

The *texture* of heritage: a reading of the 750th anniversary of Stockholm¹

Abstract

This paper employs Henri Lefebvre's term *texture* as a means of analysing a series of events which took place in June 2002 to mark the 750th anniversary of Sweden's capital city. The resulting case study demonstrates that heritage is the present-day use of the past and that selection and interpretation shift according to contemporary demands. The latter prompts a continuing series of 'particular actions' (Lefebvre) which require explaining and elucidating to new audiences in fresh contexts. This provides heritage with its impetus whilst also accounting not only for its range and reach, but also for its richness as a source of study.

Key words: Anniversary, Commemoration, Heritage, Lefebvre, Stockholm, Sweden

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¹ This article stems from a period of research at Stockholm University funded by the Swedish Institute. Earlier versions were given at two conferences: the fourth *Crossroads in Cultural Studies* (Tampere University, June-July 2002) and *Tourism and Photography* (Sheffield Hallam University, July 2003). Finally, I wish to acknowledge the incisive comments of two anonymous reviewers of this text: the final version of the paper attempts to respond to their criticisms whilst retaining many of the original ideas. Any 'misreadings' of the anniversary remain my own.

#8, 1952, 19 × 19 cm, Gelatin silver print (published in Henrik Nygren, Carl-Johan Malmberg and Hans Henrik Brummer, *Gunnar Smolianskys fotografier från Slussen i Stockholm 1952*, Stockholm, Kultur, 2002). © Gunnar Smoliansky.

Figure 8 As part of the anniversary nine photographers were asked to respond to the question: ‘what is a Stockholmer?’ Susanne Walström took as her subject-matter newborn babies, less than one hour old. Amongst these most recent additions to the city was Lova Andreason, seen here. Source: Sissi Nilsson et al., *Stockholm too Close*, Kulturhuset Stockholm, Text & Rubrik, 2002, #04. © Susanne Walström.

Introducing the *texture* of heritage

From 1-8 June 2002 the capital city of Sweden marked its 750th anniversary. This paper seeks to explain why this celebration took place and how it was commemorated. Events of this nature provide a useful tool for analysing the ‘texture of heritage’.² Through them we are able to identify those aspects of the past which have contemporary resonance. Given that this paper deals with the commemoration of a city, I wish to adopt and adapt an idea of Henri Lefebvre’s pertaining to the urban environment. It concerns his use of the word ‘*texture*’. He avers that it is ‘made up of a usually rather large space covered by networks or webs; monuments constitute the strong points, nexuses or anchors of such webs.’ Lefebvre goes on to stress that monumental works are ‘not *read*’ as a text is read but rather they are ‘*acted*’:

A monumental work, like a musical one, does not have a “signified” (or “signifieds”); rather, it has a *horizon of meaning*: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore, by means of – and for the sake of – a particular action.³

In this paper the ‘particular action’ was the 750th anniversary of Stockholm. The *texture* of the city centre provided the means of celebrating this event. The *horizon of meaning* of this ‘monumental work’ was scanned for phenomena which might support this commemoration. For the duration of the act these aspects were moved to the apex of sense and significance. An intense programme of happenings was scheduled amidst the nexuses of the city – its streets and squares, monuments and memorials – as the event was ‘acted’.

Such ‘actions’ provide a good means of interpreting and understanding a given situation. Observations made by those in the field of dance corroborate the performative aspect of interpretation by indicating that objects – including ourselves – ‘both change and are changed by the space around’ and that a ‘sense of space is only

² This term was prompted by the phrase ‘texture of memory’ as described in James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993.

³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford, Blackwell, [1974] 1997, p. 222.

partially visible – we experience it through movement, touch and sound’.⁴ Elsewhere it has been convincingly argued that ‘[a]ny discussion of the iconography of ceremonial spaces [the epitome of a strong point, nexus or anchor of a *texture*] must pay attention to the complex of meanings surrounding their representation and use.’⁵ A study of an anniversary such as that which occurred in Stockholm during June 2002 would seem an appropriate and illuminating means of analysing not just the capital of Sweden, but of also providing insights into the *texture* of heritage in a far broader sense.

A further basis for this has been derived from previous work concerning the urban landscape, especially the widespread notion of the ‘city-as-stage’.⁶ Urban spaces are palpably places of drama and spectacle: they are ‘theatres of state’.⁷ Additional support for this contention can usefully be sought from Denis Cosgrove’s analysis of Renaissance Venice in that it provides a particularly clear example of how the iconography of the built environment can supply symbols and metaphors for a city. Ritual and ceremony were used to exploit the symbolism of this urban landscape in order to ‘legitimate the institutions of the state.’ Central to this was the Piazza San Marco: ‘a regulated space... of discourse, an open-air theatre for the celebration of republican virtues and the location of the city’s most solemn rituals.’⁸ Later in the same study Cosgrove equates Andrea Palladio’s sixteenth-century designs for Venetian palaces to ‘harmonic scales’. Citing Rudolf Wittkower, he comments that the ‘frozen music’ of this architectural language, whilst intelligible to the privileged, nevertheless ‘spoke a cruder language of exclusion from power and authority in the city’ to those less fortunate.⁹ These comments on the work of Palladio attune with Lefebvre’s idea that monumental works should be read like a score. They also suggest that the same landscape can be interpreted in different ways by both contemporaries and followers alike.

Architectural monuments, commemorative memorials and historical artefacts constitute the material elements of the heritage: its *texture*.¹⁰ But, as Lefebvre indicates, these need to be articulated. It is this intangible, impermanent ‘network or web’ that will be addressed in this paper. An appreciation of just how heritage has been used and perceived at specific times and for ‘particular actions’ enables one to gauge how interpretations and usages of the past fluctuate across a *horizon of meaning*. It furthermore demonstrates the fluid nature of heritage: it constitutes an ongoing reconfiguration of the past as dictated by the needs of the present. This sense

⁴ Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay, *Body Space Image: Notes towards improvisation and performance*, London, Dance Books Ltd, 1993, ‘Working with space’, p. 82.

⁵ Felix Driver and David Gilbert (eds.), *Imperial Cities*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 8.

⁶ See, for example, Mark Harrison, ‘Symbolism, “ritualism” and the location of crowds in early nineteenth-century English towns’, pp. 194-213 in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds.) *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁷ For a further analysis of this concept see Stuart Burch, *On Stage at the Theatre of State: The Monuments and Memorials in Parliament Square, London*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Nottingham Trent University, 2002.

⁸ Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, London and Sydney, Croom Helm 1984, pp. 111 and 115.

⁹ Cosgrove, 1984, p. 133.

¹⁰ See Stuart Burch, ‘Sweden’s memory: museums, monuments and memorials’, *Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum Stockholm*, 2002 (9) 93-102.

of reconstruction and reinterpretation can refer to the ‘monumental works’ of a city, but it can equally be applied to more discreet objects: from historical documents to the commemorative souvenirs produced in response to a ‘particular action’.

The past in the present

‘The past as we know it is partly a product of the present;
we continually reshape memory, rewrite history, refashion relics’.¹¹

A classic example of such artefact adaptation is a letter (or charter) written on 1 July 1252 (see Figure 1). The document indicates that the author, one Birger Jarl Magnusson (c.1200-66), resided on the island of Stadsholmen, site of the present-day Gamla Stan (Old Town). It is the first recorded mention of Stockholm, even if the text itself says nothing about the settlement and despite the fact that recent archaeological discoveries suggest that the city’s origins precede this date.¹² It is instead a conferral of patronage for a nunnery in the province of Södermanland, exempting it from Crown taxes.¹³ Nevertheless, this artefact – reshaped and refashioned – marks the genesis of an entire city and provides a date that can be commemorated. Thus in the summer of 2002 the Swedish capital found itself able to celebrate 750 years of supposed existence. It is chance and contingency that has imbued a solitary document with such entirely unintended momentousness. A newspaper article of June 2002 was therefore correct when it cheerfully asserted that the festivities currently taking place was thanks to nuns!¹⁴

The urge to commemorate is one of the clearest instances of the use of the past by the present. Indeed, the current profusion of heritage may be accounted for by the fact that this is the ‘era of commemoration’, leading even to diagnoses of ‘commemorative bulimia’.¹⁵ Thus in 2003 the Russian city of St. Petersburg followed Stockholm’s lead by spectacularly marking three centuries of being. During the same year all manner of paltry and pivotal anniversaries (depending on your point of view) were observed: from seventy-five years of Mickey Mouse to Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech of August 1963. In Sweden the appetite for such ‘particular actions’ remained unabated when a welter of books, exhibitions and courses were arranged to coincide with the hypothesised birth some seven hundred years ago of Birgitta Birgersdotter (c.1303-73), not only Sweden’s sole canonised saint but also the patron saint of Europe (*patrona Europae*).¹⁶

¹¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 26.

¹² Lin Annerbäck (ed.) *Birger Jarl and his Times*, Stockholm, Museum of Medieval Stockholm, 2002, pp. 4-6.

¹³ There are in fact two extant documents dated in Stockholm in 1252 signed (or rather ‘sealed’) by Birger Jarl and deposited in the Swedish National Archives: the oldest one highlighted during the Stockholm jubilee (DS 390) and a second, slightly later artefact (DS 391), which was directed to the inhabitants of Attundaland in Uppland and concerned their tithe to the church in Uppsala. My thanks go to Dr Henrik Klackenbergh, Keeper of Medieval Records at the *Riksarkivet* for this information.

¹⁴ Dan Nilsson, ‘750-årsjubileet är nunnornas förtjänst’, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 3 June 2002, p. 11.

¹⁵ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: the construction of the French past. Vol. III: Symbols*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 609.

¹⁶ Lin Annerbäck (ed.) *Birgitta Birgersdotter: the woman behind the saint*, Stockholm, Museum of Medieval Stockholm, 2003, p. 3.

Events such as these are invariably suffused with nostalgia. A yearning to going back in time is driven by the knowledge that we are under no obligation to remain in the past.¹⁷ Furthermore, the manifold uncertainties and insecurities of the present contrast sharply with the ‘safely mapped’ past, the outcome of which we are already privy to courtesy of our temporal vantage point.¹⁸ It comes as no surprise to learn that, although the Stockholm jubilee was avowedly about the past, its real focus was the present and, indeed, the future. For, as the slogan of the festival stated, the first 750 years represented ‘a good beginning’ (*en bra början*).

Stockholm as theatre of memory

Substantive moves to celebrate 750 years of the Swedish capital came in March 2000 when the city council assembled an all-party jubilee committee. A budget of 48 million kronor (approximately €5m) was agreed and a general secretary appointed.¹⁹ Five key concepts were identified as being intrinsic to the occasion: happiness, education, participation, curiosity and pride.²⁰ All aspects of the city’s heritage were to be combined in an attempt to produce a positive assessment of both its present-day condition and its future prospects. The festival sought to be inclusive. The official publicity for the week-long fête indicated that it was ‘primarily aimed at the Stockholmers themselves, both as performers and spectators’, although an additional target group was obviously visitors, whether from Sweden or abroad.

These aspirations bear a striking similarity to events that occurred in Switzerland some fifty years earlier. By the year 1951 the city of Zurich had been a part of the Swiss Confederation for six centuries. The two-day festival celebrating this landmark was commented on by the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion (1888-1968) in a text entitled, ‘The humanization of urban life’. He recorded that:

The streets of the medieval city centre were closed for two days to all traffic, and benches were spread over the tracks of the street cars. It poured with rain, and yet one couldn’t chase the people away from the streets. Everywhere there was music and throughout the whole night people danced in the streets under umbrellas, and *medieval nooks and squares were used as open air theatres*. The festival was a *reunion of people* from the whole canton of Zurich. Those who came from the different parts of the canton gathered spontaneously together and performed their own plays. We had been very much afraid that the medieval core of Zurich had been altogether destroyed. Suddenly we

¹⁷ John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, photography and the tourist’s imagination*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 239.

¹⁸ Lowenthal, 1985, p. 25.

¹⁹ This was Berit Svedberg. In January 2001 she was also designated head of Stockholm City Museum. For practical information and an overview see the evaluative report produced after the festival: Berit Svedberg (et al), *Stockholm 750 år – en bra början*, Stockholm, Edita Västra Aros, 2002.

²⁰ This and the following quotation are derived from the official website (no longer available): <http://www.stockholm.se/750>.

discovered that *something still remains* and that – *given the opportunity* – people will dance and put on plays in these open spaces [my italics].²¹

This has been quoted at length because it identifies a number of key themes of especial relevance to the present study. Firstly, such events are posited as ‘humanizing’ the urban environment: for a brief moment people can take precedence over the seemingly incessant traffic. They come together in ‘union’ and fill the spaces of the city with culture. The 600th anniversary provided ‘the opportunity’ (Lefebvre’s ‘particular action’) for this celebration and, in so doing, revealed that ‘something still remained’ of Zurich’s ‘medieval core’ – i.e. its *texture*. The happening was both planned *and* spontaneous. Indeed, the ‘spontaneity of the public’ delighted Giedion and led him to conclude that: ‘To be actor and spectator in one person is what is wanted!’ The organisers of the later jubilee in Sweden evidently shared such hopes and desires.

A focal point for the many activities was the broad thoroughfare of Kungsträdgården in central Stockholm, which was filled with podiums and marquees throughout the week. From these it was but a short distance to the waterfront where one could take in a broad vista of the city including such key buildings as the Royal Palace and City Hall. Every evening these formed the backdrop to performances of music and drama accompanied by dazzling pyrotechnic displays. This spectacle was also visible from the small islands that constitute the historic centre of the city, the foremost being Gamla Stan where the famous charter of 1252 was penned. These became, to recall Raphael Samuel, quite literally, ‘theatres of memory’.²² A welter of stages were erected in the many squares and open spaces for performances of all kinds; the streets and waterways were filled with tour guides exploring the landscape of the city; cars, boats and planes from different eras populated the land, sea and air; museums mounted exhibitions scrutinising its historical development from the mid-thirteenth century until today.

Each ‘theatre of memory’ was accorded its own epoch courtesy of a series of markets suggestive of various eras dating from the Middle Ages to the 1920s. This gave people ample opportunity to dress up in period costume and give a new zest to shopping. One such occurred on the ancient island of Helgeandsholmen where, outside the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, there was a suitably themed series of stalls. Inside the museum was a temporary exhibition exploring ‘Birger Jarl and his time’. On display and securely exhibited as though it were a sacred relic was *the* charter of 1252, on loan from the Swedish National Archives. Also shown was the maquette for a statue of Birger Jarl by the sculptor Bengt Erland Fogelberg (1786-1854). The full size version, cast in bronze and positioned on a lofty granite pedestal, was erected on the island of Riddarholmen in 1854 (see Figure 2). The subject is depicted as a bearded knight, in a national romantic vein – a noteworthy demonstration of how nineteenth century Sweden conceived its past.²³ In 1863 the square in which it stands was renamed *Birger Jarls torg*. Despite this double

²¹ This and the following quotations are taken from ‘The humanization of urban life’ (dated 1951-2), which appeared in various publications including Sigfried Giedion, *Architecture you and me: The diary of a development*, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 129-130.

²² Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory (Volume I): Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, London and New York, Verso, 1994.

²³ Bengt Järbe, *Stockholms statyer*, Stockholm, Byggförlaget, 1997, p. 23.

inscription this space and indeed the island as a whole is today a strangely ‘dead’ place: no one lives there and the ancient church (burial spot of Birger Jarl’s son King Magnus Ladulås) no longer has a regular ecclesiastical function.²⁴

This island is most definitely a ‘realm of memory’. Pierre Nora has defined such *lieux de mémoire* as ‘any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element in the memorial heritage of any community’.²⁵ Yet, although a host of exceptional buildings and spaces redolent with historical associations remain, Riddarholmen island is normally deserted. Conversely, during the first week of June 2002, *Birger Jarls torg* was filled with drama and music. A medieval market saw the coming and going of fantastically attired participants mingling around the foot of the statue (see Figure 3). This suggests that the *texture* of heritage will remain largely dormant, until and unless a ‘particular action’ triggers its potential meanings. For, as we have seen, the ‘monumental works’ of Stockholm’s *texture* formed a culturally mapped space used to articulate 750 years of heritage.²⁶

The programme of events and accompanying imagery constituted the official perspective of the city. Such authorial reading serves not only to shape the heritage but also to bolster what has elsewhere been termed the ‘dominant visual conception’ of a place.²⁷ The recent anniversary events in Stockholm laid bare the authorized vision of the Swedish capital with especial clarity. It revealed the intersections made between a complex ‘network’ of tangible spaces and conceptual ideas from which the historical and present-day city of Stockholm was ascribed an ‘objectified form’.²⁸ Of the many key buildings used in the Stockholm jubilee, *Stadshuset* (City Hall) was the most important. One explanation for this is because it gives ‘objective form’ to both Stockholm and the nation.

Objectified history: Stockholm’s City Hall

Commemorative events encourage us to focus on the symbols of a city or nation that furnish it with a recognisable identity. Its silhouettes and shapes are invoked as the signature of a place. Stockholm’s City Hall possesses just such iconic status. *Stadshuset* is indubitably a Lefebvrian ‘strong point’ in the *texture* of Sweden and its capital. Indeed, its enduring significance is such that it was given its own anniversary in 2003 – eighty years after its inauguration. Every December it hosts a sumptuous banquet in honour of the newly decorated Nobel Prize winners. This majestic brick building with its waterfront setting became the obvious focal point for the 750-year festival and it was there that the opening ceremony took place on 1 June.

²⁴ Åke Lundqvist, ‘Den siste riddarholmaren’, *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm 750 år supplement), 28 May 2002, p. 20.

²⁵ Pierre Nora, ‘Preface to the English Language Edition’, pp. xv-xxiv in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past. Vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. xvii.

²⁶ For a comment on ‘mapped space’ see Celia Lury, ‘The objects of travel’, in Chris Rojek and John Urry (eds.) *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 75.

²⁷ Carol Crawshaw and John Urry, ‘Tourism and the photographic eye’ in Rojek and Urry, 1997, pp. 189 and 193.

²⁸ Crawshaw and Urry, 1997, p. 178.

Designed by the architect Ragnar Östberg (1866-1945) Stadshuset has been described as a building of contradictions.²⁹ The austerity of the First World War years led many to castigate this opulent building as ‘both unnecessary and provocative’.³⁰ However, these voices of dissent were swiftly forgotten by the time it was finally completed in 1923. Moreover, although its long period of construction (1903-23) witnessed conflicts and changes of taste, the building itself betrays none of this. With its harmonious proportions and dramatic setting it is an aesthetically exceptional structure. It rapidly took on the symbolic mantle of the Swedish capital and, by extension, the nation. This overlap is symbolised by the emblem of state surmounting its lofty tower.³¹ This cipher – three crowns – is the symbol of Sweden. It was the name of the ancient castle *Tre Kronor* at Stockholm, which burnt down in 1697. The central tower of this long-lost fortress can be seen in the earliest image of Stockholm: the *Parhelion* painting hanging in Storkyrkan cathedral.³² A version of this image was carved in stone and positioned at the entrance to the city hall. The presence of this petrified image is but one of many historicizing details which articulate the entire building. These emblematic embellishments include a commemorative pantheon of Swedish worthies ranging from the ‘mediaeval freedom-fighter’³³ Engelbrekt Englebrektsson (assassinated 1436) to Carl Larsson (1853-1919), the illustrious artist whose visions of domestic felicity lives on in every IKEA-decorated home.

The conjunction of city and nation is reinforced within the building itself. The Golden Hall is decorated with an elaborate series of glittering mosaics depicting scenes from the history of Sweden and its capital.³⁴ Dominating the central wall is a representation of the Mälars Queen. She is the eponymous protectress of Lake Mälaren, the waters of which flows through Stockholm and out into the Baltic sea. The mythical monarch holds in her lap a collection of Stockholm’s principal buildings, the most prominent being, of course, Stadshuset.

In 1920, with Stadshuset at last nearing completion, the supposed grave of Birger Jarl was discovered at Varnhem church in western Sweden. He was, as you may recall, a writer of charters during the mid-thirteenth century. Far more meaningful was the fact that he was named Birger Jarl (*Birgerus Dux*), signifying that he wielded considerable power given that the Jarl (‘earl’) was the person closest to the king.³⁵ Birger Magnusson, who came from a prominent family of magnates, gained this title in 1248 in connection with King Erik Eriksson. A co-signatory of the aforementioned charter

²⁹ This corresponded to the violent mood swings of the architect, about which see Mats Wickman, *The Stockholm City Hall* (trans. Paul Britten-Austin), Stockholm, Sellin, 1993, p. 47. See also Christina Engfors and Sture Balgård, *Att visa arkitektur: Arkitekturmuseet årsbok 1998*, Borås, Centraltryckeriet, 1998, p. 77.

³⁰ Information taken from a panel about City Hall (2001) in Arkitekturmuseet, Skeppsholmenkyrkan; noted 8 June 2002.

³¹ Wickman, 1993, p. 61. Ragnar Östberg, *The Stockholm Town Hall*, Stockholm, P.A. Norstedt, 1929, pp. 33-4.

³² The picture (also known as *Vädersolstavlan*) is a seventeenth century copy of a sixteenth century original that describes the unusual meteorological effects seen in the skies above Stockholm from seven until nine on the morning of 20 April 1535. See Björn Hallerdt, (ed.) ‘Vädersolstavlan i Storkyrkan’, in *Under Stockholms Himmel*, Stockholm, Sankt Eriks årsbok, 1999, pp. 7-86.

³³ Wickman, 1993, p. 95.

³⁴ The mosaics date from 1920-23 and were executed by Einar Forseth. See Åke Stavenow, *Einar Forseth*, Malmö, Allhems Förlag, 1956.

³⁵ Details on Birger Jarl are derived from Annerbäck, 2002.

of 1252 was Birger Jarl's eldest son Valdemar who, two years earlier at the age of only twelve, had been designated sovereign. His father, a shrewd and ruthlessly ambitious politician, became the king's guardian and therefore the *de facto* ruler of the kingdom. Nearly seven centuries later Ragnar Östberg wished to move the disinterred remains of this luminary to his Stadshuset. In spite of his urging this rather morbid proposal for a legislative building remained unrealised, so the architect incorporated a *cenotaph* as a means of imbuing the edifice with the aura of Birger Jarl (see Figure 4).

Stadshuset's most striking architectural feature is its elegant tower. The copper lanternine at its zenith is surmounted by three crowns. The base supports the empty tomb of the city's founding-father. Birger Jarl is therefore evoked as the originator of Stockholm, the city which in turn sustains the nation. That Stadshuset is the embodiment – the *objectification* – of the Swedish capital was confirmed by the logo for the 750th anniversary (see Figure 5). It features a schematic illustration of the tower's peak as seen in profile. The walls are formed by the words 'Stockholm 750 years'. The three crowns above the tower are multiplied by stars shooting out from the lanternine to suggest the sense of spectacle and celebration that accompanied the anniversary festivities.

'Heri-tat', or the refashioning of relics

One of the many activities arranged for the Stockholm jubilee was the opportunity to make a model of Stadshuset. Thanks to sponsorship from a construction firm people were able to fill specially prepared moulds with red concrete and return later to collect their heavy memento. There must be many gardens in Stockholm that feature these unusual plant pots. The festival spawned a great variety of analogous artefacts. Each in its own way says something about the event. Some were light-hearted, others carried more weight. The latter category included substantial publications about the history and development of Stockholm over the previous seven centuries.³⁶

Birger Jarl, as one might expect, appeared in a number of guises throughout the celebration. His body was even disinterred once again, this time to test his DNA.³⁷ (Who knows what will happen on the 800th anniversary of Stockholm – perhaps he will be cloned?) The charter he signed in 1252 was encountered always and everywhere on stamps and postcards; in books, newspapers and magazines; and on the television and radio. Other objects similarly 'refashioned' (to recall the earlier Lowenthal quotation) included the famous *Parhelion* painting (see above). For the 750th anniversary a special commemorative stamp was issued using the same motif. Its surreal reworking by the artist Ernst Billgren became one of the event's logos and as such appeared on the designs for the official souvenir T-shirt. Similarly, both the *Tre Kronor* castle and the tower of Stadshuset featured on a special anniversary coin. Such merchandise bears all the hallmarks of the heritage industry.

³⁶ For example, Göran Dahlbäck, Thomas Hall and Lars Nilsson, *Staden På Vattnet - Stockholm 750 År* (2 vols.), Stockholm, Stockholmia förlag, 2002.

³⁷ Peter Sandberg, 'Birger jarl har lämnat sin grav', *Dagens Nyheter*, 24 May 2002, p. A5; Bengt Falkkloo, 'DNA kan visa om den begravde var Birger jarl', *Dagens Nyheter*, 25 May 2002, p. A6; Erik Sidenbladh, 'Birger jarls ben i rostfri låda', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 May 2002, p. 6; Erik Sidenbladh, 'Sannolikt Birger Jarl', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25 May 2002, p. 16.

The Stockholm-based company *DesignTorget* sold a range of authorised merchandise during the festival. These included ‘Birger’s purse’, a leather pouch with a ring closure of the sort that Birger Jarl almost certainly did not use. In the spring of 2002 the same firm had launched a public appeal for product ideas that might be marketed during the festival. Cecilia Eklund won the competition with *I know Stockholm*, a T-shirt that served as ‘an interactive holiday diary’.³⁸ It featured a map of the city centre highlighting such tourist attractions as the Royal Palace, the City Museum and Skansen. At each site the wearer could have their clothing stamped such that by the time they had visited all the venues they could claim to ‘know Stockholm’. Rather than just dismissed as ‘heri-tat’, such merchandise are important indicators of the symbols and ideas that are current at a particular moment in time. The *I know Stockholm* artefact was an especially eloquent example of the way Lefebvre suggests cultural landscapes are ‘acted’. It further demonstrates how the city and its monuments can be re-contextualised by making novel connections and constructing alternative narratives.

This holds true for all objects. Museums perennially reconfigure their collections to tell different stories. By ‘refashioning relics’ Stockholm City Museum’s exhibition *A Journey in Time: Stockholm’s 750th anniversary* succeeded in narrating a history of the city at fifty-year intervals. Indeed, the whole anniversary of Stockholm was contingent on one object: the charter of 1252. The archive of heritage was in evidence by another commodity sold during the jubilee: a series of twelve photographs selected from the holdings of the City Museum and published to complement the events of June 2002.³⁹ Ranging from 1897-1953 they show aspects of the city through time. One example features some very finely attired English tourists stepping ashore from their boat, *Sunbeam* in 1903 (just as their modern-day equivalents were doing some one hundred years later). Another image, this time from 1920, shows workmen fixing the three crowns into place on the top of Stadshuset.

A further photograph in this collection depicted one of Stockholm’s most ancient streets: Västerlånggatan in Gamla Stan. The buildings are bedecked with flags and symbols during the festivities that marked the city’s 700th anniversary. This, the forebear of the more recent jamboree, was slightly delayed by the Helsinki Olympics of 1952. During the summer of the following year a familiar itinerary of events took place in the city. A postcard produced for this earlier jubilee gives a good impression of its character (see Figure 6). The allegorical female figure is the already-discussed Mälar Queen. Before her are the tower of Stadshuset and other monuments of Stockholm. Her mantle is the ‘three crowns’ and in her hands she holds attributes of drama and music. The latter – a trumpet – features a pendant depicting the face of St Erik, patron saint of Stockholm. The feminine charms of the monarch serves as a reminder that one of the main festivities in 1953 was a beauty pageant that sought to identify the most attractive female resident of Stockholm, and crown her ‘Mälar Queen’. The absence of such a search in 2003 indicates that tastes and ideas, like heritage, are also subject to re-evaluation.

³⁸ Magnus Reithner, ‘Interaktiv t-tröja årets Stockholmsouvenir’, *Metro*, 21 February 2002, p. 8.

³⁹ Lars Westberg, *Fotografier från Stockholm: 12 bilder 1897-1953*, Stockholm, Stockholms stadsmuseum, 2002.

Just as with the other souvenirs mentioned above, this postcard forms an integral part of the *texture* of heritage. Mementoes such as this are bought by participant witnesses to a ‘particular action’. In the case of a postcard the significance accorded to such artefacts is especially poignant and enduring given that the surviving message adds another facet to the ‘horizon of meaning’. This particular card, for instance, was sent to a naval office in Gothenburg on 2 June 1953. The text reads: ‘A greeting from the 700-year city to decorate your wall’ (‘En hälsning från 700-års staden för att pryda Er vägg’). Its display in that contemporaneous context was but one, diminutive narration of the festival.⁴⁰ Its subsequent reappearance in this article re-enacts this whilst simultaneously imbuing it with *new* meaning. A postcard from 1953 connects with a charter from 1252. The latter provides the origin of Stockholm, the former evokes the spirit of the mid-twentieth century and both are viewed from the vantage point of the 750th anniversary.

Effacing history?

The overt populism and commercialisation of the so-called ‘heritage industry’ used to trouble some historical purists (*sic*). They claimed that the past, when seen through the lens of heritage, becomes an image with neither substance nor depth and where contentious issues are neutralised.⁴¹ This can be an accusation fairly levelled at the costumed antics of the Stockholm festival where all around were to be seen revellers in historical garb chatting nosily on mobile phones. In the main nostalgia prevailed: the city of the past was imagined as safe, clean, civilised and not really all that different from today. The reality was, however, somewhat different given that for at least one hundred years of its existence Stockholm was ‘a stagnating metropolis’. For the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries was a period of weak economic expansion and de-industrialisation compounded by ‘high mortality... a declining nuptiality and a rising bastardy rate. Stockholm was a town where death was never far away’.⁴²

Such tales of poverty and disease were only really apparent in the aforementioned exhibition *A Journey in Time* at the City Museum. From this it became clear that, for long periods, it was indeed a place of death and danger. There were outbreaks of the plague in 1350 and 1710 as well as cholera in 1834 and 1853. In the early 1600s it was but a ‘small and impoverished city’. The commencement of the eighteenth-century saw a wave of refugees as Sweden lost its mantle of Great Power. And, finally, ‘to be born in Stockholm early in the 19th century was to be born into poverty, unemployment, slums, drink, criminality and prostitution. Average life expectancy was about forty years. Infant mortality was high’.⁴³ Or, as David Lowenthal so neatly put it: ‘That the past really does literally stink is a lesson many time travellers would

⁴⁰ Cf. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin, 1972, pp. 20 and 30.

⁴¹ Robert Hewison, ‘Heritage: An Interpretation’, in David L. Uzzell, (ed.) *Heritage Interpretation. Volume I: The Natural and Built Environment*, London and New York, Belhaven Press, 1989, pp. 15-23.

⁴² Johan Söderberg, Ulf Jonsson and Christer Persson, *A stagnating metropolis: the economy and demography of Stockholm, 1750-1850*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 2-3.

⁴³ Lena Högberg et al., *En Tidsresa: Stockholm 750 år*, Stockholm, Stockholms stadsmuseum, 2002, p. 83.

soon learn'.⁴⁴ Perhaps, rather than the 'a good beginning' mantra of the festival, it might have been more accurate (but less catchy) to conclude: 'a surprisingly auspicious outcome'?

The City Museum exhibition demonstrated that alternative readings of the past *were* in evidence. This quite properly suggests that there has, and continues to be, innumerable 'Stockholms' experienced by the city's inhabitants through time. This was most eloquently articulated by two displays featuring work by the Swedish photographer, Gunnar Smoliansky. One was a series of twenty-four black-and-white small-scale images taken when Smoliansky was just nineteen years of age.⁴⁵ This was in 1952. Thus their redisplay fifty years later was an example of an anniversary within an anniversary. Proffering a mute yet so very expressive witness to the past they take as their subject matter the semi-industrial harbour area of Slussen in the centre of Stockholm. Figures sit impassively at café tables; linger forlornly next to railway lines; wend their way through underpasses; stand pensively at harbour keys; or climb the steps that lead from one place called 'Stockholm' to another that is situated unattainably beyond the picture's edge (see Figure 7). This very different 'visual conception' of the city was from a distinctly unconventional perspective. So too was Smoliansky's concomitant exhibition 'The world is not what it was'.⁴⁶ Featuring photographs from the years 1977-1987 the nostalgia implied by the title had an uncommon piquancy. The images were close ups of decidedly rundown places and humdrum objects. These two displays can hence be interpreted as rejoinders to the official, sanctioned narrative of the jubilee. They thereby served as a vital reminder of all those alternative pasts, memories and interpretations that make up the 'invisible accumulation of dramas'⁴⁷ which have for the most part been forgotten, subsumed or even suppressed in the long biography of Stockholm.

The heritage archive and collective identity

The heritage is one means of establishing what Stuart Hall has termed a 'collective social memory'. Group identities are continually being constructed from the 'archive' of heritage. As such what a nation (or, for that matter, city) "'means"... is constructed *within*, not above or outside representation'.⁴⁸ Like Lefebvre's use of the word *texture*, heritage constitutes a 'shifting hierarchy' of meaning. The Stockholm festival of June 2002 should therefore be perceived as an important – perhaps essential – part of the identity-forming process. Such actions strive to bring together 'imagined communities' of not just the present but also the past.⁴⁹ An open, enquiring approach to the latter carries far-reaching consequences for a positive appreciation of the present. For the multiple histories of a city such as Stockholm represents a challenge

⁴⁴ Lowenthal, 1985, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Gunnar Smoliansky, 'Från Slussen i Stockholm 1952', Waldemarsudde, Stockholm (until 4 August 2002); see Henrik Nygren, Carl-Johan Malmberg and Hans Henrik Brummer, *Gunnar Smolianskys fotografier från Slussen i Stockholm 1952*, Stockholm, Kultur, 2002.

⁴⁶ 'Världen är inte vad den var. Fotografier 1977-1987', *The Life Gallery*, Stockholm (until 18 May 2002).

⁴⁷ Will Eisner, *The Building*, New York, DC Comics, 1987, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Stuart Hall, 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage'', Re-imagining the Post-nation', *Third Text*, 49, 1999-2000, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd revised edition, New York, Verso, 1991.

to the notion that it was at any stage a mono-cultural, socially homogenous place. This is complemented by the fact that contemporary Swedish society (especially suburban Stockholm) is indisputably multicultural. The jubilee of 2002 was an opportunity to embrace and celebrate this fact. In this it was at best only partially successful. Its focus (inevitably perhaps) was the old quarter of Stockholm.⁵⁰ This reinforced the sense that ‘Swedish culture is at the centre, and immigrant culture at the periphery.’⁵¹

This is not to say that the voices of ‘new Swedes’ were excluded entirely. A case in point was the work of nine photographers responding to the question: ‘what is a Stockholmer?’ *Stockholm too Close*, as the title suggests, was an intimate view of the city’s people. Held at the imposing *Kulturhuset* it was here that one was privy to the mixed, muddled, multicultural reality of the place. One example was Karolina Henke’s family portrait of ‘Nawzad, Layla, Kevok and Lolav’ in which the father of the group is depicted holding a framed photograph of a small, red wooden house. An accompanying quotation reveals that the family see it everyday from their train window and long to live in just such a place.⁵² One might read this as a desire on their part to move from the periphery of Swedish society to its centre.

The 750th anniversary of Stockholm thus posed some important questions about identity and belonging not only in terms of one city but also at a national level. For this ‘local’ event needs to be appreciated within a national context. Using a different example I have elsewhere shown the close interrelationship between regional acts of commemoration and national identity.⁵³ That this correlation is enhanced when it comes to events which occur in a capital city is suggested by the findings of the Stockholm-based Institute for Urban Studies:

The use and misuse of history in the city environment is always a strategy pointing more to the present and the future than to the city’s past. History is perhaps the strongest element and binding substance for creating a common idea and apprehension of identity. It has been widely known and used for that purpose in nation-building processes, which also implies that history has an important role for capital cities, which always stand in focus for the nation and in several ways are supposed to represent it.⁵⁴

Stockholm became a ‘focus for the nation’ during the jubilee. This was established through the precise timing of the week-long event.⁵⁵ It was in large part determined by

⁵⁰ The scope of the ceremony was also restricted by its budget, which equated to only one tenth of the resources allocated when Stockholm was the European City of Culture in 1998.

⁵¹ Ulf Hannertz, *Transcontinental Connections: Culture, people, places*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 154.

⁵² This image and the text were reproduced in the accompanying exhibition catalogue: Sissi Nilsson et al., *Stockholm too Close*, Kulturhuset Stockholm, Text & Rubrik, 2000, #01.

⁵³ Stuart Burch, ‘The Holbrook Bequest for commemorative plaques: tradition, narrative and “local patriotism” in Victorian Nottingham’, *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, Vol. 105, 2001, pp. 155-170.

⁵⁴ Håkan Forsell, ‘Comments – Capital Cities and Cultural Identity’, in Lars Nilsson (ed.), *Capital Cities: Images and realities in the historical development of European capital cities*, Stads- och Kommunhistoriska institutet [Studier i Stads- och Kommunhistoria, 22], Stockholm, 2000, p. 188.

⁵⁵ It was also timed to coincide with the Stockholm marathon. Furthermore, a general election scheduled for September meant that it could not be scheduled later in the summer.

the date of Sweden's National Day.⁵⁶ The traditional gathering place for celebrations on June 6 is Skansen, the world's first open-air museum.⁵⁷ However, in 2002 attention shifted to Stockholm Stadium (*Stadion*), built for the Olympic Games of 1912 and capable of holding 22,000 people.⁵⁸ The music and performances were led by the present King Carl XVI Gustaf who, amidst much flag waving, was keen to stress his *patriotism* in contrast to *nationalism*. That one or the other of these passions was swelling the hearts of all Swedes and not just Stockholmers was ensured by Sweden's participation in the football World Cup at that moment taking place in Japan and South Korea. Moreover, the *form* that the Stockholm jubilee took prompts a further parallel with expressions of national identity given that the two celebrations marking the 700th and 750th anniversaries of the Swedish capital coincided with the Coronation and Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in Great Britain. The official celebrations of the latter took place in the first four days of June 2002 and used a similar deployment of heritage as that seen in Sweden.⁵⁹

Concluding with 'a good beginning'

That events in Sweden were matched by those in Britain demonstrate the range and reach of the *texture* of heritage. Heritage is the *present-past*. This means that – despite the ravages of time, the degradations of neglect and the losses accrued through deliberate destruction – it persists as a plentiful, polyphonic resource. Heritage is enacted at the behest of today: each and every present launches 'particular actions' which will dictate the terms by which the *texture* of heritage will be inflected, interpreted and instigated. This means that any prognoses for the future derived from a given *texture* will also reveal features about that action. Indeed, heritage looks as much to the future as it does to the past. Heritage is the *present-future*. That the 750th anniversary of Stockholm was entitled 'A good beginning' is thereby both poignant and revelatory. This important aspect was encapsulated by Susanne Walström's series of photographs displayed in *Stockholm too Close*. As already mentioned, this exhibition addressed the question 'what is a Stockholmer?' Walström took as her subjects newborn babies, less than one hour old. Amongst these most recent additions to the city was Lova Andreason (see Figure 8). Having only experienced the place for a matter of minutes she thus features rather late in the 750 year history of Sweden's capital. The Stockholm of tomorrow – the heritage of the future – belongs to her. Where will she be in 2052? This image and the questions it prompted emphasised the forward-looking nature of the Stockholm jubilee. It also reiterates that heritage is indeed preoccupied as much with shaping the future as it is with articulating the past. Rather than the closed book of history, heritage is a complex amalgam of the cultural, political and social here-and-now. An appreciation of the 2002 anniversary shifts the

⁵⁶ Since 1916, 6 June has been chosen as the Swedish Flag Day. This day in 1523 saw Gustav Vasa elected King of Sweden; whilst in 1809 it also witnessed the signing of the Swedish constitution. Although it was not until 1983 that official recognition was given to this date it has since then steadily gained in significance. Gert Svensson and Peter Letmark, 'Nationaldagen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 6 June 2002, p. A7.

⁵⁷ Karin Blent et al (ed.) *Skansen* (trans. William Jewson), Uppsala, Ord & Form, 2002, p. 6

⁵⁸ Claes Caldenby, Jöran Lindvall and Wilfried Wang (ed.), *Sweden: 20th-Century Architecture*, Munich and New York, Prestel, 1998, p. 255.

⁵⁹ Events in Britain were reported by the Swedish media: see, for example, Kari Molin, 'Gatufest till drottningens ära', *Dagens Nyheter*, 4 June 2002, p. A11.

definition of heritage away from the ‘dead past’ to the ‘living present’.⁶⁰ It is consequently an active *texture*, in a constant condition of metamorphosis.

As such, our principal duty is to identify ‘particular actions’ and investigate *how* the heritage has been deployed. Such work, by revealing subtle or significant differences in the understanding and utilisation of a particular *texture*, will serve as a profitable device for measuring both continuity and change. This is especially important given that heritage happenings are themselves ephemeral. Events come and go. Exhibitions are mounted and disassembled, their objects dispersed. Nevertheless, these heritage phenomena *can* endure in some important forms: from official publications and guides, to media reports and individual narratives. Moreover, the buildings and spaces (Lefebvre’s ‘strong points, nexuses or anchors’) that bore witness to the tide of heritage often remain. In addition, the more discreet networks that draw together the *texture* of heritage also need to be taken into consideration: the plethora of souvenirs and other paraphernalia that characterise ‘particular actions’ are thus valuable carriers of meaning, as this paper has attempted to demonstrate.

It is to be hoped that this journal article is itself ‘a good beginning’ when it comes to analysing the 750th anniversary of Stockholm. This essay, as the title suggests, is but one reading of the events. As its commentator I have taken the ‘script’ of heritage and directed the action myself.⁶¹ The resulting text is intended to initiate dialogue, especially amongst those with a particular expertise in the *texture* of Swedish heritage.⁶² How else might this ‘particular action’ be perceived and presented? For instance, one of the many aspects entirely unaddressed by this paper concerns the economic dimensions of the *texture* of heritage. Moreover, even those issues that *have* been broached would surely benefit from more sustained analysis. To take but one example: could and should the ‘horizon of meanings’ in the *texture* of Stockholm’s heritage been widened? The portrayal of this past-present city was carefully delineated, filtered and, on the whole, sanitised. An event such as this was a form of entertainment, albeit with a ‘serious’ impetus. ‘Edutainment’ in other words (i.e. ‘an activity or product... intended to be educational as well as enjoyable’⁶³). If heritage is ‘informative entertainment’ does this explain why the less savoury aspects of the past are not so easily assimilated? Equally, were the more challenging characteristics of the *present* adequately tackled? If Stuart Hall is right when he says that identities are ‘constructed *within*’ heritage, what role did the anniversary have in mediating between centre and periphery; ‘indigenous’ and ‘immigrant’; Stockholm and Sweden? Notions of identity are fluid and permeable, therefore ‘particular actions’ in the *texture* of heritage ought to provide a fixed focus for calculating the limits of collective identity and distinguishing between official, ‘dominant’ conceptions and alternative, subordinate readings.

The 750th anniversary of Stockholm is over; the ‘particular action’ has been performed. Yet due to the ‘multiplicity of meanings’ in the *texture* of this heritage

⁶⁰ Both phrases appear in the intriguing novella ‘The Dead Past’ (1956), Isaac Asimov, *Earth Is Room Enough*, St Albans, Panther, 1973, p. 47.

⁶¹ Cf. Harrison, 1988, p. 210.

⁶² These might include, among others, Peter Aronsson, Bodil Pettersson, Lotten Gustafsson, Owe Ronström and Birgitta Svensson.

⁶³ Elizabeth Knowles with Julia Elliott (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words* (2nd ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 99.

there is ample scope for bringing alternative interpretations to the fore. In much the same manner, known and novel aspects of Stockholm's *texture* are destined to feature in a potentially infinite array of future actions. Through this ongoing cycle it is possible to identify which sites and objects, customs and habits, personalities and historical events retain currency or garner fresh attention in the present. This is a fitting confirmation that the *texture* of heritage is a dynamic, defining force, well worthy of scrutiny and speculation.

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