared that his museum already possessed some eighty items related to Andrée. In its projected, permanent museum building, he hoped to include a special "Andrée Room", at once "a valuable source of study material for engineers and scientists, and a lasting memory over Andrée and his achievements." (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1930-08-25) Others yet proposed an entirely new Andrée Museum in the capital, to serve as a national monument commemorating both the expedition and Swedish polar science in general. Finally, voices were heard from Andrée's birth-town of Gränna, stating that no other site could be more natural than the native place of the unfortunate expedition leader himself. In such a provincial setting, the advocates declared, the museum would be more to its profit than in the museum-crammed capital. The issue was mainly pursued by the locally powerful A E Bolling, known as "the King of Gränna", among other things chairman of both the Municipal Council and the Folklore Society. He recognized the potential in underlining Andrée's double identity as a native of Gränna and polar hero. In the local newspaper *Grenna Nya Tidning*, he stated that a museum would bring considerable economic effects: "The placing of the Andrée Museum in our town would mean much to the whole community, due to the stream of tourists it would attract." (*Grenna Nya Tidning* 1930-09-02)

The location and presentation of the findings was a question ultimately related to how the "relics" and the Andrée expedition as such were to be defined and evaluated. An exhibition in the Great Hall of the Nordic Museum would be to define Andrée and his comrades as first and foremost national heroes, to move the collection to the Museum of Natural History would be to emphasize their character as scientists and polar researchers, while locating it at the Museum of Science and Technology would stress Andrée's identity as an engineer and the voyage as technological achievement. A museum in Gränna, finally, would put focus on Andrée's local roots, and thus in all probability either hazard his status as a national concern or undermine the capital as the obvious location for such concerns. The final decision was in the hands of the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography, SSAG, which had been appointed the official trustee of the findings.

The short-term solution finally chosen by SSAG, was to meet the acute public interest through a hastily organized exhibition on relatively neutral grounds, in the Liljevalchs Art Gallery in Stockholm, during spring 1931. Through this compromise, the heroic, scientific and technological aspects of the Andrée Expedition were all subjected to its value as a sensational news item. Furthermore, national status was prioritized at the expense of local by placing the exhibition in the capital.

## A Temple on Bygdøy

In May 1935, the Fram was towed on its last journey, from the harbor of Horten to Bygdøy in Oslo (*Aftenposten* 1935-05-06). There, a modern styled museum building was erected around the stranded ship. In spite of its functionalist vocabulary, the architecture showed references to both Viking houses and medieval cathedrals with pointed vaults; all constructed in concrete, glass and wood. The steep, sloping roof-sides were coated with copper from ridge to base. The building was designed by the Norwegian architect Bjarne Tøien, who had won the architectural competition with his entry, "Saga". The inauguration was planned to take place on National Day, May 17, 1936, but was delayed until three days later.



The Fram Museum stands on Bygdøy like a modern temple over Norway as a polar nation (postcard).

The conflicts had been numerous. Most parties agreed that a museum should be built, but the choice of location was a matter of controversy, as was whether the new museum should be incorporated into the existing Maritime Museum or form an individual institution, threatening to over-shadow the older museum (*Dagbladet* 1934-05-24). Influential property owners on Bygdøy objected to having a large modernistic building and a tourist attraction as a neighbor and managed to delay the process considerably (*Tidens Tegen* 1934-10-03). Some critics, however, questioned the content of the museum on a more principal level. In *Dagbladet*, the journalist Johan Borgen questioned the reasons for "worshipping dead symbols" when modern Norwegian research on Svalbard was in need of financial support in order not to be pushed aside by Russian initiatives (*Dagbladet* 1934-08-11). "Why is the Fram holy" asked the signature "Rasle" in a critical article: "All ice-covered sea is by now discovered, and we do not need such symbols an-

ymore. We have no room for more of this polar manliness.” (*Morgonbladet* 1934-10-20) The critical voices gradually silenced, however, and by the time of World War II, the Fram Museum was an established institution in the museum landscape of Oslo, yearly attracting some 20 000 visitors.

The museum was entirely adapted to accentuating its central artifact. The entrance was centered right before the ship-stern. A bust of Fridtjof Nansen and a full-figure statue of Roald Amundsen (both later replaced by a single full-figure of Nansen) greeted visitors in front of the ship, thus establishing the main characters right from the start. The floor was lowered, so that the Fram could be observed from below, and side-galleries along the walls followed the waterline and ship deck levels. Another two galleries allowed the ship to be viewed from above. The dimensions, the massiveness and the sheer strength of the construction were clearly brought to the light. An essential factor was that visitors were allowed to actually enter the ship and move about more or less freely above and below deck. Objects and scientific equipment from the polar voyages were displayed in the saloon, but also in the corridors and cabins, along with personal belongings from the different expedition members. Small brass plates by the cabin doors named the respective inhabitants during each of the three Fram expeditions. Framed photos and paintings showed scenery and episodes from the trips. The exceptionally strong diesel engine, which had been kept at the Technical University of Norway, was renovated and returned to its proper place, where it could be observed in the machine room below. By moving about on the confined space of the ship, the visitors could form at least some notion of life on board.

Early versions of the museum plans included a small commemorative chapel, supposed among other things to house the urn containing Fridtjof Nansen’s ashes (*Dagbladet* 1934-08-12). Although the chapel was never actually carried into effect, the very idea strongly underlines both the sacral quality of the museum and its close symbolic ties to Nansen as a person.

The exhibition mediated a condensed polar history, in which Norway, Norwegian explorers and of course the Fram were in total focus. Manly exploit and resolution, personified by the three expedition leaders, combined with the strength and endurance embodied by the Fram, implicitly depicted Norway as a nation. The rest of the world – be it other countries as polar nations or the Arctic and Antarctic as physical environments – were reduced to background roles and stage settings.

Also during the war and the German occupation, the museum was mostly kept open. In these years, a new dimension was added to the symbolic content of the Fram. As during the 1905 dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden, the Fram was again used to personify the Norwegian will to independence and ability to endure hardships. This is evident in the journalist Odd Arnesen’s book from 1942 about Fram and its history, typically titled

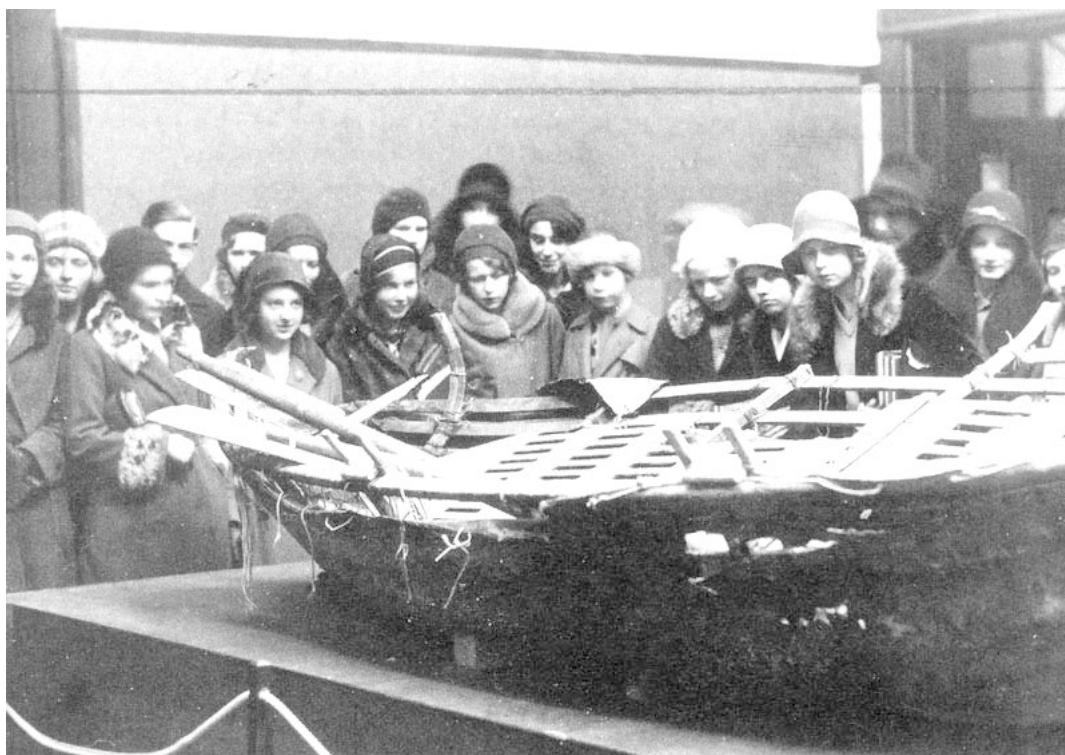
”Fram: A ship for the whole of Norway” (Fram: Hele Norges skute, Arnesen 1942). In the final sentences of the book, Arnesen implicitly ties the national crisis



and independence movement around the turn of the century to the current situation in occupied Norway: "Fram and the spirit that emerged from that ship, created a greater Norway. It gave us the strength to carry on during the struggle for separation in 1905 – when the gathering call once more sounded – *Fram!!...!* Therefore the Fram stands today in its house of steel and concrete and glass, urging us towards new deeds, south and north, where Norwegians have left their mark for centuries, new deeds, showing that we will never surrender in the peaceful struggle between nations." (Arnesen 1942: 290–291) The words appear to be carefully chosen; a more overt appeal for resistance would hardly have passed the censorship of Quisling's Norway.

### **The White Island Findings on Their Way to Gränna**

The Andrée Exhibition arranged by SSAG at Liljevalchs in Stockholm the spring of 1931 was just as successful as could be expected. To meet the public response, the museum extended opening hours to include evenings throughout the week, but still the queues were long (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1931-01-11). Curiosity seemed insatiable about the unique images, developed after 33 years in the ice, the contents of the diaries and, not least, the many objects that had been retrieved (the commented catalogue includes 550 item numbers).



Curious visitors watch the remains of the expedition canvas boat at Liljevalchs art gallery in 1931.  
(Photo: Tekniska museet)



One of the rooms was filled with maps and designs over the finding location on White Island, accompanied by a skiopticon projector showing a number of the expedition's photographs. The largest room contained the majority of the physical objects, with the expedition's canvas boat and three sledges placed at the centre. A plain-looking boathook engraved "Andrée's polarexp. 1896" had been prominently placed, since it was this small object that first called attention to the ice and snow covered spot on White Island. The other rooms displayed scientific instruments, clothes, personal belongings, the remains of food supplies and travel pharmacy. The objects were presented in simple display cases, organized as far as possible in accordance with the relative positions in which they had been found. The time focus was clearly set on the moment of rediscovery in 1930, rather than the tragedy in 1897. In other words, it can reasonably be argued that the exhibition was first and foremost dealing with the current sensation, the findings, and only secondly with the Andrée Balloon Expedition (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1931-01-05).

The exhibition at Liljevalchs by no means made Gränna officials give up hope about an Andrée Museum in their city. Already in autumn 1930, weeks after the findings, the municipal council decided to create a small museum in the local community centre (hembygdsgrd), incidentally located right across the street from Andrée's house of birth. In May 1931 the Andrée Museum in Gränna was inaugurated, receiving considerable media attention. Regardless its local setting, the ceremony was shaped as a national manifestation and was broadcasted directly on national radio and covered by the national newspapers.

The museum itself was a relatively modest arrangement, in marked contrast to the high pitch of the opening ceremonies. The hopes of accessing the White Island Findings after the termination of the exhibition at Liljevalchs had not been fulfilled. Many of the photographs were certainly reproduced in the exhibition, but in terms of physical objects, the museum had to make do with Andrée-related items from the dispersed childhood home, hastily collected by the Folklore Society. With the exception of one of the three sledges, lent out to the Gränna museum for a couple of months, the artifacts of the White Island Findings, which would have made up the obvious main attractions of the museum, were indeed conspicuous by their absence. In spite of persistent requests from Gränna, they remained stored in Stockholm localities awaiting a permanent institutional solution (Törnvall 2002).

The opening of the museum was one in a row of actions aiming to posthumously anchor Andrée and his balloon to his native town, which he had permanently left in his early teens. The first initiatives in this direction had been taken long before the destiny of the expedition was revealed. In connection to the thirty years-anniversary in 1927, for instance, a metal memorial plate was placed on the façade of Andrée's childhood home. With the White Island Findings, efforts to reconstruct Andrée as a local persona were intensified. The municipal council immediately but unsuccessfully requested that the expedition members should be buried in Gränna instead of in the capital (*Gränna Nya Tidning* 1930-09-16). The

local press took all opportunities to emphasize the hometown connection, publishing detailed articles with headlines like “From the cradle in Gränna to the polar ice grave” and “Son of Gränna – National hero.” (*Grenna Nya Tidning* 1930-08-26; 1930-09-19) Even the roots of Andrée’s interest in balloon-flying were sought in Gränna: “Flying and the higher regions had always appealed to him: it is said that he started his expeditions already as a child, by climbing the pipe drains of his parents house.” (*Grenna Nya Tidning* 1930-08-26) The strings to his native town that Andrée had cut off as a schoolboy were energetically retied.

The Folklore Society, headed by the tireless A E Bolling, was the key agent in this process. A central activity was to create an Andrée collection as quickly as possible. Calls and appeals for objects connected to the balloon flyer and his family were published in the local press. Acquisitions of ever so far-fetched relevance, such as “a unique original photograph of Andrée from his school years in Jönköping” or “an old medicine cabinet belonging to the late pharmacist Andrée” were noticed and commented on in the newspaper in terms of relics (*Grenna Nya Tidning* 1930-11-07; 1930-10-24).

Through the years, Gränna continued to contend for the White Island Findings. When the Folklore Society in autumn of 1931 simply refused to return the borrowed sledge to SSAG in Stockholm, the controversy even became a legal case.<sup>3</sup> In 1938, a special, purpose-built museum building was inaugurated in connection to the existing museum, but to no use. Instead the Folklore Society had to arrange a more or less provisional “Lake Vättern Museum” in the new building. During the Second World War, the White Island Findings were stored on different locations in Stockholm. Then in 1945, in the final stage of the war, Gränna made a renewed request, calling attention to the bad storage conditions. This time, the persistent endeavors were finally crowned successful.<sup>4</sup>

It is reasonable to ask why it was so important for Gränna to have its Andrée Museum. It is equally justified to ask why the resistance in Stockholm was so firm, even though the artifacts mostly were kept in store, to little use for anyone. A final question to be answered is why this resistance gave way all of a sudden, when it did.

One answer to the first question is that Gränna was and is a tourist town, where a museum with unique content could provide a valuable attraction. But other aspects are also important: in the small town community, Andrée and his achievement represented something unfamiliar, detached from everything local and familiar. The Andrée Museum was a window to the big world outside, through which Gränna, known mostly for its production of a special kind of peppermint candy – “polkagris”, could connect to events that had become history.

The resistance in Stockholm was officially motivated by research issues; the material and specimens collected by the expedition was valuable for Arctic scientific research, it was stated – although few scientists seem to have actually used them.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the ability of the Folklore Society to take care of the collec-

tion in a proper and professional way was questioned. Finally, plans were still entertained about creating a future Swedish museum of polar research in Stockholm. Maybe the most important thing was that the Andrée Expedition had been defined once and for all as a national concern – moving the collection from the capital would imply a reevaluation in this aspect. That the change occurred when it did may have to do with the fact that the kind of polar research that Andrée represented was becoming more and more out-of-date after half a century. Neither symbolically, nor in its content did it have very much in common with Swedish post-war research ambitions. The White Island Findings had become a matter of prestige, but they were also gradually becoming a burden, from which the SSAG was not unwilling to be relieved.

On May 3, 1946, the renamed White Island Museum (Vitö museet) was inaugurated in Gränna. The official changing of the name from the Andrée Museum to the White Island Museum was done to mark the fact that the much longed-for collection now finally was present. A new building had been added hastily to the museum complex, in order to house the additions. A short notice in the national daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* characterized the event as the end of a prolonged battle: “After fifteen years of stubborn fight against Stockholm over the findings made on White Island, E A Bolling, the energetic chairman of Gränna Folklore Society, has finally gained victory.” (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1946-07-18)

Compared to the commotion caused by the much smaller museum in 1931, general interest in the White Island Museum opening 1946 was modest. None of the major papers, not to mention radio, reported from the opening ceremony. Although the local paper reported extensively, the tone was somewhat more distanced this time: “The opening of the White Island Museum last Sunday was a memorable occasion, and even if it did not turn out to be a public event of any larger proportions, many well-known and esteemed persons attended, thus adding a certain lustre to the celebration, and proving the significance attached in high places to the fact that the White Island Findings have finally received a worthy location.” (*Gränna Tidning* 1946-07-23)

The first, 1930s version of the Andrée Museum in Gränna was a memorial room, a place for sorrow and contemplation over the town’s great son. In this character it contrasted to the temporary exhibition at Liljevalchs in Stockholm, which was a tactful but still parade of the sensational findings. Including the White Island Findings in Gränna in 1946 did not essentially change the general character of the museum. It remained a mausoleum with a combined local and national discourse where the wreath-ribbons from the funeral were still displayed; the solemn mood aptly captured by the motto over the entrance: “Relics brought to the mother land, inducing reverence and devotion.”<sup>6</sup>

## Ageing Institutions and Modern Relevance

The Fram Museum is located on Bygdøyenes, splendidly overlooking the sea-approach and central parts of Oslo. Visitors can choose between two ways of access: by boat from the City Hall Quay on the opposite side of the Oslo Fiord, or the land-route by car or by buss. Both approaches provide a fitting framing of the visit. The short sea-trip is a reminder of the Norwegian sea-faring tradition and the natural preconditions that made for its emergence. Visitors choosing to arrive by land pass by a number of nationally charged cultural institutions along the wandering road across Bygdøy, ending with a turning space right in front of the Fram Museum. The Norsk Folkemuseum, one of the world's first open-air museums, with a medieval stave church as a highly visible centerpiece, is followed by the Viking Ship Museum, containing the uniquely well-preserved 9<sup>th</sup> century ships from Gokstad and Oseberg. Finally, in the direct vicinity of the Fram Museum, are the Museum of Naval History and Thor Heyerdal's Kon-Tiki Museum. As the Norwegian cultural historian Anne Eriksen has pointed out, the Fram thereby becomes part of a network of significance, made up by these memorial institutions taken together. None of them is locally focused or related to Bygdøy. They all speak to, and about, Norway and the Norwegians as a nation (Eriksen 2005; see also Eriksen 2009).

The Fram Museum has remained remarkably intact along the years. To a large extent, this can be explained by the building itself; shaped as it is around its central artifact, it leaves little option for radical alterations. Exhibitions have been added, improved or updated without changing the central themes or main narratives. The most thorough transformation was carried out for the centennial of Nansen's 1893 departure towards the North Pole. That was when Per Ung's full-figure sculpture of Nansen was added in front of the ship's stern. Faded maps and photographs were replaced by back-lighted blow-ups. While most of the older pictures had showed the welcoming festivities after the Fram's three expeditions, added images portrayed the encounter with the polar areas in different ways. Stuffed penguins on rocks and ice-flakes against painted backgrounds represented the Antarctic nature. Polar bears – the obligatory feature of every polar museum – together with seabirds similarly illustrated the Arctic. Exhibition texts were translated to no less than seven languages to meet the requirements of the large numbers of foreign visitors. Sound effects like engine noise from the machine room and sledge-dogs howling from the store rooms added to a more realistic effect (*Aftenposten* 1993-06-21).

Still, the face-lift did not include any radical revisions of the museum's basic narratives of manly heroic exploits and Norway as a glorious polar nation. If anything, the storyline was further accentuated by the imposing statue of Nansen in front of the ship. The Fram Museum was, and remains, a national shrine, a place narrating a condensed story of Norway and Norwegianism to school classes and

foreign visitors. In this sense, it can be categorized as what the museologist Ragnar Pedersen terms a Memorial museum (Pedersen: 41). These institutions, usually based on historically significant events, phenomena or individuals, represent and mediate a society's central values in a concrete form. The symbolic significance attached to them grant them strong powers of communication. Pedersen's Norwegian examples are the Eidsvoll Museum (commemorating the constitution) and the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim. Both are essential to Norwegian self-understanding, and so is the Fram Museum. In addition to its prominent position in the capital's urban landscape and on its tourist track, it holds a key place in the Norwegian national consciousness.

In comparison, today's Andrée Museum appears peripheral from several aspects. The geographical location is no less peripheral in a national perspective today than it was in the 1930s, and the polar centre is strange in its local/regional setting. Even more disturbing: the major storyline, although still retaining its potential to move and its metaphorical qualities, is hardly in tune with the grand narrative of modern Sweden, as a cultural, political or scientific project.

In contrast to the Fram Museum, the Andrée Museum has kept strong local ties though the years – strong but not unproblematic. For many years the fight for the museum remained a unifying but at times also dividing task for the Folklore Society. It was a question about priorities and allocation of resources, but also about local identity, self-image and recognition. How was the Andrée material to be fitted into the local history of Gränna; how was the “balloon-town” to be combined with the “candy-town”? As former museum director Sven Lundström pointed out, the early Andrée Museum depended largely on the personal recollections, accounts and sentiments of the visitors themselves concerning the events of 1897 and 1930 (Lundström 1991). To many, the museum was a place where personal, individual experiences could be connected to common, shared experiences. For a long time, no further justification was needed. As the part of the audience with personal memories of the events diminished over the years, however, these points of reference inevitably faded and lost their relevance. The museum needed to find new roles to play.

In the late 1960s, novelist Per Olof Sundman's acknowledged book *The Flight of the Eagle* (*Ingenjör Andréas luftfärd*, 1967, Oscar-nominee film version by Jan Troell in 1982) initiated a critical reevaluation of S A Andrée as national hero, which had hardly been possible earlier. Rather than personal courage, Sundman stressed irresponsible self-delusion, blind faith in technology and hubris as central to Andrée and his actions. In this version, the main character of the story was turned into a modern version of the mythical Icarus (Rydén 2003). Partly influenced by the revised image, some critical perspectives on Andrée's motives were included in a new exhibition at the Andrée Museum in 1979. At the same time, the wreath-ribbons from the 1930 funeral were finally removed from the exhibits (Lundström 1991; Joriksson 2002).



The considerable attention received by Sundman's novel and Troell's motion picture did not alter the fact that the Andrée Museum was in increasing need of conceptual renewal, not to mention new facilities, to avoid being marginalized. In 1990, a seminar, aptly titled "The Andrée Museum in 1997: A future for the past", was arranged to formulate a new vision for the museum at the prospect of the coming centennial celebration of the expedition (Lundström 1991). Designs for a new building were presented, but the aim was more ambitious than that; the objective was to find new meanings for a strong but largely out-dated story. The seminar made clear that the only possible way forward was to firmly place Andrée in a historical context, but at the same time make room for other, more modern, kinds of polar research than the one represented by the Andrée expedition. This double ambition, condensed into the vision of a polar research centre of a national and even international scope, characterized much of the renewal work that was carried out under the following decade (*Göteborgs-Posten* 1993-03-28).

It was a matter of course to the scholars and museum curators of the seminar that Andrée and polar history was to be the main focus of the museum also in the future. That this view was not shared by all became clear in a debate in the newspaper *Jönköpings-Posten* some ten years later, when the projecting of the new museum was finally moving towards completion. A published letter to the editor stated that many locals felt Andrée and what he represented had been allowed to take up too much space and attention, at the expense of more regionally anchored exhibitions:

What we want is a living, exciting museum, not a house for the dead, shaped by a foolish deed that had no relevance to anyone but the parties directly concerned and their competitors.// When we see the grand plans for a new polar centre, we ask ourselves: is this really what the people of Gränna would want? (*Jönköpings-Posten* 2000-07-25)

In its answer, the museum direction asserted that Andrée indeed was a relevant part of the local history, and that the Andrée material, still carrying considerable attraction, could be a means to create a modern cultural centre that would benefit also the (rest of the) local history. Nevertheless, the direction firmly stated that "We will never produce a permanent local historical exhibition." Recurrent temporary exhibitions of such content, however, could be arranged in connection to the new polar centre. (*Jönköpings-Posten* 2000-08-03)

When the new museum opened in 2002, in a new building on the same location as its predecessor, the ambivalence between local values and polar aspects was immediately visible. Together with tourist information, public library and auditorium, the museum comprised The Grenna Cultural Centre (Grenna kulturgård). In this new complex, the Andrée exposition and the Polar centre were placed on the basement level, while a substantial local historical display met the visitors on the main, entrance level (although somewhat confusingly preceded by a stuffed polar bear in the entrance, serving as a teaser for the basement exhibits). In a vast cen-

tral opening between the two levels, a life-sized copy of the balloon “Örnen” (used in the motion picture from 1982) served to symbolically underscore the connection between the two parts of the museum.



The entrance of the Grenna Cultural Centre, inaugurated in 2002 (photo: Anders Houltz).



Jan Troell's film version copy of the balloon Örnen, strikingly placed in the centre of the museum exhibition space (photo: Anders Houltz).

The museum direction's declarations two years earlier about a museum without permanent local historical exhibitions had obviously been given up. The history and heritage of the region were in fact a prominent theme of the new museum. Still, many of the ideas from the seminar in 1990 had been carried through, be it in a smaller scale than initially envisioned. The basement contained a contextualizing Andrée exhibition, aiming to make both the expedition and its failure understandable in relation to the historical situation in which it was played out. A majority of the artifacts from the White Island findings were on display and a wide-screen, 360° projection of contemporary photos of the 1930 finding site related to the recovered photos from the expedition. Another section was devoted to more recent polar research in the Arctic and the Antarctic, especially but not exclusively displaying Swedish activities. Research from the recurring International Polar Years, the most recent in 2007–2008, was emphasized. Together with databases, archives and interactive workstations, this comprised the polar centre of Gränna. The museum as a whole can be viewed as a compromise. It was a local museum, but also a display over the grandest failure of Swedish polar research, and a centre for communicating modern science. At once local, national and international, at once historical and contemporary, but none of these ambitions carried out to its full potential. The unifying link between the different focuses was still the Andrée narrative, stretched to the limit but essential to the totality.

Summing up, the Andrée Museum has gradually changed from a memorial site into a theme museum, fitted into a diverse cultural centre, in an attempt to remain relevant both locally and nationally. Along the way, the early efforts to fit the town of Gränna into the Andrée narrative have been replaced by efforts to justify Andrée's position in the local context. In contrast, the Fram Museum is still a memorial museum, disengaged from local ties and presenting narratives that are largely unaltered but nevertheless nationally relevant.

## **Museum, Narrative and Nation**

With all the public support and attention attached to their expeditions, explorers like Andrée and Nansen, balancing on the thin line between science and spectacle, became trapped in the stories they had constructed around their own persons. There was no turning back, no alternatives but to succeed or die while trying. Similarly, the museums erected around their performances and persons have become entrapped by the strong narratives that they relate. These captives of narrative are dealing in different ways with their situation.

What has been uncovered by this comparison is not mainly a case of institutions that are either modern or outdated. Instead it could be argued that both museums quite clearly express what it means to be a modern polar nation, but they do it in different ways. Sweden and Norway both claim active roles in present polar science and especially Norway retains commercial, industrial and geo-political



interests in the regions. In the Norwegian case, however, there has been a remarkable continuity in these ambitions, from the times of the Fram expeditions to the present. While Norway's polar efforts have developed and its scientific ventures have unfolded, the link to the Nansen tradition has been kept intact. This is not least a question of rhetoric and framing – recent exploits and the actors behind them refer explicitly to the distant past. For Sweden's part, a more distinctive breach can be discerned, essentially taking place during the decades of the Andrée expedition's absence. From necessity rather than out of free will, Sweden's strategic claims were revised on several points during these important years. The industrial and geo-political claims of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were abandoned, and a new scientific ideal, distanced from the individual explorer-hero, was introduced (Sörlin 1994). With the unexpected reappearance of the White Island Findings, these changes became apparent, and they have made the museum display problematic ever since.



Since 1993, Fridtjof Nansen welcomes visitors to the Fram Museum in the shape of a statue by Per Ung (photo: Anders Houlitz).

The breach has further implications than that. During the inter-war years, the foundation for a revised national identity was laid both politically and culturally; the development of a modern Sweden of large-scale solutions in society as in industry, of rationality and progress rather than history. In this revised grand narrative, to which S A Andrée most likely would have had few personal objections, the symbolic figure which he had become ironically enough fitted badly. In Norway it can be argued that the significant breach with history came earlier and was due to quite different factors. The crucial point seems to be connected to the nationalist awakening of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent creation of a common national identity, culminating with the dissolved union with Sweden and independence in 1905. The Fram and all it represents was a part of this grand narrative right from the start, and still is.

With the intention to contribute to the largely uncovered research field of polar museums and their narratives, I have here focused on two institutions and two nations. A further analysis would certainly gain from a widened scope, including other nations and other museums, both in the Nordic countries and, for instance Russia, USA and Great Britain. Already the present comparison is, however, sufficient to point out the relation between museum and narrative, as well as the relation between individual museums and the grand narratives of nations. Indeed museums, and polar museums not least, offer efficient arenas for conveying national self-images. Giving prominence to historical individuals and their narratives as either metaphors or examples has proved a useful method for museums as nation building institutions, and in this sense polar explorers with their heroic aura appear well-suited, at least historically. The museums provided the distant events of polar explorers with a home-setting, more or less firmly tied to, and gradually revised in relation to, contemporary issues. This ability to contextualize and re-contextualize essential narratives without loss of credibility and with unchallenged truth claims is one of the distinctive features of the museum as a medium, compared to for instance newspapers. This asset can, however, turn into a hazard when museums become entrapped by the narratives they depend upon

The two museums compared in this article are both in different ways captives of their own narratives. In the Norwegian case the museum is permeated by a story that seems nearly impossible to revise. What makes revision so difficult (and even perhaps appear unnecessary) is the fact that the narrative is tightly interlaced with the grand narrative of modern Norway. In the Swedish case, the entrapment works the other way. The narrative is a foundation, but its national and local relevance is no longer evident. The ambivalence is apparent in the exhibitions, and in the continuous efforts to revise them. In relation to the grand narrative of modern Sweden, the story of S A Andrée and his expedition is, at most, a counter-narrative.



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## Notes

- 1 Nansen's later engagements, both as a leading force in the abolishment of the Swedish-Norwegian union and as a humanitarian activist and diplomat (earning him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922), are most likely important additional reasons for his long-lived national popularity. It is worth noticing that no less than three out of top 10 on the list were explorers (Nansen, Roald Amundsen and Thor Heyerdahl). In a comparable Swedish vote for the "Swede of the century", the writer Astrid Lindgren ended up in first place and no explorers were among the top 20 (*Aftonbladet*, 1999-12-31).
- 2 In for instance "På ski over fjellet" from 1884, Nansen expounds on the nature-given relationship between Norwegians and skiing. In: *Eventyrlyst* Oslo 1995.
- 3 Correspondence between A E Bolling and Prof. Hans W:son Ahlmann, SSAG, 1932-11-10; Correspondence between A E Bolling and Birger Barre Advokatkontor, Stockholm 1933-02-09. Gränna museers arkiv.
- 4 Letter from Per Geijer, chairman of SSAG, to the board of Stockholm University, 1945-02-12. Royal Academy of Sciences Archive.
- 5 On the other hand, scholars of other disciplines than the anticipated natural scientists have showed considerable interest – historians of photography and literature as well as conservation scientists etc have all from their different perspectives extracted new knowledge from the White Island Findings (Martinsson 2003).
- 6 Guide to the Gränna Museums, 1947 (Gränna museers arkiv).

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## Using Different Pasts in a Similar Way: Museum Representations of National History in Norway and China

By Marzia Varutti

### Abstract

This article explores how national histories are constructed in the museums of Norway. It does so through a comparative perspective, whereby museum displays of national past in Norway are being compared to museum displays of national past in the People's Republic of China. This will involve comparing narratives, museological approaches, rationale and purposes of museum displays in the two countries.

Fieldwork research in museums in Norway and China suggests that if national pasts are obviously unique to the historical trajectories of each country, their museum renditions are structured in an intriguingly similar way. Museum displays of national pasts in Norway develop around a set of themes including myths of ancestry and descent; epics of resistance leading the embryonic nation through a dark era and towards a "Golden Age"; a core of moral and aesthetic values; notions of national modernity; and selective amnesia. I will show how similar topics can be found in museum displays of the past in Chinese museums.

The comparative perspective of the analysis enables me to assess the uniqueness of museum representations of the past in Norway and at the same time to explore analogies in the museum construction of national narratives beyond the European context, through the case study of China. This will lead me to put forward the hypothesis of the coagulation, at international level, of a canon for the museum representation of national history.

**Keywords:** Museums, Norway, China, national history, representation.

## Introduction

Whilst there is little doubt that the manipulation of the past is crucial to the making and remaking of national identities, the ways in which the past is being edited in the specific context of museums, and the implications of this, remain partially opaque. In addition, little is known about these processes in an international comparative perspective.

This chapter explores how national histories are constructed in the museums of Norway by means of a comparative approach, whereby museum displays of the national past in Norway are compared to museum displays of the national past in the People's Republic of China.

Whilst shunning a direct comparison between the two countries, the analysis aims to elucidate the characteristics of national representations of the past in Norwegian museums by displacing them from the “familiar” national and European contexts, and setting them against a radically different case study, such as China. This approach might appear hazardous given the obvious differences between the two countries – differences of size, geo-cultural position, historical trajectories, democratic traditions, state apparatuses, demographic profiles and ideological influences, to name but a few. Yet precisely by virtue of the differences between the two countries, the existence of similarities in the way national pasts are represented and narrated raises a number of research questions: is it possible to identify recurrent themes and approaches in the way the nation is depicted in museums around the world? Are national narratives – their form of expression, if not their content – to some degree similar at international and global level? If so, what can be inferred from such a finding?

The analysis builds on fieldwork research conducted in Norway and China. In particular, in Norway, the study focuses on the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, the Museum of the City of Oslo, the Museum of Cultural History Oslo, the Museum of the Viking Burial Ships, and to a lesser extent, the Maihaugen Museum in Lillehammer. In China, the museums examined include the Museum of National History, the Military Museum, the Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party, the Shanghai Museum, the Shanghai History Museum, and the Sanxingdui Museum. These museums have been selected since they include displays that present national cultural features and historical events, and they enjoy a national status – addressing national and non-national audiences, receiving relatively high numbers of visitors, benefiting from public funds, and featuring highly in the circuits of national and international tourism.

Research methods included interviews with museum curators, as well as direct observation and discourse analysis of displays. The analysis of exhibitions focused on the comparative examination of narratives, museological approaches, rationale and purposes. Discourse analysis of displays involved approaching museum objects, texts and the overall museum environment as components of a



single composite narrative (Bal 1996) about the national past and national identity.

Using China as a backdrop for the discussion of the ways in which the national past is represented in Norway contributes to clarify the extent to which specific modes of representation are unique to Norway, and conversely, the extent to which these are shared with other country contexts. This situates Norway within a broader spectrum of approaches to national pasts at European and global level, ultimately providing a platform to explore the hypothesis that a canon for the representation of national history is gradually coagulating at international level.

## **The Past Made Into Heritage**

Notions of the past and of heritage are often juxtaposed to complement and support each other: the past is interpreted in such ways that aim to provide a cohesive narrative and a context for the heritage, whilst the latter materializes an otherwise abstract past. Yet it is important to stress the distinction between the two. If we define the past as an account of historical events, heritage can be understood as those elements of the past that are retained and celebrated and, as a result, exert an influence on the present (Blundell 2006: 39). In other words, the past is transformed into heritage through processes of selection, interpretation, and memorialisation. These processes require a degree of creativity (Varutti 2010b) and imagination (Anderson 2006) in the way memories are acted upon, edited and reassembled in order to be transformed into powerful bonds among individuals and collectivities. The link between the past, the heritage and the nation is ideally synthesized by Stuart Hall (1999: 5) “we should think of the heritage as a discursive practice. It is one of the ways in which the nation slowly constructs for itself a sort of collective social memory.” Thus, when we examine how the past is being recollected and re-presented, we are not simply dealing with past events, but also with the series of choices, selections, and transformations that have been operated along the way and that produce real effects in the present.

Museums are key sites where such selective and transformative processes take place and are validated. If history, as the historian Bo Stråth (2005: 256) puts it, “is a translation of the past into our time, an act of interpretation”, then museum representations of history add yet another layer of interpretation, and can be understood as sites of meta-translation. From a corpus of historical data and objects, some elements are expunged, others are emphasized, yet others are altered and re-assembled to form a coherent visual and narrative ensemble. Museum objects are deployed as discrete pieces of evidence, materialized snapshots of the “authentic moment” (Clavir 2002: 32) variously interpreted by an interpolating linear narrative.

Museum displays are especially powerful memory sites since they enable the connection between individual and cultural memory. This process is particularly salient in the case of displays unfolding narratives of the nation and its past. The

anthropologist and museum professional Anthony Alan Shelton (2006: 484) noted “exhibitions [...] structure objects spatially to reactivate or create memory anew”. In the context of the display, visitors' individual memories and understandings are confronted with the memory constructed (as cultural and authoritative) by the museum. The visitor is brought to situate him or herself vis-à-vis the narrative of the display through processes of recognition and self-identification, or distancing and rejection. In this sense, museums are extraordinary laboratories where the notions of cultural heritage and cultural memory are being constantly reconfigured and re-invented.

These observations are so inherent in museums' institutional, political and intellectual remits that they defy cultural and temporal distance and can be, for instance, equally applied to museums in Norway and China. In other words, museum displays – the objects on view, the texts that “explain” them, the environment that contextualizes them – constitute a system of interpretation that can be read critically to reveal the tenets that inform it. Casting light on these aspects of museum displays and narratives in a cross-cultural perspective bears the potential to bring to the fore not only national uniqueness but also intriguing similarities and convergences at international level.

Stefan Berger's (2008: 13) argument that “inventions of the modern nation originated in North America and Europe, but colonialism exported the narrative strategies and hierarchies of European national narratives across the globe”, as well as Krijn Thijs' (2008: 71) note that “narratives of different nations can be compared on their narrative structures and on the transnational import and export of specific narrative elements”, encourage the search for analogies between countries within and beyond Europe. In the light of these considerations, it seems pertinent to contrast national narratives in a European country such as Norway, with those of an extra-European country such as China. It is worth emphasising however, that the aim of the analysis is not so much to compare Norwegian and Chinese museums as to use examples from museums in China as a counterpoint to the analysis of museums in Norway.

The question of the relations that may exist between the modes of representation and narratives of the nation traceable in museums in Norway (and for that matter, in Europe) and China is far too broad and complex to be tackled in the framework of this paper; nevertheless, the assessment of the range and quality of analogies existing between narrative structures and genres seems a pertinent starting point for such investigations. It is also important to remain alert to the risk of Eurocentric derives that such question might involve. In this respect, historian Jie-Hyun Lim (2008: 291) appropriately notes “the Eurocentric national history paradigm consigned the less developed nations to ‘an imaginary waiting room of history’ [...]. They saw their indigenous history as a history of ‘lack’ in comparison with Europe”. In the light of this observation, the juxtaposition of Norway and China does not aim to provide evidence of the transfer of European

models of national histories outside of Europe, but rather to move away from such Eurocentric understandings of national pasts by enlarging the scope of the analysis and by setting it in new analytical frameworks.

In a first instance, it might seem that museum displays of the national past in Norway and China would have little in common. Yet at a closer examination, Norway can be profitably set against China by virtue of some basic similarities between the two countries.

Firstly, likewise Norway, China was not a major colonial power. Neither country conducted major colonial campaigns during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; rather, they have been the object of colonization. Norway was subject to the Danish Crown until 1814 and then, following to the Treaty of Kiel, it was “transferred” to the Kingdom of Sweden from which it gained independence in 1905. A few decades earlier, on the other end of the Euro-Asiatic continent, French and British armies were forcing their way into Chinese ports imposing to the Emperor the Nanjing Treaty in 1842. However, whilst in Norway the long-term Danish presence left a profound cultural imprint, the colonial presence in China remained contained in time and space, concentrating mainly on key commercial harbours on the east coast.

Secondly, Norway became a fully independent country only in 1905; likewise, the process of formation of a Chinese national identity is relatively recent (Dittmer & Kim 1993). It could be argued that – at least over the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the nation in both Norway and China has been conceived in modernist terms, that is, as an entity characterized by territorial unity, legal enforcement, community participation, homogeneous culture, sovereignty, international recognition and a unifying nationalist ideology (Smith 2004: 15). Both Norway and China had to face the challenge to create a nation out of an ethnically diverse population, yet with a weighty ethnic majority. At their inception, both nations had to govern territories in parts still unmapped and deprived of infrastructures, services and administrative structures, and whose populations had to be “unified” in a national mould. These challenges were met through a range of strategies including relocation of population, educational, linguistic and religious policies. For instance in Norway, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the establishment of local municipalities implementing the redistributive policies of the Welfare-state significantly contributed to nation-building. Similarly, the nationalisation of religion and the spread of Lutheran Protestantism since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, instilled and cemented a sense of shared cultural identity that would have later provided a platform for the development of Norwegian national identity (Bærenholdt 2007: 184, 206ff). With similar purposes of nation-making, in Communist China the massive resettlement of Han Chinese in the South-Western provinces mostly inhabited by ethnic minorities, bore such proportions that it has been described as a “civilizing mission” and paralleled to a form of “internal colonization” (Harrell 1996).

Thirdly, and as a result of the above, in Norway as in China museums of history tend to emphasise specific historical periods (the Viking period and 19<sup>th</sup> century Norway, and Ancient and early imperial China) which are being idealized and constructed as central to contemporary definitions of national identity. In what follows, I consider how this is done.

### **The Folk and the National Past in Norwegian Museums**

Quite intriguingly, Norway has no museum of national history. The Maihaugen open air Museum in Lillehammer, which includes reconstructions of 200 historical and contemporary buildings, together with the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History in Oslo are probably the two sites that best approximate the idea of a Norwegian national museum of history.

Nationalist narratives in Norway develop around a set of values and concepts that can be loosely identified with the notion of folk. These values find an ideal manifestation at the Maihaugen open air Museum and the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, where the Norwegian nation is displayed in its popular, peasant dimensions. The emphasis on the folk was the result of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic interpretation of national identity framing the peasant as the primordial, authentic and uncorrupted essence of the nation (Stoklund 2003: 23ff).<sup>1</sup> The folk culture approach in the Maihaugen open air Museum and the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History is translated through an emphasis on rural and peasant life, with its corollary of wholesome food, open air activities, and communion with the natural environment – all pervaded by a hint of nostalgia.



The Romantic, rural past displayed at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History was founded in 1894. The Museum's remit as a showcase of the incipient Norwegian nation is apparent since its establishment, at "a time marked by strong national fervor and a desire for a more independent position in the union with Sweden".<sup>2</sup> Although there is no obvious narrative line informing visitors' path, the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History offers a series of images and artefacts that materialise the artistic, architectural, functional, technical achievements and peculiarities of the communities inhabiting what has come to be called Norway. The visitor walks in the natural and built landscape, experiencing the historical depth (from the 13<sup>th</sup> century Stave Church to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Pakistani flat down-town Oslo), and geographical breadth of the nation (moving from the southern coastal huts to the northern inland Sami dwellings). The prominence of the cultivated fields, the orchards, the botanic garden, and the forest in the premises of the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History are telling indications of the centrality of the natural environment in Norwegian national imagery. Folk museums such as the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History are elected sites for popular education, family outings and leisure activities. Overall, this kind of venues contributes to children's familiarization with the natural, artistic, architectural, historical, cultural and ethnic features of the nation – thus ultimately contributing to the formation of Norwegian citizenry.

The encounter with the national past in Norway is not bounded to museums. Open air staged historical representations where local actors impersonate historical figures and re-enact historical events, are very popular during the Summer months. The popularity of these historical representations might be explained by an increasing interest in local history (Gullestad 2006: 111). In most cases, these historical re-evocations propose idealized versions of the past where only the positive aspects are being re-evoked (see also Gullestad 2006: 111). These historical representations contribute to re-actualize the past and renew its links with the present; they bring history into the nucleus of society, transforming it into a family gathering and an occasion for socialization. They also contribute to the territorialisation of the past, whereby feelings of belonging to a local community are being strengthened by the commemoration of a shared past. In this sense, the accuracy of the historical representation is secondary to its bonding effect.

Nevertheless, the re-evocation of an idealized past is not without dangers in a country such as Norway that is experiencing rapid socio-cultural changes. In the turn of one generation, from the 1960s to today, Norwegian society has been radically transformed as a result of important waves of migration from South Asia, the middle-East, Eastern Africa and Latin America. Although Norway's multicultural policies aim to integrate the new immigrants into Norwegian society, inter-ethnic social relations are not always thoroughly harmonious. In this situation, the celebration of national and local traditions, myths, festivities and events may turn into instances of exclusion rather than cohesion, as they may



heighten the divide between ethnic Norwegians and newly arrived communities (see also Gullestad 2006: 119-120). Museum professionals seem to be well aware of this risk. Following the adoption of multicultural governmental policies over the last decade, museums in Norway have made considerable changes to museum practices, displays and national narratives in order to include ethnic communities and to better reflect the cultural pluralism of contemporary Norwegian society (Rekdal 2001). To summarize, it could be said that museums in Norway are key loci not only for imagining, but also for experiencing the Norwegian nation. Museum displays have actively contributed to the definition of Norwegian national identity and to its transformation from its folk, peasant, roots, to its current multicultural dimension.

These features set Norway in stark contrast with China. Here, museums have historically performed the roles of political indoctrination, patriotic education and dissemination of Communist ideology. National history in China is highly institutionalized, embedded in the formal remit of cultural institutions such as museums. Since 1949, museums have provided a unified, government-approved vision of Chinese identity, culture and history (notably of revolutionary history). Providing political legitimation, instilling a sense of belonging and loyalty, and incorporating ethnic minorities into the Han majority, have been the priorities of Chinese museums over the last decades. Political concerns continue to permeate contemporary museum representations of the national past, especially in the ideological uncertainty of the post Tian An Men, the protest and massacres in 1989. However, today Chinese museums have also become full agents in the implementation of cultural nationalist policies, as well as in the economies of culture, tourism and international prestige (Varutti 2008).

It could thus be said that in Norway as in China, museum representations of national past are in line with the respective national political projects. In Norway museums show concern with using the national past to build a shared platform from which to negotiate the changes affecting contemporary Norwegian society. Conversely, in China public museums formally adhere to the government official nationalist discourse, and thus continue to enforce predefined visions of the Chinese nation and its past. Beyond the diverse functions that museums are performing in Norway and China, it is possible to discern a pattern of similarities in the way they pursue such functions, and notably in the narrative strategies deployed in the representations of the respective national pasts.

### **Norwegian National Narratives as Seen From China**

Historian Peter Aronsson (2010) has developed a theoretical model for the comparative analysis of national museums in which national museums' narratives and approaches are linked to the process of nation-building. On these premises, Aronsson identifies a series of criteria upon which a comparative analysis of

museum settings might be based, these include the historical establishment of an independent state; the relation between state and nation(s), the role of civil society and the public sphere; and the degree of social segmentation or cohesion. Juxtaposing Norway and China in the light of these criteria evidences that in both countries the late nationalisation of cultural heritage and the relatively late establishment of national museums were the product of the recent establishment of the nation. Significant differences, however, set the two cases apart. Whilst at its inception Norway lacked a long established tradition of royal collections, which might have acted as a core for the development of national collections, in China, the Communist Party greatly benefited from the existence of imperial collections, which were appropriated and turned into the very emblem of Chinese national heritage and of national identity. Also, in Norway one cannot find a network of national museums comparable to the one existing in China. This might be understood as a reflection of different levels of political legitimacy, whereby the relatively weak legitimacy of the Chinese government needs to be enforced through authoritative and cohesive historical narratives and representations, whereas this need is less acute in the more politically stable Norway. This point lends support to Aronsson's (2010: 49) argument that "national museums are easier to promote at the state level in a centralised state than in a more democratic and pluralistic state".

To proceed further in the comparative exercise, I borrow the methodological approach adopted by historians Stephan Berger and Chris Lorenz (2008: 4ff). Berger and Lorenz selected a series of key topics – myths of origin, "golden ages", national heroes, continuity and discontinuities in national narratives, the nation's Others and historical exclusions – which are explored in a European comparative perspective. These topics are grounded in major theoretical insights on the theories of nationalism. More in detail, the scholar of nationalism Anthony Smith (2004:17) noted that there are specific kinds of resources that can be mobilized in order to strengthen national identity and feelings of national belonging, "these include myths of origin and election, the territorialization of memories to form sacred landscapes, the shared memories of communal 'golden ages', and the ideal of struggle and sacrifice to fulfil a national destiny". It seems telling that the main similarities in the museum representations of the national past in Norway and China are precisely centred on the basic national "resources" identified by Anthony Smith. In particular, it is possible to identify analogies between Norway and China in the processes of construction of a common ancestry, and its deployment as basis for a national mythology; the formulation of an epics of national resistance to the oppressor and of final victory in the re-establishment of a national integrity, or national essence; the crystallization of a core of moral and aesthetic values inextricably associated to the nation; a tradition of "salvaging" the past from oblivion, of retrieval of valuable memories and of obviation of others; the framing of some historical events and persons through an

idealized, romantic and nostalgic perspective. In short, in Norway as in China, museum displays of the national past provide a core of cultural, historical and moral values on which discourses and enactments about national identity can be grounded. Below, I take a closer look at the main analogies in the representation of national history in Norway and China.

### **National Mythologies**

The construction of a shared past (historical or mythical) is crucial in so far as the past becomes the purporter of the moral, social and aesthetic values of the nation. But how can the past be re-actualized and inserted in national narratives? One of the most powerful ways to deploy the past and make it effective for present nation-building purposes is to re-evoked a “Golden Age” which is depicted as a high point of civilisation and a model of moral virtue, illuminated politics, scientific advancement, and artistic creativity (Smith 1997: 40). As Armstrong (1982) has argued, the practice of selectively recalling evocative elements of the past – such as myths and symbols that have the power to heighten the awareness of belonging to the same community – is one that inscribes in the long term, thus suggesting that nations develop in the *longue durée* as a result of persistent processes of ethnic identification. Museums can actively contribute to these dynamics by re-actualizing and celebrating national myths and symbols.

Another way through which national authority legitimises itself through the past is by establishing a genealogical link with the symbolic figures or events associated with the origins of the community – that is, a founding myth (Fowler 1987: 230). As a number of historians, including Duncan Bell (2003) and Bo Stråth (2005) have pointed out, myths and traditions – even if transformed or invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992) – are crucially important as discursive practices that bind together collective national identities. As Bell explains (2003:75) a nationalist myth can be understood “as a story that simplifies, dramatizes and selectively narrates the story of a nation’s past [...] they subsume all of the various events, personalities, traditions, artefacts and social practices that (self) define the nation and its relation to the past, present and future”.

Museum displays – all the more if illustrating national features and historical events – are an ideal ground for the development, crystallization and dissemination of national mythologies. Norwegian national mythologies for instance, weave together romantic notions of the natural landscape with the tough, frugal heroism of seafarers, travellers and explorers (see Aronsson et al. 2008) – the Vikings being the most accomplished expression of this archetype. However, since as mentioned, Norway does not have a designated museum of national history, its national historical narratives are scattered across diverse institutions. For instance, the exhibition *We won the land* at the Maihaugen Museum<sup>3</sup> in Lillehammer, locates the origins of the Norwegian nation and the inception of a “Norwegian history” in the end of the ice age. In the exhibition’s narrative, the

melting of the glaciers and the ensuing transformation of the natural landscape are the preconditions for “history” to begin. In the narrative of the Maihaugen Museum, the Norwegian nation is fully entangled in the natural landscape, understood as an ideal conflation of Nature and (Norwegian) culture.

The Viking period (800–1066 AD) constitutes a pillar of Norwegian national narratives. It figures most prominently in the Museum of the Viking Burial Ships, at the outskirts of Oslo, where visitors may closely observe three magnificently preserved Viking wooden burial ships. Here, the artefacts on display are not interpolated by an explicit national narrative; rather it is the materiality of the burial ships – their majestic dimensions, technical masterpiece, and elegant shapes – that are made to speak for the seafaring culture and boat-making skills of Norwegian ancestry.

Christianity is another important page in Norway’s national history. Middle Ages, Christian Norway is recalled at the Museum of Cultural History of the University of Oslo in a gallery displaying religious paintings on wood and painted wooden sculptures. The emphasis is here on the aesthetic features of wooden sculptures. These are presented as tokens of the devotion to Christianity of rural communities in South-Western Norway since the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The subject matter of religious wooden sculptures (of which the stave churches can be considered an extraordinary extension) points at the bonds between Christianity and the Kingdom, between religious and political power, whilst sanctioning the victory over Norse paganism.



Christianity “arrives” to Norway, diorama at the Museum of the City of Oslo.

The national narrative centred on the notion of the folk that unfolds at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History provides a corollary to the narratives emphasising the bond with Nature at the Maihaugen Museum, the seafaring exploits on display at the Museum of the Viking Burial Ships, and the Christian rural Norway celebrated at the Museum of Cultural History. Taken together, these museums map a constellation of national sites and national narratives that, although not expressively interconnected, compose a grand narrative of the Norwegian Nation. Peter Aronsson (2008: 206) brings this argument further suggesting that the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, together with the Museum of the Viking Burial Ships and the National Maritime Museum constitute a complex linking the ancient Viking past and the modern present of the Norwegian nation. In other words, the heritage of the Vikings is being inscribed in the framework of a Norwegian ethos conflating peasant culture and a modernity defined in terms of scientific discovery and advanced technology applied, among other, to oil exploration, telecommunications, and the fishing industry.

If one juxtaposes the museum representations of the nation in Norway and China, one of the main shared elements that emerges is the centrality of national mythologies. However, whilst in Norway such mythologies unfold in museums through a sequence of foundational turning points such as the Viking era, the advent of Christianity, independence, the oil discovery etc. in Chinese museums national narratives are primarily concerned with communicating a sense of historical continuity. The notion of continuity in the history of Chinese civilisation is central in the political discourse on the national past. For instance, the question of the origins of the Chinese civilisation is an especially debated and politicized one. Until the late 1970s the dominant interpretative model suggested the idea of a unique settlement of civilisation – identified as “Huaxia” – situated along the Yellow River, from which populations would have later spread across the rest of China. “Huaxia” has come to indicate the ancestors of the Han, but also more broadly, Han Chinese civilisation. The concept of Huaxia has been instrumental to the discourses on the alleged superiority of the Han Chinese majority (Dikötter 1992). Since the 1980s the theory of the Yellow River has been abandoned by historians and archaeologists to the benefit of an alternative interpretation – known as theory of the “interaction sphere” (Falkenhausen 1995) – based on a plurality of settlements that, through interaction, would have lead to the spread of the population over the territory. In 1986, archaeological excavations in Sichuan Province, South-West China, brought to light cultural relics attributed to the Shu culture, estimated to date back to the XII century BC. These bronze artefacts of arresting beauty are the tokens of an advanced and culturally refined civilisation in the South West of China, independent from the Northern settlements. This represented a turnaround in the interpretation of the origins of Chinese civilisation, since it discarded the theory of the Yellow River, according to which the settlements in Northern China were the “cradle” of Chinese civilisation. The



Sanxingdui Museum, in Sichuan, celebrates the cultural and technological refinement of the Shu civilisation and firmly inscribes it in the history of the Chinese nation. Yet, the Museum of Chinese National History in Beijing – currently being revamped – continued to embrace the theory of a unique settlement, focusing on Huaxia and its alleged superiority, and presenting the history of the Chinese nation as an uninterrupted line of development from the Peking Man to the founding of the People's Republic. Conversely, one can find very little note of the Shu civilization, which is dismissed as a marginal, minor local culture. This example shows how different museums are taking advantage of historical uncertainty to unfold different and competing narratives on the origins of the nation. In spite of archaeological evidence of the contrary, the Museum of Chinese National History preferred to emphasise the aspect of continuity in Chinese history. These inconsistencies are revelatory of the ongoing process of history writing, but also of the malleability of museum representations vis-à-vis the need to disseminate powerful narratives of national unity and cohesion.

### **National Epics**

National mythologies extend in national epics where the endurance of the embryonic nation-state is being put at hard test by natural calamities and disasters, plagues, economic crisis, and wars. From these, the narrative goes, the nation will emerge stronger than ever. It is possible to retrace such epics of resistance in both Norwegian and Chinese museums.

The exhibition *We won the Land* at the Maihaugen Museum in Lillehammer, for instance, deploys a narrative alternating lights and shadows. The representations of the Black Death in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent Danish occupation are followed by a more positive narrative centred on the process of nation-building since the independence from Denmark in 1814 and over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Museum displays and narratives turn again to dramatic tones to describe the Nazi occupation of Norway between 1940–45, and finally they resume a positive stance to celebrate the modern, affluent and stable Norwegian welfare state in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A similar narrative line is also present – albeit more subtle – in the reconstructed *Apartment building, Wessels Gate 15* from down town Oslo on display at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History. The building is composed of eight apartment units. Through details of the lifestyles of their occupants, the apartments provide an overview of what life was like in different periods in the history of Norway, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus displays juxtapose the wit and lightness of the 1920s with the hardship of everyday life in the economic crisis of the 1930s, the approaching threats of Nazism and Fascism with the renovated hope for the future of the pop 1960s, the social protests of the 1970s with the multiculturalism of the new millennium. Implicitly, the presence of electronic devices in the apartments and the quality of home decoration become

indicators of prosperity and modernity. In spite of the modernist narrative underlying the display, this succeeds in drawing a vivid portrait of Norwegian citizenry over the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In contrast to the linearity of national narratives in Norway, museum representations of national epics in China focus on the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and are strictly linked to the rise of the Communist Party and the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. The development of the Communist Party, from its inception in Shanghai in 1921 (celebrated in the Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party) to the epic of the Long March, are vividly and romantically illustrated in the museums established during the Maoist era (from 1949 to 1976). For instance, the exhibition cases in the Military Museum are replete with such items as binoculars, lanterns, water flasks, and soldiers' uniforms.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the exhibition at the Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party presents as historical evidence personal belonging of the attendants to the congress, such as typewriters, wall clocks, badges, uniforms, tea sets, and even lamp switches.<sup>5</sup> By illustrating the spirit of sacrifice of the Red Army soldiers and by celebrating the martyrdom of patriotic heroes, these displays are meant to provide models of citizenry, whilst instilling feelings of pride and national belonging. The dark, pre-1949 past is contrasted with the glory of the post-unification and the brightness of the Communist future. As it is the case in Norway, these national narratives emphasise the endurance of the national bond through difficult times and close on a call for the retrieval and preservation of a "national essence".

### **Selective Amnesia**

In a museum setting, forgetting is as consequential as remembering (Varutti 2010b). Some pages of history are voluntarily omitted as part of a "strategy of forgetfulness" (Lundahl 2006: 2) that enables unpleasant historical events to be "edited out" from the main national narrative.

For instance in China the writing of official history was (and in part, still is) achieved by imposing national heroes and events for remembrance, and conversely by neglecting or ignoring others (see Varutti 2008). Historical narratives are purged from disturbing elements (events or characters) and historical or mythical figures are adapted to suit present needs. The instance of the recent surge in popularity of *Qin Shi Huangdi*, the emperor that unified China around 221BC and the commissioner of the impressive Terracotta Army, shows how an historical or mythical character is salvaged from collective amnesia, re-interpreted and cast as a national hero to support contingent narratives on the longevity, continuity, and unity of the Chinese nation (Duara 1988: 780). Significantly, such narratives are successfully exported through museums, as illustrates the popularity of the temporary exhibition *The First Emperor. China Terracotta Army* opened at the British Museum in 2007 and subsequently touring the world major museums. In spite of a renewal of interest towards the ancient

past, China's recent history is still to be written. The decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when artistic production and cultural expressions that were not of propagandistic nature were considered obsolete and unproductive, remains largely inaccessible to historians and is still considered taboo in public museum representations. The prospect of a public museum of the Cultural Revolution is still far from becoming reality; this would require, in the first instance, the coagulation of a collective and government-approved willingness to remember. For the time being, amnesia is the strategy chosen to deal with personal, collective and national loss.

Historical omissions and selective amnesia are not a prerogative of Chinese museums, they also occur in other countries, including Norway. For instance, museum displays of Norway's national past rarely explore the unexpected wealth produced by the discovery of oil resources in the late 1960s, nor do they tackle the deep impacts that this exerted on the articulation of national priorities in the political, economical, social and cultural realms. Museum representations seem to privilege a more distant, indefinite, romanticized past. Similarly, the discriminatory practices that the Norwegian government conducted vis-à-vis the Sami and some ethnic minority groups such as the Travellers until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have only recently started to be addressed in museum displays. Mostly they are raised in the framework of displays dedicated to a specific ethnic or indigenous group, such as the Sami gallery in the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, or the *Latjo Drom* permanent exhibition on Travellers at the Glomdal Museum in Elverum. Even more delicate, because more recent, is the question of the "German children" (*tyske barne*), the children born of relationships between German soldiers and Norwegian women during the Nazi occupation (1940-45). The discrimination to which these children have been subject is largely absent from museum exhibitions. Similarly, museums fail to engage with the racist policies implemented during the Nazi occupation aiming to select an ideal Norwegian "racial type". This thorny issue has been exceptionally – if indirectly – acknowledged in the temporary photographic exhibition *Visions of Purity* held at the Gallery Sverdrup, University of Oslo, in Autumn 2009. Aside from these isolated instances, these difficult historical pages are only rarely and marginally referred to in museum representations of Norwegian history; definitely, they are not (yet) part of the Norwegian national master narrative.

Read against the grain, museum displays of historical events reveal a constellation of silences and omissions. Events, periods, characters are edited out from national narratives when they are difficult to come to terms with, contested, or traumatic, and would therefore jeopardize the cohesion and persuasive potency of national narratives. Interestingly, in both Chinese and Norwegian museums the instances of historical omissions mostly pertain to the recent national past – a past that has not yet been fully crystallized into history, memorialised or embedded into the cultural heritage, and thus is "difficult" to depict and narrate in museums.

It might be argued that it is a general prerogative of (national) museums to shun engagement with such recent past or, alternatively, to tackle it through tactful and *ad hoc* strategies – of which historical amnesia and selective remembrance are examples – that whilst not imperilling the homogeneity of national narratives, also reveal the political nature of museum displays of the past.

### **National Ethics, Values and Aesthetics**

The construction of a national ethos is pursued by associating the nation with a set of values, moral codes and aesthetic canons.

In Norway, framing the nation through the folk perspective has involved the mobilization of moral values such as egalitarianism, individualism, spontaneity and integrity (the latter are often associated to childhood), as well as ideals of tradition, authenticity, cultural continuity, and love for the natural environment (Gullestad 1992; Sørensen & Stråth 1997; Garvey 2005; Bærenholdt 2007). These constitute a core of recurring themes in museum displays of Norwegian national identity. For instance, the Folk Dress permanent exhibition at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History chose to focus on the artist Adolph Tidemand emphasizing the fact that he indistinctly portrayed “wealthy farmers that were member of the Parliament [...] [*and*] ordinary Norwegian farmers. [...] His models were drawn from all social levels”. Similarly, the curators of the temporary exhibition *Where is Mr Siboni?* make a point of specifying that “From the foundation of the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History in 1894, the collection of artefacts has been focused equally on urban and rural cultures. The whole life of the nation shall be represented, not only particular social classes and environments”.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of a high ethical profile is also apparent in the description of the occupants of the reconstructed *Apartment building, Wessels Gate 15* at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History. Despite the differences in historical period, gender, social class and background, museum panels emphasize that the tenants’ common feature was to be “nice persons and good people” (*pene mennesker og bra folk*). In a similar vein, the Museum of the City of Oslo displays a number of portraits of individuals and family groups from the Middle Ages to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These stern, austere portraits contribute to the definition of a “Norwegian” ethos in the arts and in real life. Tamed colour tones, composed body gestures, rigorous accoutrements suggest an aesthetics of the essential, the contained, the modest and the measured. Witoszek (1997: 87) argues that there is an historical continuity in Norwegian political culture based on the individualist and egalitarian ethos which lead to national independence.



Celebrating Norwegian national independence and its heroes at the Museum of the City of Oslo.

National independence is itself a cherished national value – in part instantiated by Norway’s reluctance to join supra-national organizations such as the EU. This can be better appreciated at the light of the interpretation of the successive unions with Denmark and Sweden as colonization, and the trauma of WWII, leading to the invasion of Norway by the Nazi army. These events left an imprint on national consciousness to the effect that national independence is perceived as something that needs to be protected. The projected moral integrity of Norway is also the result of museum narratives emphasizing the fact that Norway was not a colonial power, but rather a victim of Danish and Swedish imperialism (this can be seen for instance at the Mainhaugen Museum, the Oslo City Museum and the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History). This image is being maintained and re-actualized at the Nobel Peace Center, extolling the key role of Norway as mediator in international peace negotiations and in international cooperation and development aid. As a corollary, the annual endowment of the Nobel Peace Prize by the King of Norway contributes to update Norway’s moral authority and international status of a “righteous” nation.

The crystallization and institutionalization of “Norwegian” values and moral codes appear as relatively recent processes when juxtaposed to their correspondent in China. Here, Confucian principles have historically provided a source of moral values and codes of social conduct. Today, they continue to be strongly associated to Chinese civilisation, and by extension to the Chinese nation



(Suresh 2002). Confucian principles have deeply informed social relationships by means of an emphasis on the concept of filial piety, declined in the respect for the parents, the elderly, the ancestors, the superior, and ultimately the State. The notion of filial piety finds particular application in the domain of the political relationship between the citizen and the sovereign (Bell & Ham 2003). It follows that the State is constructed as a superseding, almost paternal entity. The image of Mao Zhedong in museums (notably in the Museum of the Revolution, the Military Museum and the National Art Museum, in Beijing, and the Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party, in Shanghai) is deeply imprinted by these principles. More broadly Confucianism has significantly contributed to shape Chinese attitudes towards the past and its material manifestations by emphasizing the importance of remembrance (cfr Zhang 2003), valuing the respect for elderly and the ancestors, and the need to learn moral lessons from the mistakes of the past.

In terms of aesthetics, contemporary Chinese museums appear fully involved in a process of redefinition of “Chinese aesthetics”. The ideological transition from Communist ideology to cultural nationalism initiated in the early 1990s has found expression in museum displays in a gradual distancing from Marxist-Leninist approaches to history and the turn to the sublimation of the aesthetics of cultural relics. In contemporary exhibitions, the most salient artefacts illustrating Chinese national history are being presented through aestheticizing display techniques that invite a contemplative gaze, emphasise the formal characteristics of objects thus ultimately celebrating, and in the process canonizing, a “Chinese national style” (Varutti 2010a).

### **Creating a “Modern” Nation**

At the Museum of the city of Oslo, historical artefacts, landscape paintings, urban miniature models, dioramas and historical photographic material celebrate the metamorphosis of Christiania from a large village into a capital over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The establishment of “national” institutions – such as the Royal Palace, the University, the Stock Exchange, the Theatre,<sup>7</sup> the Bank of Norway, and the national transport, telecommunication and postal services – together with demographic increase, social stratification, urban development and a thriving economy, are the elements supporting the discourse on the modernity of the nation in the making. Similarly, at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History the visitor can walk in a reconstructed 19<sup>th</sup> century bank office in Christiania. The exhibition, financed by DnB NOR, Norway's largest financial services group, retraces the development of the banking system in Norway in parallel with the making of the Norwegian nation. In a similar vein, the Museum of the City of Oslo deploys a series of dioramas reconstructing in fine detail housing interiors from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to today. Interior decoration becomes here an index of the transformation of the urban landscape and living units (through the appearance of

concrete housing blocks), and of families' customs and lifestyles. Similarly, the reform of the school system and the institution of a penitentiary are presented as salient facets of the modernization of Norwegian society in the Museum of the City of Oslo. Interestingly, the transformation of Norwegian society into a multicultural society is also perceived as a sign of the times, as exemplified by a diorama entitled *City Landscape* (Byskap) displaying a multicultural crowd in a central square in Oslo, and chosen to close the permanent exhibition about the history of city at the Museum of the City of Oslo.

Writing about Sweden, Peter Aronsson (2010: 42) notes that “the absence of a single, central narrator reinforces the contemporary multicultural discourse of equal individual and historical value”. It could be argued that, similarly, in Norway the absence of a single, clearly defined and powerful narrative of the nation leaves room for more open definitions of what constitutes the Norwegian national heritage and national identity, leading to the development of museum national narratives that take into account recent phenomena of migration, mobility and cultural hybridity. This is ultimately conducive to a flexible, open-ended definition of the profiles of the national body, in line with the multicultural complexity of contemporary Norway.

Conversely, in Chinese museums the multicultural character of China's citizenry – including a large Han Chinese majority and 55 ethnic minority groups – is framed as a “remnant of the past” due to fade out as Chinese society “modernizes” (Varutti 2010b). The main narratives of modernity of the Chinese nation unfolded by museum displays are linked to the celebration of the accomplishments of the Han Chinese majority, with a special emphasis on the achievements of the Communist government since its establishment in 1949. For instance, the Museum of Public Security in Shanghai depicts the history of the police service, its social function and the moral values that inform it. The efficiency of the police service is presented as the condition to build a safe, modern society based on the rule of law. The Bank Museum in Shanghai, illustrating the development of financial activities in China, provides another example of how a public service may be inscribed in narratives about the modernity of the Chinese nation. The images reproduced on the banknotes are particularly revelatory of the narratives of progress disseminated by the Communist Party. Depicting workers and peasants labouring for the nation, banknote images celebrate national achievements in the domains of mechanization, technology, scientific research etc. In the same vein, the Post Museum in Shanghai presents the development of the postal and telecommunication services as tokens of the country's modernity.

Modernisation is then celebrated in the national narratives of both Norway and China. Indeed, with the exception of multiculturalism, museum displays of the nation in Norway and China emphasise similar aspects of modernization, such as increased efficiency of public services and expansion of the possibilities of

production and consumption. However, in the two instances modernization is linked to different acting forces: in Norway, it is presented as a civic-national project, whereas in China the narratives put more emphasis on the role of the state in the modernization of the country. These examples show how modernity, understood as an intellectual tool that helps to integrate innovation and make sense of social change, can be variously framed in museum narratives to support different kinds of nation-building projects.

## Conclusions

Stephan Berger and the research group working on the project *Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Europe*<sup>8</sup> have authoritatively documented the parallels that can be traced among European countries in the uses of the past for nation-building purposes. In line with Berger's (2007) opening of the analysis to a global perspective, this paper has extended the comparative methodology further, to include a non-European country, such as China. The focus of the analysis was narrowed to museum representations of the nation and the examples from China were used to highlight specificities and generalizable features of national narratives in the museums of Norway. The analysis of museum representations of national past in Norway and China suggests that if national pasts are obviously unique to the historical trajectories of each country, their museum renditions point at a set of intriguing analogies in structures and strategies of historical representation. In Norway, as in China, national narratives of the past present what Anthony Smith (2004: 227) defined as the three requisites of a past that is useful to nation-building processes: authenticity, inspiration, and the capacity for reinterpretation. Museums play a key role in this respect, as displays contribute to validate the authenticity of national mythologies, to amplify and renew their inspirational potential, and to constantly reinterpret, revise, re-frame and make anew the past to fulfil present needs.

Museum displays of the nation in Norway convey a range of national mythologies, including the romantic folklorized rural past, the idealized relation with Nature, Vikings' heritage, and the salvaging role of Christianity. This suggests that national narratives are not monolithic, but segmented and composite. In China too, museum displays of the nation unfold segmented national narratives – at times these even underpin different and incongruous perspectives on the nation. In both countries, despite a stress on historical continuity, the selective amnesia applied by museums to specific historical periods and events reveals historical hiatuses and discontinuities, whilst also casting light on the engineering of collective memory at work in displays. In the museums of both Norway and China, national narratives of the past find their counterpart in narratives of modernity. In both instances, modernity is formulated in terms of the (mostly technological) modernity of national structures and services.

In sum, coherence, continuity, longevity, civilisation and modernity emerge as the foundational endowments of the nation. In particular, these may be understood as structural components of national narratives in the museums of both Norway and China – significantly, both newly established nations in need to ground their present legitimacy in a long, uninterrupted and glorious past. In both Norway and China museums (and all the more national museums) appear to have developed a comparable *répertoire* of concepts, symbols, metaphors, images, narrative modes and visual strategies that are systematically used in representations of the nation. These elements are the building blocks of national master narratives, understood in the sense of Krijn Thijis (2008: 69ff) that is, as systems of abstract structures which are variously combined in narrative templates, which are then “filled” with specific historical narratives. Such structural analogies between Norway and China lend support to the hypothesis that an international canon is in place for the representation of the nation in museums. This does not, however, affect the contents of representations and narratives, which are context dependent and bound to specific national features (modes of nation-building, political ideology, current socio-economic context etc.). This discrepancy between structures and content reveals how an established set of modes of representation of the nation in museums is variously deployed in the framework of different political agendas. Whilst no country is so cohesive as to do without the unifying and legitimizing power of master narratives of the past, the perceived need to do so, and the strategies to implement it may vary significantly from a country to another. Analogies and divergences in these processes are valuable indicators of broader historical and global dynamics of social and political change. In particular, detailing and qualifying differences and analogies in museum representations of the nation in a cross-country perspective opens the ground of enquiry to new questions. What historical and contemporary political, social and cultural factors determine convergences and divergences in the master narratives developed by different nations? If an international canon for the museum representation of the nation exists, how can this be defined? What kind of museological and nationalistic considerations inform it? How did it come into being, through which historical processes? Answering these questions bears the potential to lead to more refined understandings of the roles that museums play in contemporary societies, the various ways in which similar roles are fulfilled, their historical roots and future implications.

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## Notes

- 1 Although the concept of folk lied at the core of Norwegian nationalism, the concept initially implied a reference to “the Norwegian people” as opposed to the State (Aronsson et al. 2008: 258).
- 2 Norwegian Museum of Cultural History website: <http://www.norskfolke.museum.no/en/target-groups/About-the-Museum/The-History-of-Norsk-Folkemuseum/> (last accessed November 2010).
- 3 The exhibition *We won the land* opened in 1994, when the city of Lillehammer hosted the Winter Olympic Games. Maihaugen Museum website: <http://www.maihaugen.no/en/>. A multimedia presentation of the main sections of the exhibition is available here: <http://www.randistoraas.no/eng/index.php?Side=1&counter=2> . I wish to thank Dr. Line Esborg, at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, for the insights she provided about this exhibition in occasion of a seminar presentation she gave at the IKOS in November 2009.
- 4 Military Museum, Beijing. Visited in May 2006.
- 5 Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party, Shanghai. Last visited in April 2006.
- 6 All quotations in this paragraph are from exhibition panels at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History. Last visited, January 2010.
- 7 In the winter 2009-10, the Museum of the City of Oslo hosted the temporary exhibition *In the spotlight. The theatre history of Oslo and its performing arts*. The exhibition explored the development of theatre performances in Norway as part of the nation-building process – from the creation of the Christiania Norwegian Theatre in 1854 devoted to the presentation of Norwegian plays in the new national language (the new Norwegian based on rural dialects), up to contemporary performances revisiting classics such as Ibsen in a cross-cultural, creative fresh perspectives.
- 8 See [http://www.uni-leipzig.de/zhsesf/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.uni-leipzig.de/zhsesf/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)



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## Whose Raoul Wallenberg is it? The Man and the Myth: Between Memory, History and Popularity

By Tanja Schult

### Abstract

Raoul Wallenberg is widely remembered for his humanitarian activity on behalf of the Hungarian Jews in Budapest at the end of World War II, and is known as the Swedish diplomat who disappeared into the Soviet Gulag in 1945. While he successfully combated Nazi racial extermination politics, he fell victim to Stalinist communism – yet another barbaric, totalitarian regime of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Given Wallenberg's biography, his mission and his unresolved fate it is no wonder that Wallenberg became a figure of mythic dimensions. It is the mixture of heroics and victimhood, as well as the seemingly endless potential of possible adaptations that secures this historic figure and his mythic after-narratives its longevity. While it is without doubt the man behind the myth who deserves credit – first the man's realness gives the myth credibility – it is the myth that secures the man's popularity. The man and his myth depend on each other.

In this article, I will give an overview of how Wallenberg was perceived and described by survivors, in popular scholarly literature, how he has been researched by historians, and how he has been presented in different media. It will become apparent that the narrators have sought to satisfy different needs, e.g. psychological, political, and commercial ones. The narrators' intention and attitude towards the historic person and the myth which surrounds him is of primary importance. I will show how different approaches to, and uses of, the myth exist side by side and nourish one another. And yet they can all simultaneously claim existence in their own right. By providing examples from different times and places, I like to illustrate that the popular images of Wallenberg are far less one-sided, stereotypical and homogeneous than they are often portrayed and hope to draw attention to the great potential that the Wallenberg narrative has today, as his 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary approaches in 2012.

**Keywords:** Raoul Wallenberg, hero, myth, Holocaust memory, popular memory culture, uses of history.

## Introduction

Raoul Wallenberg was born in 1912 into the prominent Wallenberg family, which for generations had played an important role in Sweden's economic, political and cultural life.<sup>1</sup> Wallenberg studied architecture at Ann Arbor, Michigan, but was expected to complete his education with formal training as a businessman. He spent months abroad in South Africa and Palestine after which, thanks to his godfather Jacob Wallenberg, he acquired a position at a food-trading enterprise in Stockholm. At the recommendation of his boss Kálmán Lauer, a native Hungarian Jew, Wallenberg was sent to Budapest by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1944. He was assigned to help the overworked members of the Swedish Legation in their rescue mission on behalf of the Hungarian Jews. The mission had been initiated by the American War Refugee Board, which also funded the undertaking together with JOINT. When Wallenberg came to Budapest, the majority of the Hungarian Jews had however already been deported; most of them were killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Wallenberg came just a few days after Regent Miklós Horthy had suspended the deportations.

Wallenberg and the other members of the Swedish Legation did their utmost to help the remaining Jews of Budapest. Following the Arrow Cross Coup on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1944 the situation became chaotic, and it became increasingly anarchic as the Red Army closed in on the city. Due to the combined rescue missions of the Red Cross, the Jewish resistance groups, and the neutral legations, and, finally, by mere virtue of the war nearing its end, around 120 000 Jews survived the Holocaust in Budapest. This was Europe's largest Jewish community after the war.

The trained architect and businessman Raoul Wallenberg was no career diplomat when he joined the humanitarian rescue mission. During his six months in Budapest, he distinguished himself from the other accredited diplomats through his unconventional methods, and in popular memory he became a symbol for the success of the combined rescue actions. In contrast to his colleagues, Wallenberg was arrested (for unknown reasons) and spent the rest of his life in Soviet captivity. What exactly happened to Wallenberg after his imprisonment remains unknown until this day. Naturally, his tragic and unresolved fate had significant impact on how posterity remembered this rescuer. It also determined how, from an early state, myth-making – including simplifications, exaggerations and conspiracy theories – became part of the Wallenberg story.

Moreover it is fascinating that not only Wallenberg's tragic fate but also his life, from its very beginning, provides many components that allow his story to be told in the form of a hero's tale (Cp. Schult 2009: 51–68). The basic narrative is ideal for retelling. Like many heroes, this protagonist's origin provides the stuff of mythic narratives. Before his son was even born, Raoul's father died from cancer



at the age of 23, leaving a young widowed mother behind. Wallenberg himself was born on a Sunday with a caul about his head, something which in popular belief is considered a sign of luck; an omen that the child is distinguished by greatness of mind and even equipped with supernatural powers.<sup>2</sup> It is this kind of dialectic narrative, promising the potential of the Wallenberg story to provide either a tragic story or a heroic one – or, indeed, both at once – which makes it so suitable for re-telling. In each case, the narrative is told as a hero's story with characteristic qualities; the call to adventure brings Wallenberg to Budapest, the challenge, especially after the Arrow Cross Coup, allows him to become a legend, and the tragic, unsettled fate secures an eternal life through narrative.

Consequently, it is no wonder that Wallenberg became a figure of such mythic dimensions. His biography, his mission and his unresolved fate, along with the fact that his own nation Sweden did not initially claim him exclusively for its own national cultural memory, makes this cosmopolite especially suitable for generalizations and commemorative uses in countries worldwide. The basic narrative is at once complex and flexible. Simplified, we can summarize its dual character by presenting Wallenberg as someone who successfully combated Nazi racial extermination politics, but fell victim to Stalinist communism – that other barbaric, totalitarian regime of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is this mixture of heroics and victimhood, as well as the seemingly endless potential of possible adaptations that secures this myth's longevity – not only during the Cold War or when the memory of the Holocaust receives attention, but because it is adaptable to different needs. This is something that this article aims to demonstrate.



Children playing on Kirsten Ortveds Wallenberg memorial (2001) in central Stockholm, Sweden © Tanja Schult.



## Man and Myth

When I refer to the Wallenberg epic I am following Aleida Assmann's analysis of how narratives become myths in collective memory. These myths' most important characteristic is their power to convince and affect. These myths are not bound to specific historic conditions, but are timeless narratives that are meant to be told and retold from one generation to the next. Ultimately, they are intended to offer orientation and moral guidance (Cp Assmann 2006: 40). Thus in my definition of myth in the context of Raoul Wallenberg and the posthumous images created of him, the concept is basically a symbolic narrative of a person who is considered extraordinary and whose narrative is seen to provide answers to timeless questions that are relevant in every human life.<sup>3</sup>

In my approach I follow Claude Lévi-Strauss, who underlined the importance of myths for satisfying needs which cannot find their answers in science or academic research (Lévi-Strauss 1978). Like Lévi-Strauss, I argue that we therefore must take myths seriously because they convey something important. Even myths established around a historic person are significant. Although they presumably most often are not reliable accounts of how in our case Raoul Wallenberg acted in Budapest, they certainly tell us something about the symbolic function his narrative has played in the period following his death. By thus taking the myths that have been established around a historic person seriously, it follows that my approach is anthropological in nature, attempting as it does to better understand humankind and its fascination with, and attraction to, mythic tales (Schlesier 1985: 10–11).

Without doubt, Raoul Wallenberg was a historic figure, not a hero of mythology. However, today the Wallenberg narrative consists of both historical facts as well as mythical dimensions – and these components are hard to separate. Given this, one way to tell the Wallenberg story is to present the secured facts of his life along with the more mythical narratives established around the man and his mission, and the images posterity has created of him. This is what we did in the exhibition *Raoul Wallenberg Bilder (Raoul Wallenberg Images)*, which I curated for The Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images (today operating under the National Library of Sweden) in the spring of 2008. The many existing images of Wallenberg, as mediated by newscasts, documentaries, interviews, books, theatre plays, musicals, operas, symphonies, film and fiction were presented side by side, and also interwoven with each other. Our attempt was characterized by the insight, or belief, that the Raoul Wallenberg story today consists of this kind of patchwork of historic facts and mythical narratives.

Without doubt, it is the man behind the myth who deserves credit. And it is that man's realness which gives the myth credibility. But it is the myth that secures the man's popularity. The man and his myth depend on each other. In this article, I will give an overview of how Wallenberg was perceived and described by survi-

vors, in popular scholarly literature, how he has been researched by historians, and how he has been presented in different media. It will become apparent that the narrators have sought to satisfy different needs, e.g. psychological, political, and commercial ones.<sup>4</sup> The narrators' attitude towards the historic person and the myth which surrounds him is of primary importance, along with the intention of the storyteller's narrative.<sup>5</sup> I will show how different approaches to, and uses of, the myth exist side by side and nourish one another. And yet they can all simultaneously claim existence in their own right. By providing examples from different times and places, I hope to draw attention to the great potential that the Raoul Wallenberg narrative has today, as his 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary approaches in 2012.

### **Raoul Wallenberg in the Memory of Survivors**

As early as 1945, Budapest survivors wanted to honour the man who they regarded as a symbol of their successful rescue. After the war, the survivors formulated three goals they wanted to achieve: the naming of a street in Budapest after Wallenberg, the erection of a monument, and the publishing of a book. Already in 1945, the first goal was achieved: the former Phönix utca (street), close to the former International ghetto where the Swedish safe-houses were located, was renamed Wallenberg utca (and in 1946 Raoul Wallenberg utca) (Schult 2009: 87).

In 1948, the book by Hungarian journalist and Holocaust scholar Jenő Lévai, *Raoul Wallenberg. His Remarkable Life, Heroic Battles and the Secret of his Mysterious Disappearance*, was published. Lévai himself was a Holocaust survivor. Lévai's book was one of the earliest publications on the subject, and it was based on official and private documents, testimonies and interviews. It was first published in Hungarian, a slightly shorter version following in Swedish the same year. The English translation however, verbatim to the Hungarian original, did not appear until 1989 (Lévai 1989). Significantly, this book – commissioned by the Hungarian survivors – had a lasting impact on how Wallenberg was commemorated, as well as on how history was written. Every historian who so far has researched Wallenberg – from Randolph L. Braham, commonly regarded as the leading expert on the Hungarian Holocaust, to Paul A. Levine in the most recently published Wallenberg study from 2010 – refer to Lévai (Schult 2009: 33).

The survivors managed also to see to it that a monument was created, but on the day of its planned inauguration it was retracted.<sup>6</sup> The approaching Cold War put a stop to this early attempt to honour Raoul Wallenberg in public.

In the three following decades Wallenberg was not entirely forgotten, but it was not until the late 1970s and especially the 1980s that the Wallenberg case received attention in several countries throughout the world. This was not least due to emerging witness reports from the late 1970s claiming that Wallenberg was still alive. In the wake of this, survivors became more and more active. Depending on in which country they lived, some survivors had long believed that Wallenberg

was dead, some thought he was safe at home, others who were living behind the iron curtain sensed it a delicate subject and did not inquire about it. Like most Holocaust survivors, especially those who fled their native home countries, these people had established a new life and somehow managed to displace their experiences of World War II. Since the 1980s however, predominately starting in the USA, the memory of Wallenberg has received uninterrupted attention until today. It was in the 1980s that the topic gained the attention of political leaders also in countries outside Sweden. Countless articles and books were written and the first permanent memorials were built.



Street sign in Trenton, New Jersey, USA © Tanja Schult.

Jewish survivors played an important role in this development, partially because it was their narratives upon which many journalists constructed their Wallenberg stories, partially also because they actively began mobilising political and public awareness. Given that many survivors had fled after the Hungarian uprising in 1956 to a series of different countries, their dispersal contributed to the Wallenberg case receiving attention in different parts of the world. This is also a reason why Wallenberg received hero-status in so many different national contexts.

Undoubtedly, hero-worship became a part of the Wallenberg story from a very early stage. During the weeks that followed the Arrow Cross Coup in October 1944, when the situation for the Jews worsened, Wallenberg was much more visible in the streets than other diplomats. These weeks became the “Heroic Period” which turned Wallenberg into “a legendary figure” (Yahil 1983: 36). This hero-status was perceived and expressed by survivors almost directly after the war, as

illustrated by the quote below. It is taken from the prologue to a gala concert in memory of Wallenberg which took place in Budapest as early as June 26, 1946. The text was written by Paul Forgács, the son of one of Wallenberg's closest co-rescuers (Schult 2009: 57).

He was a wandering knight, pure and unafraid, a reincarnation of the dragon-killer of old who unhesitatingly went to battle for superhuman ideals, the true, irreproachable idealist. ... He was a crusade but of a new kind, for he loved everyone. He feared danger but despised it and overcame his fear because he wanted to defeat danger. He was more of a hero than the heroes of old, more like a worthy successor to the apostles. He did good for the sake of good ... because he considered it his duty to fight for someone else's cause, fight for an idea, which he possibly wasn't aware of but only felt in his heart. An idea which perhaps was embodied in only one person in the whole city, Raoul Wallenberg (Forgács 1946).<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, the memories retold during the 1980s in various documentaries do not differ much from the early depictions of Wallenberg from the immediate post-war years.<sup>8</sup> Despite more than 30 years of near silence in between the first witness reports and those from the 1980s, we find the same ingredients in the narratives.

It is striking that the survivors clearly are aware that his or her story sounds rather unlikely, almost like a fairy-tale. He or she confirms that Wallenberg encountered high expectations – rumours of his success preceding his actual achievements – but in the most dangerous situation, Wallenberg always prevailed. The survivors' stories emphasise that there was very little to hold on to during the fall of 1944 and that Wallenberg – as a symbol and as the real man – became the straw they grasped for. This act of faith was not in vain. So while the survivors show an awareness of the unlikeliness of the story they are relating, and they indeed also display scepticism towards an over-dimensioned hero-story, they can nonetheless not resist believing in the power of this individual, given their own rescue and the survival of their loved ones. The reputation of Wallenberg's actions, which may actually have been less numerous or glorious than thought, only grew over time. And even Holocaust survivors who later have learned that a family member was killed despite having a *Schutzpass*, remain loyal to Wallenberg. The aura of trust that Raoul Wallenberg invoked among many survivors is remarkable (Schult 2009: 63).

Raoul Wallenberg is described by survivors and colleagues alike as someone who was inventive, charismatic, linguistically talented, intelligent and well-organized, and above all as someone with a great capacity for negotiation. Despite being described as a cultivated person, as shy or even weak, he seemed at the same time also to have had a natural authority; people obeyed him. Depending on their age and position, some experienced him as a messiah – as a divine character – while others as arrogant but nonetheless a revelation. However, they were all struck by the fact that he had come from secure Sweden to war-time Budapest to work for their survival.





Kristoffer Arvidsson, *Wallenberg at his desk in Budapest* (2010) © Kristoffer Arvidsson.

Being aware of the problems of oral history, I am not summarising the survivors' descriptions so as to provide the "real" or "true" portrait of Wallenberg. It is not the question here if these testimonies are exaggerated or untrustworthy, but rather it is important to realize that these narratives in themselves fulfilled particular needs. Moreover these narratives, which rested on survivors' memories, had an enormous impact on the way that the Wallenberg story was retold by journalists, in documentaries, films and exhibitions. To a great extent, these survivors' memories shaped the basic narrative.

Two further aspects are relevant here. First of all, those who survived as children are still alive and continue to be personally involved in the Wallenberg case. They predominately aspire to two goals: to learn the truth about Wallenberg's fate and, because of their age, to secure that his memory will be kept alive even after they have passed away. A second point that should be made about the survivors' narratives is that despite the fact that Wallenberg occupies an exclusive place in survivors' memory, the concern sometimes expressed that the symbolic status of Wallenberg overshadows the efforts of all the other rescuers active in Budapest 1944 is not particularly well-grounded. Those who have been active in keeping Wallenberg's memory alive have most often also contributed to the commemoration of other rescuers too, such as Wallenberg's co-helps, or other diplomats from neutral legations or the Vatican.<sup>9</sup> The interest that the myth of Wallenberg attracts may well call for studies of the man himself as well as of other rescuers, their antagonists, or the Holocaust more generally.



The impact that the survivors' memories had on how posterity remembers Wallenberg cannot be underestimated. It would therefore be possible to argue that Wallenberg belongs to the survivors, if not for any other reason than that he can only belong to us because of them – due to their experiences and thanks to their testimonies and memoirs. Wallenberg belongs to us because these people survived and conveyed what had happened to them. Although we may not know if it really was Wallenberg who in all the individual cases was responsible for a rescue, we must acknowledge that the survivors themselves consider Raoul Wallenberg to be directly or indirectly responsible for it. Their judgement gained importance and authority precisely because of their survival. The role they understood him to have played, whether fact or fiction, and the symbol he became, had an enormous impact on their lives and on the narratives they told, and so on the image attributed to Raoul Wallenberg in collective memory.

### **Raoul Wallenberg in Popular Literature**

The survivor's memories became important for the early authors who wrote about Wallenberg. Many of these, such as John Bierman, Harvey Rosenfeld and Elenore Lester, were British or American journalists. They based their books on the survivors' narratives. Historian Paul A. Levine is highly critical of these authors, whom he calls "hagiographers" throughout his book from 2010. However, as I argued in my dissertation (Schult 2009: 41ff), many have misunderstood these, who I prefer to call early "authors of popular scholarly literature". A fair assessment of these authors demands that we not only understand that they were no academic scholars, but also that they did not have any adequate historic studies to rely on. Not even Jenő Lévai's book was translated into English, and most of them were unable to read Hungarian or Swedish.

Equally important is the fact that due to the witness reports from the late 1970s, these authors seriously believed that Wallenberg might be alive, and understood their books as instruments for the raising of public and political awareness. They hoped this would contribute to Wallenberg's release, or at least to a clarification of his fate. It was not their intention to create a myth around Wallenberg or, as hagiographers do, write a biography over a saint. They wanted to present the facts to which they had access at the time. Given their goal – the rescue of a former rescuer – it is hardly surprising that they took the opportunity to tell Wallenberg's story in the style of a hero's tale. Even exaggerations and oversimplifications demand contextualization.

Anyone who carefully reads this popular literature discovers that, in contrast to hagiographers, these books do not deliberately include *only* good things about Wallenberg. Nevertheless, there indeed is a similarity between popular historical literature about Wallenberg and the early storytelling styles of the Middle Ages. Such stories were meant to celebrate outstanding people so that the community

could “participate in their magic”. These storytellers, not unlike early Wallenberg biographers such as Philipp or Lévai – or later works by his former colleagues and journalists such as Berg, Anger, Lester or Bierman – attempted to “give an authentic account of the story (at least as it was assumed to be)” while ensuring “that none of the power of the hero would be lost.” (Bloomfield 1975: 30) Their accounts could at times be critical or reveal the protagonist’s negative sides or failures, as it made their narratives more credible. In their accounts, Lévai, Anger, and Berg, like the medieval storytellers, displayed both “a remarkable honesty and a slightly ambiguous attitude towards the hero,” (Ibid.) which made their stories seem all the more authentic. However, that which was most important for these storytellers was to relate the magic of heroes, by mere virtue of them having lived. They were not heroes of legend, but had actually existed. It was important to the authors of these stories that the power of the hero was maintained, and that the audience was inspired by the example that the hero set (Schult 2009: 46ff).

The books by these early authors doubtlessly had significant impact on Wallenberg commemorations. Each new book was reviewed and discussed at length (not only in Swedish newspapers)<sup>10</sup> and in turn they often functioned as starting points for other forms of commemoration. For instance, it was Frederick E. Werbell’s and Thurston B. Clarke’s *Lost hero: The Mystery of Raoul Wallenberg* (written in 1982) that the popular American TV-series *Wallenberg – A Hero’s Story* from 1985 was based on. And it was the portrait of Wallenberg on the cover of John Bierman’s *Righteous Gentile*, on display in a bookstore in New York in 1983, that moved sculptor Lotte Staviskey so much that she researched Wallenberg extensively in libraries and bookstores before executing a bust in admiration of the man. The bust itself became a “transmitter” of the Wallenberg story. Nane Annan, together with her husband Kofi Annan, saw it at an exhibition in 1984. It was consequently presented to Nane Annan as a gift; a gift which she, in her turn, passed on to her mother Nina Lagergren – Raoul Wallenberg’s sister – thereby spreading the news of Wallenberg’s popularity in the US (and predominately in New York). Perhaps more importantly, since 1987 the bust is on public display in the New York Public Library, which has a collection of copies of Wallenberg-related documents. Since 1987, a copy of the original mold is also presented to the winner of the *The Raoul Wallenberg Hero For Our Time Award* and *The Raoul Wallenberg Civic Courage Award* given by *The Raoul Wallenberg Committee of the United States of America* (Schult 2009: 311).<sup>11</sup> These two examples illustrate how influential these popular scholarly books were for Wallenberg commemorations and the collective memory to which they contributed.



Charlotte Gyllenhammar's Wallenberg Memorial (2007) in Gothenburg, Sweden © Tanja Schult.

## **Raoul Wallenberg in Historiography**

In contrast to the heroes of mythology, Raoul Wallenberg was a historic figure, who turned out to be a real-life hero (Cp Levine 2004). Wallenberg was not the saint of a legend from a magical time long ago, but lived and acted in a time that still affects our own. Raoul Wallenberg's realness is a most essential component to this hero story. In the emergence of Wallenberg's story, the classic concept of the hero becomes valid again simply because this man really existed. Today Wallenberg serves as an example for moral guidance in contemporary pluralistic societies in several ways and acts as a means to gauge social responsibility and good leadership (Schult 2009: 47).

Historians may not know exactly how many people Wallenberg saved in Hungary; they may question, on factual grounds, his being credited with the rescue of 100 000 Jews in Budapest. Based on what we know today however, there is no doubt that Wallenberg took the decision to leave his secure homeland to go to Budapest during World War II, or that he there contributed to saving lives and was captured by the Soviets. His fate too, it is agreed, remains unknown.

At the time of writing it seems rather unlikely that anyone in the future will reveal such information about Wallenberg which would imply that his story has to be completely rewritten. And even if it is doubtful that academic studies, however valuable they may be, are suitable to replace the mythic narrative, more research is nevertheless needed and eagerly anticipated. Despite the dozens of books and thousands of articles already existing, there is indeed still much research left to do; on Wallenberg's upbringing, his years in the United States, his business years in Stockholm between 1938–44, and, of course, especially his time in Budapest and in Soviet captivity.

The approaching centenary in 2012 of Wallenberg's birthday seems to have accelerated developments in this field. Several researchers are currently working to shed new light on Wallenberg, his mission and his fate, approaching their subject from a series of different angles. This is promising. Given that there as yet exists no comprehensive scholarly biography of Wallenberg, it is welcomed that the two researchers Ingrid Carlberg and Bengt Jangfeldt are presently working on this challenge. Two other scholars, Géllert Kovacs and Georg Sessler, are investigating Wallenberg's period in Budapest. Kovacs focuses mainly on Wallenberg's social network, thereby highlighting the role that other helpers played in the operation. Sessler investigates how the members of the Swedish Legation – together with the Red Cross and a number of individuals – could be so successful. He does so by embedding their actions in the distinctiveness of the Hungarian context as well as by exploring the role of Wallenberg's superior Kálmán Lauer in more detail. Susanne Berger, one of the consultants to the Swedish-Russian Working Group on the fate of Raoul Wallenberg, continues the research on Wallenberg's time in prison by studying Russian Archives (Berger 2010). Furthermore, she is



working on a book in which she explores the question why the Wallenberg case could not be solved during the last 65 years.

Given our in many ways incomplete knowledge of Wallenberg it would be exciting and important to learn more about the man behind the myth – even if such increased knowledge might dispel some of the magic. So again we have to ask the rhetorical question: whose Wallenberg is it, if not the historians'? Have they not only the right but also the obligation to research this historical figure and retell his story based on existing documents?

According to historian Paul A. Levine, it is in fact the “trained historian” who is most suitable to mediate the moral value of Wallenberg to society. In his eyes, it is the historian who “should write and interpret Wallenberg’s place in Holocaust history and memory, and in social memory more broadly.” (Levine 2010: 20) Be this as it may, given the fact that there during all these years there simply did not exist a scholarly historic study by a scholarly trained historian which focused on the context in which Wallenberg was active,<sup>12</sup> Levine’s statement seems somehow dispensable.

Indeed, the two most recent studies on Wallenberg’s time in Budapest, the above mentioned *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest. Myth, History and Holocaust* (2010) by Levine himself and Attila Lajos’ *Hjälten och offren. Raoul Wallenberg och judarna i Budapest (The Hero and the victims. Raoul Wallenberg and the Jews of Budapest)* (2004) do in fact not prove that the trained historian is the most suited for mediating Wallenberg to society. Rather, these works demonstrate the predominance of the myth even in the work of academic historians. Both authors wish to contextualize Wallenberg and to analyze his role in relation to the preconditions of Budapest of 1944–45. Both scholars locate and analyze relevant sources which are suited to provide a more detailed picture of the rescue mission during World War II; Lajos using documents found in Hungarian archives, and Levine documents from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. So for sure, they both have made important contributions to our knowledge of Wallenberg.

However, both studies have their difficulties, for different reasons (Cp reviews by Zander 2006; Wahlbäck 2007; Carlberg 2010; Schult 2010a and 2010b on which the following passages are based). For my line of argument, it is most important to understand that the myth’s predominance acted as a hindrance to these historians in their ambition to present persuasive studies based on factual arguments and written documents. When it comes to identifying the man behind the myth, and attempting to once and for all identify what Wallenberg actually did or did not do in Budapest, it seems that the hero-concept causes problems. The concept is quite helpful when studying the after-images created around Wallenberg, but apparently rather misleading when one wants to analyze what the historic Wallenberg did or could do in the specific historic context.

Lajos’ study is influenced by a Christian martyr-hero image which leads to a rather unfair devaluation of Wallenberg and which stands in contrast to the much



more beneficial narrative which in fact can be found implicitly in Lajos' narrative and in the facts presented in his footnotes. Apparently Wallenberg, the businessman from an upper-class family with unconventional methods and a love of winning and dining, is in Lajos' eyes not worthy of being regarded a hero. As becomes apparent, in his understanding a hero should rather resemble a Saint Francis of Assisi; a saint who gave up a life of luxury to serve God in austere poverty. It is possible to accuse Wallenberg of all kinds of things depending on one's own perception of what makes a hero, but it is difficult to come to a nuanced analysis of the historic person when one is not even aware of what kind of hero-understanding one's own analysis is based upon.

Levine too finds the prominent role that Wallenberg occupies in popular memory problematic. However, as a result of his eagerness to dispel the exaggerations and oversimplifications of the Wallenberg myth, he ends up in a self-contradictory line of argument – a tendency which is characteristic of his study as a whole. As a result Wallenberg's integrity is questioned, even if this is not Levine's intention; for paradoxically this happens in direct opposition to his stated intention not to minimize Wallenberg's deeds. This seems to be due to his own moral expectations on both the historian and the historic hero. Levine cannot free himself from the myths, the reason seemingly being that he is aware that also the hero of history needs mediation. Levine wants to retain Wallenberg as a hero, but according to him, Wallenberg is a misunderstood hero whose "acknowledged moral value" could have a much stronger effect on society if his deeds are contextualized and understood correctly. According to the latter, one is willing to concede Levine a point.

From a historian's perspective it must of course be legitimate, even perhaps a responsibility, to separate the historic person from the myth, and to come closer to the man behind it. For the historian it is a valid question where history ends and myth begins (following Lévi-Strauss: 38). However, over the last 65 years the Wallenberg myth has become established, and this has happened without – or maybe because – there was no academic historic study for it to relate to. The dilemma that a historian has to face today is the power of the myth, which as argued fulfils other needs than does the work of a historian. Whatever one thinks about the mythic narratives, they have today a given place in collective memory. What becomes anachronistic, especially in Levine's book, is when the historian who explicitly seeks to refute myth ends up presenting Wallenberg in quite a similar fashion to the popular literature which he simultaneously criticizes. Indeed, to the reader familiar with the Wallenberg literature, Levine's study rather confirms the established image of an extraordinary man who turned out to be a most suitable choice for the mission. So in a way, it is a mystery of its own why Levine distances himself from his own earlier articles (quoted at the beginning of this passage) where he presents Wallenberg as a "real-life hero", in particular from the catalogue of the Wallenberg exhibition that the Jewish museum in Stockholm

organized in 2004 (Levine 2004; cp also Schult 2004a and 2004b). His articles in the catalogue are not even listed in the bibliography of his own book from 2010.

History as an academic discipline should be characterized by its openness. (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 40). But the predominance of such a myth as Wallenberg's illustrates that it is not easy for any academic to approach the subject with a completely open mind. On top of that, the myth is also dangerous; seductive in the sense that anybody who succeeds in revealing what really happened to Raoul Wallenberg, or who could dispel crucial elements of the myth, will certainly gain attention worldwide.

Although unlikely, it is still possible that future research may show that the established image of the historic Raoul Wallenberg has to be revised. So far however, we can state that despite all the skepticism towards the hero concept, and despite its misuse in an indeed very unheroic 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>13</sup> it may be equally possible to regard Raoul Wallenberg as an opportunity to *retain* the hero concept; a concept which apparently is still much wanted and needed in popular memory. As Lévi-Strauss formulated it, there is a "gap which exists in our mind to some extent between mythology and history" but, he continues, this gap "can probably be breached by studying histories which are conceived as not at all separated from but as a continuation of mythology" (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 43). If we realize that even the most critical historian ultimately holds on to Raoul Wallenberg as an ideal, not because of what he became in popular memory, but because of what he did in the historic circumstances in which he acted, we may understand that Wallenberg can act as a link between historians and a broader public, and show the way for a better understanding of mythical narratives based on historic men and women. Raoul Wallenberg is indeed one of the historical persons from a time in history that still reverberates in our day, in whom the classical hero concept once again becomes valid. Raoul Wallenberg offers an opportunity to hold on to the particularly misused category of the hero – even in democratic societies in a globalized age (Cp Schult 2007/2010).

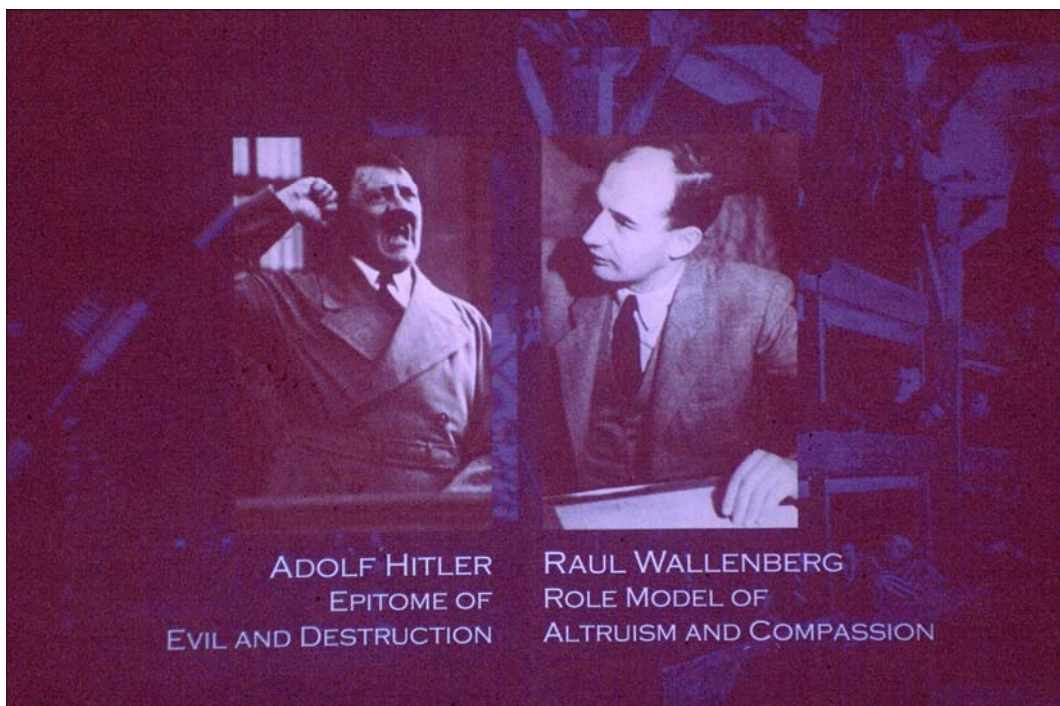
## **Raoul Wallenberg Remix**

Historians, survivors and authors of popular literature have contributed to the repository from which journalists, artists, curators, filmmakers, composers and play writers draw when they construct their narratives. By doing so they contribute to the commemoration of Wallenberg. Sometimes they add new layers or facets to the Wallenberg epic, but first and foremost they nourish and keep the Wallenberg story alive.

As the following examples demonstrate, popular images of Wallenberg are far less one-sided, stereotypical and homogeneous than they are often portrayed. In fact, if they were not, the myth would hardly have the resilience to survive. Part of the success of a mythic tale is that it offers many possible variations, thus being

adaptable to questions relevant in society at a given time and place and to the requirements of the media in which the story is being retold. The various adaptations of the basic narrative depend first and foremost on the interpreter's agenda.

The following examples would each deserve in-depth analyses, not least due to their media-specificity. However, this cannot be carried out here. The examples are foremost chosen to provide an idea of the diversity of the existing Wallenberg images and to illustrate some of the many possible interpretations and recent uses of the narrative. Although it is perhaps self-evident, it is still worth emphasising that artists, curators etc are driven by entirely different agendas than academics or documentary filmmakers. Even if they too at times conduct a great deal of research before they begin their work, they of course are not bound to academic scrutiny but have their artistic freedom. Rather, they are bound to their media and their public. So while they in many ways might be less confined to historic facts, they do have to reduce the story to what they regard as most essential. This is a challenge in and of itself.



Cover of the 2002 brochure of Michigan's Holocaust Memorial Center.  
(Raoul's name is however misspelled)

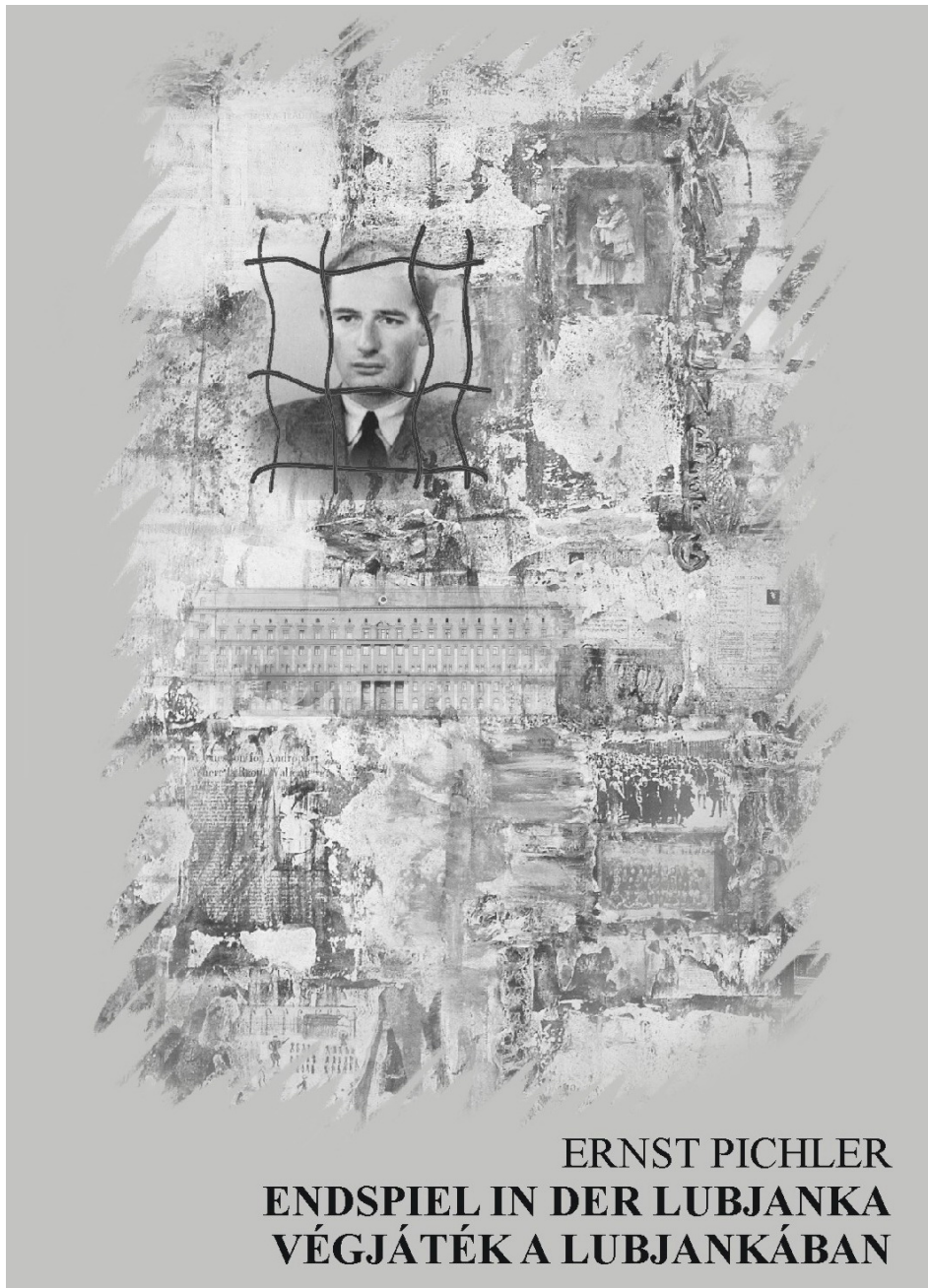
Raoul Wallenberg has fascinated a growing public for more than 65 years. Today, he has indeed become a "role model of altruism and compassion", as is stated on the cover of the 2002 brochure of Michigan's Holocaust Memorial Center. The cover shows an image of Wallenberg along with one of Adolf Hitler, the "epitome of evil and destruction". This example clearly demonstrates the status Wallenberg has been attributed with during the last six decades in popular imagination: he provides an example by being represented as the antagonist of evil itself. Wallen-

berg's role as the representative of good is directly based on the perception that the Holocaust was a benchmark in history. The Holocaust is considered to be the ultimate crime committed by human beings, something that by the 1990s became a matter of consensus in most Western societies (Schult 2009: 73ff). Given the importance that Holocaust remembrance has today, it is no wonder that Wallenberg receives such attention.

However, even if the remembrance of the Holocaust in future were to be regarded less relevant – which at the time of writing seems rather unlikely – the Wallenberg story would nonetheless continue to be retold, albeit with a different focus. It is clear that the myth of this famous prisoner of the Cold War has already lived on after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Although the man himself did not survive Soviet communism, his unresolved fate assured that his myth would. So while the Wallenberg case for decades was synonymous with the fate of millions of victims of the Stalinist era, and served as a symbol for the Cold War, this changed to some extent after 1989.

“Wallenberg” today functions foremost as the archetype of the innocent political prisoner whose symbolic value remains salient. This becomes apparent in the play *Endgame in the Lubjanka* (*Endspiel in der Lubjanka*) from 2008, written by Austrian Ernst Pichler.<sup>14</sup> The play will be performed in 2011/12 in the German-speaking theatre in Szekszárd, in a Swabian-populated part of Hungary. It is projected to subsequently be performed in Sweden. Pichler takes up several aspects of the Wallenberg story that during the years have received much attention; the Wallenberg family's double role during the war (doing business both with Nazi-Germany and the Allies), its indifference towards Raoul Wallenberg, and particularly the Swedish government's reluctant handling of the Wallenberg case (something which Wallenberg's family, above all his mother and stepfather, were the repeated victims of). The playwright regards it his duty to remind us of all the unanswered questions that the Wallenberg case still raises, well aware that the answers would come too late for Wallenberg himself. The play's central theme is that no enigma is so cryptic that time won't reveal its resolution. But with its lack of answers, Wallenberg's disappearance reminds us above all of the millions of people who share a similar fate. Still anchored in the context of the Soviet state prison system, the play has a more general message too. In Wallenberg the unknown political prisoner received a face and a prominent name. His fate represents the many unknown innocent political prisoners, whether of Soviet tyranny or of other dictatorships, whose names we do not even know.





Katalin Forgács' cover to Ernst Pichler's Wallenbergdrama from 2008 © Kolor Optika.

Consequently, Wallenberg's symbolic value is used to attract public attention to cases that display similarities to his. This has been so in the case of Dawit Isaak. Isaak is a Swedish-Eritrean journalist who has been kept without trial in isolation in an Eritrean prison since September 2001. Researcher Susanne Berger and journalist Arne Ruth, both of whom have been much engaged in the Wallenberg case over the years, have drawn parallels between the two prisoners in an article in 2009 (Berger & Ruth 2009). Isaak's case has attracted considerable attention in the Swedish media, which has urged the government and the Swedish Ministry for



Foreign Affairs to be more active on Isaak's behalf. At least, it has been argued, the government should go public with what it actually has been doing for Isaak. Berger and Ruth underlined the similarities between the cases of Wallenberg and Isaak, especially with regard to the (in)action of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. They revealed a discrepancy between programmatic words on the one hand, and an insufficient course of action on the other. The parallel between the two cases demonstrates that once again Swedish "quiet diplomacy" was very ineffective. The life of an individual, it seems, is not worth much despite all the assertions about the universality of the human rights (Cp. Berger & Borgoloni 2007). Most often cases regarding an individual citizen are first of all a matter of state sovereignty, only in exceptional cases do they become the subject of international trials. Thus even if the media – supposedly democracy's "fourth estate" – dedicates substantial attention to them, the chances of placing an individual case on the international agenda are slim. Prior to Berger and Ruth, historian Mattias Hessérus had already pointed to the similarities between the two cases (Hessérus 2009). Also his article is a tragic reminder that the Wallenberg case seems to repeat itself in the case of Dawit Isaak. Hessérus' focus lay on the media strategy and the relation between state power and the media. He concluded that the example of Raoul Wallenberg paradoxically shows both the growing influence of the media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as the media's limitations. While the media's potential source of power is words, these remain ineffective if the people responsible for political action are passive, or refuse to communicate their own actions. While the media has not given up on Dawit Isaak and honours him regularly with many prizes – latest the *Golden Pen of Freedom Award* (DN 28/10 2010) – the wide public attention that the case has received does unfortunately neither seem to have benefited Isaak.<sup>15</sup>

Wallenberg's unresolved fate has doubtlessly had significance for his continued societal presence. It has led to the case appearing on the political agenda time and time again. Interest in what really happened to him is still strong, and even the slightest bit of new evidence makes the headlines. The Swedish magazine *Fokus* for instance announced a "breakthrough in the Wallenberg case" on its cover in April 2010 (Bergman 2010). The interview with researcher Susanne Berger reveals that a change in attitude of the Russian authorities had been signalled – for the first time they stated that Wallenberg was possibly alive after 1947. But while the journalists gave the case attention, Russian and Swedish official quarters once again remained silent, and a resolution to the case – which had been announced in innumerable articles over the decades – was still out of sight.

The fate of Wallenberg tends to be used politically, and a closer investigation of the motives of the politicians and organizations referring to it would make an interesting study of its own. While Wallenberg's fate seems to secure the myth's longevity, it is still not the most crucial ingredient in this hero narrative. Most characteristic for the commemoration of Wallenberg is the way in which he is

regarded an ideal for moral guidance. Thus it is not because he suffered an undeserved fate, but because he contributed to the survival of the persecuted, that he most often is referred to.

This common interpretation of Wallenberg as a role model, however, does not mean that there is only one interpretation as to which aspect of the Wallenberg story that is most suitable for the mediation of Wallenberg as an example. If we take the monument genre, it becomes apparent that existing memorials illustrate the many faces of Raoul Wallenberg in popular imagination: as a classical hero, as the man of action, as a fighter, as a giant in terms of physical or intellectual strength. Some stress Wallenberg's role as a Swedish diplomat, others depict Wallenberg as a victim, a prisoner, a hero without a grave, as a martyr. Several memorials focus on the legacy of Wallenberg's mission, thereby expressing universal values such as freedom or the principle of hope. But Wallenberg is also honoured for being an unconventional hero, a trouble maker. What the focus is on depends on the interpreter's choice and his or her interpretation of heroes; when it comes to monuments, this choice becomes all the more obvious as the genre by its very nature does not lend itself to expressing complex events (cp Schult 2009).

In contrast, the film medium allows decidedly more multifaceted portraits. At the same time, however, it too follows the imperatives of its own media specificity; film, for instance, has its own inherent dramaturgical logic. In the exhibition *Raoul Wallenberg Images* two cinematic versions of Wallenberg were showed in relation to each other: one provided by Richard Chamberlain in the American TV-series *Wallenberg – A Hero's Story* from 1985;<sup>16</sup> the other by Stellan Skarsgård in the Swedish-Hungarian co-production from 1990 (written and directed by Swedish filmmaker Kjell Grede) *God afton, herr Wallenberg. En passionshistoria från verkligheten* (the English title is simply: *Good evening, Mr. Wallenberg*). In the exhibition, similar scenes from the two films – depicting Wallenberg's selection for the mission; his first confrontation with the fate of the Jews; his handling of dangerous rescue actions – were chosen and shown one after the other. Thereby it became clear that despite the similarities in narrative, the directors' respective interpretations of Wallenberg differed markedly from one another.

Richard Chamberlain's Wallenberg in many ways resembles a classic Hollywood-hero: we are encountered with a man of action, a handsome womanizer; he is charming, elegant, and self-confident. He enjoys the good life as well as a life of adventure and danger. This Wallenberg confronts Eichmann face to face and threatens him with punishment after the war. He believes in his mission, and above all in justice. Although he might miss the carefree times in Stockholm, it is in wartime Budapest that he finds his real purpose in life. When he meets the Russians, their rude behaviour immediately indicates that this encounter will not turn out well for Wallenberg. Despite all the dangers and the suffering, this one man consistently makes a difference – with one exception: although he succeeds in fighting the Nazis he ends up a victim of the arbitrary tyranny of the Soviets.

Grede's Wallenberg, played by Stellan Skarsgård, is in many ways Chamberlain's opposite – even though both display similar methods, using a combination of bluffs and authoritativeness; of acting out and threatening Nazis with the prospect of postwar reckoning. But in many ways Skarsgård's Wallenberg is more of an anti-hero. Unobtrusive to his outer appearance, he is sceptical about his own position in an upper-class life which seems meaningless to him. He feels emotionally devoted to the fate of the Jews, partly feeling connected to their tragic fate through his own painful personal experiences (such as his father's death), but above all because he has witnessed what the Germans have done to the Jews. During his time in Budapest, he becomes more and more overpowered by the cruelty and inhumanity of both the Nazis and their Hungarian counterpart, the Arrow Cross. Despite feeling powerless in the face of the killings and rapes, the sensitive, caring diplomat nevertheless overcomes his own passivity. But all too often his efforts are in vain. By the end, when he encounters the Russians, he ignores the warnings he is given about accompanying them; almost naive and seemingly in good faith, he agrees to go with them. There is nothing else in his life waiting for him. It seems as if, from the moment he had decided to leave Stockholm, his fate was sealed. Sharing the suffering of the Jews, rescuing at least some of them made his life meaningful. He must follow this given path, although the viewer realizes that this will lead him into captivity. This film is a melancholic reflection, a close portrait of a sensitive humanist who faced random violence and finally fell victim to tyranny's madness.

Both films were broadcasted several times, not only on Swedish television, and used as classroom tools in the context of teaching pupils about Wallenberg and the Holocaust. All the same, critical voices were heard in response to the two productions, some disliking one or both versions of the portrayed Wallenbergs. Here however, I will not go further in this analysis – the mere outlining of the two examples will suffice to illustrate the crucial importance of the narrator's interpretation, as well as the diversity of Wallenberg's faces in popular narratives.

If the Romanist Dietmar Rieger is right, every kind of reference to a historical figure, however insubstantial it may appear, secures the stability and vitality of existing myths (Rieger 2005: 192). Even intentions to minimize the magical dimension of the myth through rational explanations for the seemingly inexplicable – such as how the rescue actions took place or how, according to existing documents, they in fact could *not* happen – can serve to secure the myth's popularity and resilience. So while it might be the historian's goal to subject the myths surrounding the rescue actions of 1944–45 to critical analysis, he or she may in fact ultimately accomplish the opposite (Rieger 2005: 190).

This insight, that every kind of reference to the historical figure secures the myth's stability, may be a comforting one. Those who regard all academic research based on documents as a potential attack on their hero Wallenberg can relax; time is on their side, new research will follow as well as new adaptations in

other media. Those who feel that their Wallenberg is insulted by Swedish crooner Carola's *Raoul – hjälte för vårt land* (*Raoul – Hero for our country*), sung at the Livets ord (Word of Life) church in Uppsala in 1993, or cannot find comfort in the fact that troubadour and guitar-hero Ben Olander travels in Sweden and abroad with his Wallenberg-allegories,<sup>17</sup> might at least find some relief in the fact that – so far – Wallenberg's image does not show up on beer-coasters and cheeses as does his hero-colleague Jeanne D'Arc. Neither does there so far exist a Wallenberg Action Hero figure, and although there are some children's books, there is no comic or computer game which features him as protagonist. The closest one gets to this is the Swedish Institute's Raoul Wallenberg exhibition in the virtual online world Second Life, in the official virtual Swedish Embassy the Second House of Sweden.<sup>18</sup> It thus still seems inappropriate to describe Wallenberg as a "celebrity" (Levine 2010: 3), because celebrities are made up and made famous,<sup>19</sup> while heroes are self-made. However, tendencies to exploit the commercial potential of the Wallenberg narrative are nonetheless recognizable, e.g. when musicals of his story were performed on Broadway. Moreover, the free newspaper *Metro* has pointed to Wallenberg's fashion potential and praised him for his elegant and timeless dress style (Metro 2007; see Schult 2007/2010). So who knows what the future holds?

han aldrig har visat så här många mönster, färger eller färger tidigare i sin karriär. Och han markerar ändå - liksom många andra kollektioner som visades under

kommentarer som "har du gått ner lite i vikt?" eller "äh, jösses, jag hade ingen aning om att du var så lång" så är jag en nöjd man, säger Michael Kors.

Michael Kors. TRANG CHUONG/METRO NEW YORK

**Inspirerad av långbent reklam**

Virginia Sims var ett cigarettmärke för kvinnor som Philip Morris marknadsförde i slutet av 1960-talet med bilder av långbenta, moderna yrkesarbetande kvinnor ställda mot sekelskiftets kvinnor med lång kjol och sloganen "You've come a long way".

Vivienne Westwood visar en brittisk busig look.

Nästan hemsbyxor från Burberry. Och färgglad jacka.

Spara höstens skinnplagg till våren, tycker Dsquared.

Alexander McQueen gillar stora ryggsäckar.

Michael Kors är förutom framgångsrik designer även gästvärdare i TV 3-programmet "Project runway".

**Modepanelen: Så fixar du höststilen**

<p><b>1. Vilket är höstens viktigaste plagg?</b></p> <p>"En skön stickad kofta. Usch, om man ändå vore bättre på att sticka själv..."</p>	<p><b>2. Vilken look tänker du satsa på i höst?</b></p> <p>"Höga stövlar med rejäl klack, tåta strumpbyxor eller leggings, lädkort tröjkänning eller kjol med hög midja och en t-shirt. Över det kofta och en skön sjal. Midjekorta kavajen är också viktig."</p>	<p><b>3. Vad är du riktigt trött på?</b></p> <p>"Svindyra, mellanblå designerjeans. Urkl! Jeans har vi även i höst, men de står inte i fokus på samma sätt."</p>	<p><b>4. Vad tänker du spara till i vår?</b></p> <p>"Den cerberosa klänningen dök upp på vårvisningarna i Milano. I vår vill jag ha bara ben, i höst matchar jag med svarta täckande strumpbyxor och knähöga svarta Acnestövlar."</p>
<p>Ebba von Sydow, chefredaktör Veckorevyn.com.</p>	<p>Anders Bergmark, modechef Café.</p>	<p>Frida Fahrman, Metros modeexpert.</p>	<p>Anders inspireras av Raoul Wallenberg.</p>

"En lång stickad tröja eller kofta säger nog mest om den här hösten."

"En riktigt snygg höstklappa. Den får gärna vara stor och med en hög krag."

"Jag tänker satsa på stickat i alla dess former. Klänningar, kjolar, strumpbyxor och stora sjalar."

"Plagg som sitter obekvämt, gör ont eller klär. Man får inte glömma att kläder ska vara sköna att bära."

"När skinnjackan blivit för kall kommer jag att spara den till i vår."

Angelina Jolie i skinnjacka.

Raoul Wallenberg as a fashion icon in the newspaper *Metro*.



Furthermore, many unexploited themes remain – consider only that Barack Obama and Raoul Wallenberg were born on the same date (not in the same year of course), and what it would mean for the commemorations of Wallenberg if once again a President of the United States (after Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan), this time an African-American, proclaimed Wallenberg to be his role model. Obama aims to be reelected in 2012 – the year of Wallenberg’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It seems certain that the vast potential of the Raoul Wallenberg myth will guarantee its continued remix also in the future, appearing in different shapes in all kinds of media.

### **So Whose Raoul Wallenberg is it After All?**

This article has explored the interdependence between man and myth. Of course neither Raoul Wallenberg as historic person nor as myth can be owned – neither by historians nor by anyone else. Filmmakers, curators, sculptors, painters, and novelists, politicians, teachers and preachers, journalists and troubadours across cultural boundaries all present their image of Wallenberg. Some support the existing narrative, some contribute to the myth with new facets; others may question it. All the same, a mythic tale cannot be owned.

Long ago the Wallenberg story got a life of its own. And its independence from its historical roots will only become increasingly apparent when the last survivors and closest family members – who so far have acted as authorities on Wallenberg – have passed away. Raoul Wallenberg’s closest family may have their own image of their relative which they treasure in private, but it seems that they are aware that the image or myth of Raoul Wallenberg is not owned by any one person.

The storytellers have adjusted their narratives according to their own time and place, to their professions or to the media in question. And however different these narratives may at first appear, they all emanate from the same basic narrative. Interestingly, this basic narrative along, with the purposes for why the story is retold and researched, have much in common. The storytellers’ aim is nearly always that prosperity remembers the man considered extraordinary, a man believed to provide orientation and moral guidance in the present. How such commemoration of Wallenberg in fact should be expressed so as to be most effective, is of course a subject of dispute.

I would argue that the Wallenberg story even in the future will not be heavily exploited for entirely improper purposes, nor will it be forgotten. The core narrative depicts Raoul Wallenberg as an archetype of moral good. This will be illustrated with a final example, however odd it may seem at first. It is taken from Woody Allen’s motion picture *Deconstruction Harry* from 1997 (Cp Schult 2007/2010).

The confused protagonist Harry is obsessed with sex and suffers from writer’s block. He is in desperate need of moral guidance. But who can guide him when



even the President of the United States is a bad example? Here, Raoul Wallenberg, like a hero *ex machina*, comes to his salvation: “Look, take Raoul Wallenberg. Did he want to bang every cocktail waitress in Europe? Probably not!” These are the words of Allen’s cynical alter-ego Harry in the 17<sup>th</sup> minute of the movie. For Harry, Wallenberg embodies morality and selflessness. While everybody else is no good, this man does not let him down. Despite Harry’s cynicism and confusion, it becomes clear that Wallenberg acts as a kind of role model for Harry. It is due to Wallenberg’s popularity in the States that his example can function in this way even in the fast medium of a movie; within seconds, the audience associates Wallenberg with moral good, with values which seem to be lost but nevertheless longed for. Wallenberg represents the person who is genuinely engaged in the fate of others, uncorrupted by private escapades or hidden motives.

In all likelihood, Wallenberg’s life was brutally ended prematurely. But there will be no end to the Wallenberg story. There cannot be an end to a myth of such dimensions. This type of Raoul Wallenberg remix will continue and find new expressions. It is not only for Harry that Raoul Wallenberg is a hero to hold on to even after the inglorious 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Children playing on Kirsten Ortveds Wallenberg memorial (2001) in central Stockholm, Sweden  
© Tanja Schult.

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## Notes

- 1 The summary of Wallenberg's life as well as other parts of this article rest on my book *A Hero's Many Faces. Raoul Wallenberg in Contemporary Monuments* from 2009. These extracts are reproduced with the permission of Palgrave Macmillan. Furthermore I would like to thank the *Birgit and Gad Rausing Foundation* for the fellowship which enabled me to write this article.
- 2 See the letter by Raoul's maternal grandmother, Sophie Wising, from 9 August 1912 to his paternal grandmother Annie Wallenberg, in Maj von Dardel, *Raoul* (Stockholm, 1984: 30). The book contains correspondence predominately concerning Wallenberg's childhood. For Wallenberg's childhood see also the unpublished folder *Raoul Wallenberg – en karaktär, en livsinriktning* compiled in 2002 by Louise Schlyter, formerly Curator of Culture at the Cultural Activities and Recreation Department at the City of Lidingö.
- 3 There are, however, many possible uses. For the history of the term "myth" and its changing meanings (see Müller 2002: 309–346).
- 4 Of course there are many more uses and genres not taken up in this article.
- 5 Compare my disputation lecture at Humboldt University Berlin "Heldenbilder am Ende eines unheroischen Jahrhunderts. Über die kulturgeschichtliche Wirkung Raoul Wallenbergs.", October 2007 (Schult 2007/2010)
- 6 For the brief history of the first Wallenberg monument, see Schult 2009: 88ff.
- 7 The translation of the Hungarian text into German and English can be found at the Raoul Wallenberg-föreningens arkiv (F 4:3) in Riksarkivet, Stockholm.
- 8 This passage as well as the next passages are based on the survivors' and colleagues' testimonies which we presented in the exhibition *Raoul Wallenberg Images*. They were taken from the documentaries by Küng, Klabunde, Bierman, and SVT's *Ramp*, if no other reference is given.
- 9 See e.g. the homepage of the IRWF ([www.raoulwallenberg.net](http://www.raoulwallenberg.net); last entered 27 October 2010). Furthermore there exist several Raoul Wallenberg Prizes which in their turn draw attention to important accomplishments by others.
- 10 In the press cuttings' archive of the Sigtuna Foundation one can find more than 1000 articles written on Raoul Wallenberg between 1945 and the late 1990s, predominately from Swedish newspapers. Although that even this extensive collection does not hold all the articles ever published in Swedish newspapers, it can nonetheless give an idea of the media's and the public's interest. I want to thank the Harald and Louise Ekman Foundation for the fellowship which made it possible for me to study the Wallenberg articles at the Sigtuna Foundation in October 2010.
- 11 See the committee's homepage [www.raoulwallenberg.org/awards.htm](http://www.raoulwallenberg.org/awards.htm) (last entered 27 October 2010).
- 12 Except for maybe Mária Ember's Wallenberg book, *Wallenberg Budapest* (Budapest: Városháza) which was however published in Hungarian; those who could read German could at least read an article of Ember in András Masát, Márton Méhes och Wolfgang Rackebbrandt

- (2002). But even Ember was not an employed academic, but an educated historian, working in a publishing house and as a journalist. I thank Georg Sessler and Gábor Forgács for information according to Ember's professional background.
- 13 In my book I elaborate these issues in detail, cp Schult 2009: 41–50.
  - 14 The play was published in 2008 by the Hungarian publishing house Kolor Optika. The publisher's (Katalin Forgács) husband, Gábor Forgács, was working at the Swedish Legation in autumn 1944 and also his father Vilmós had worked together with Wallenberg.
  - 15 Every day, all major Swedish newspapers have a notice with Dawit's portrait and the number of days he is imprisoned. See also the homepage [www.freedawit.com](http://www.freedawit.com) (last entered 27 October 2010) For the most recent attempt of the media to draw attention to the case see the article editorial "Vi ger oss inte", *Dagens Nyheter* 1/10 2010.
  - 16 Directed by Lamont Johnson, manuscript by Gerald Green (who also wrote the manuscript for the much recognized series *Holocaust*). As mentioned above, the film was based on the book *Lost hero: The Mystery of Raoul Wallenberg* written by Frederick E. Werbell och Thurston B. Clarke from 1982.
  - 17 Ben Olander's songs can be listen to on the singer's homepage [www.ben-olander.com/](http://www.ben-olander.com/)
  - 18 For *Raoul Wallenberg's Office in Second Life* see <http://www.osaarchivum.org/secondlife/>  
See also the short clip on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2ipTTZfg2w> (both sites were last entered 27 October 2010).
  - 19 Cp. Boorstin 1985: 48.

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