

Banal Nordism: Recomposing an old song of peace

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And they shoot all the soldiers to an old song of peace
 Normal folk sing along in a flood that does not cease
 Yet even a hundred thousand voices can be wrong¹

Make love *and* war

It's 9 o'clock on Sunday 6 March 2011 and I've just been rudely awoken by my clock radio. Bright shafts of Nordic sunlight are trying to trick me into believing that spring has finally reached northern Europe. That season certainly seems to be in full swing elsewhere in the world: the ongoing consequences of the 'Arab spring' is the lead story for Sweden's state broadcaster, P1.² I must have dozed off during reports of the continuing violence in Libya because I only half-heard what sounded like a far more heart-warming story: a Swedish-designed product being successfully exported to five unnamed countries. In my stupor I thought I heard the phrase 'svensk granit' and immediately associated this with *Granit* – a very swish interior design store providing 'smart solutions for storage in cardboard, plastic and wicker.'³

¹ 'Och de skjuter alla soldater till en gammal sång om fred / Ett helt hav normala människor sjunger med / Men även hundratusen röster kan ha fel', '18.29-4', 2 minutes 26 seconds, text and music by Joakim Berg, from the rock group Kent's album *Röd* (2009).

² Cf. 'Arabisk vår?', *Konflikt*, 22 January 2011, accessed 25 March 2011 at, <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=1300&artikel=4306449>.

³ 'About Granit', undated, accessed 25 March 2011 at, <http://www.granit.se/?id=1492>.

But a single vowel can make a big difference: this was *granat* rather than *granit*. And the design product in question was an 84 mm multi-purpose, man-portable, reusable recoilless rifle – more generically known as a bazooka. Based on a fifty-year old design, its manufacturer states proudly that this ‘combat proven’ weapon is ‘in use in more than 40 countries, on every continent.’⁴ Its success helped lift the company that produces it to number thirty-one in the list of the world’s top one hundred arms-producing companies for 2009.⁵ That company is Saab AB, the headquarters of which are in the heart of Stockholm. Hence *svensk granat* or ‘Swedish grenade’.

Why does the notion of a ‘Swedish grenade’ sound so, well, wrong? After all, Sweden is synonymous with cutting-edge design and technology. Yet the former is habitually associated with the types of things on sale at stores such as Granit or IKEA. And when it comes to technology, a brand like Saab conjures up images of the iconic Saab 900 produced by Saab Automobile throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The grenade launcher, however, is made by Saab AB, the self-styled ‘Security and Defence Company’. It is nevertheless an aesthetic object *and* a market-leader of its type: it is ‘the **best** there is’ (Fig.1).⁶ Yet, even if it accords with Sweden’s reputation for high-quality design and technological know-how, there are no examples on display in the art and design galleries of Sweden’s Nationalmuseum. Fortunately it

⁴ ‘Carl-Gustaf M3 weapon system’, undated, accessed 25 March 2011 at,

http://www.saabgroup.com/en/Land/Weapon-Systems/support-weapons/Carl_Gustaf_M3_weapon_system/In-use.

⁵ ‘The SIPRI Top 100 arms-producing companies, 2009’, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, undated, accessed 25 March 2011 at, <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/production/Top100>.

⁶ ‘The 84 mm Carl-Gustaf Multi-Purpose Weapon System’, SAAB AB, product sheet 8 p – Carl-Gustaf – Eng – v.1, April 2009, p. 2.

can be found among the artefacts of the National Swedish Museums of Military History, even if the model in question is from the late 1940s.⁷ Its inclusion in the nation's public collections is entirely fitting given that Saab AB's recoilless rifle is ultra-Swedish – right down to its name: the 84 mm Carl-Gustaf Multi-purpose weapon system.

The name 'Carl Gustaf' has attracted considerable attention in recent times, both in Sweden and abroad. But the potency in question has more to do with conquests of a sexual rather than a military nature. This was in relation to the past exploits of Carl XVI Gustaf, king of Sweden since 1973. He was born in 1946. So too was the rifle that shares his name. His 'romps in seedy nightclubs owned by shadowy underworld figures' were reported extensively in late 2010 due to the publication of a highly controversial biography.⁸ Following the book's release the king held a well-attended press conference. He chose to conduct it in a forest-setting directly after an elk hunt and still dressed in his hunting attire.⁹ His appearance in front of the press was as brief as it was disappointing. He had not read the book and took no questions. Even if he had, it is most unlikely that any of the journalists would have asked Carl Gustaf if a Carl-Gustaf was deployed during the hunt. Very little of the elk would have remained if he had. This is because the rifle has been designed

⁷ '8,4 cm granatgevär m/1948', accession no. AM.125476, accessed 25 March 2011 at,

<http://www.digitaltmuseum.se>.

⁸ Harriet Alexander and Marcus Oscarsson, 'Swedes in shock at King Carl Gustaf sex scandal', *Daily Telegraph*, 6 November 2010, accessed 25 March 2011 at,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/sweden/8114740/Swedes-in-shock-at-King-Carl-Gustaf-sex-scandal.html>.

⁹ Susanna Vidlund et al, 'Vi vänder blad och går vidare', *Aftonbladet*, 4 November 2010, accessed 25 March 2011 at, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article8069975.ab>.

to penetrate armoured vehicles – as exemplified by hole-punched metal plates possessed by Armémuseum, Sweden’s national army museum.¹⁰ Its effectiveness was recently testified by sergeant Alexander D. King of the United States Army. He recalled one particular occasion in Afghanistan when two marksmen loaded their Carl-Gustaf rifles with high-explosive anti-personnel ammunition, each containing several hundred steel pellets. Up to thirty enemy combatants were killed thanks to this Swedish designed, manufactured and exported ‘meat-grinder’.¹¹ In the first half of 2008 the United States government spent a reported \$48m on the Carl-Gustaf system including weapons and ammunition.¹²

Forests, elks, sex, design and technology – these all accord with general stereotypes about Sweden. The production and sale of lethal military equipment does not. Why is this so? The reason, as this chapter hopes to demonstrate, is because of *banal Nordism*: a series of commonplace suppositions, expectations and, by extension, dissociations about Sweden and its neighbours. It is this set of banalities and their consequences that will be explored in the following text.

¹⁰ ‘Genomskjuten plåt, 5,56 mm Carl Gustaf AP’, accession no. AM.038951, accessed 25 March 2011 at, <http://www.digitaltmuseum.se>.

¹¹ Christopher Holmbäck, ‘Svenska vapen är deras vardag’, *Fokus*, 29 October 2009, accessed 25 March 2011 at, <http://www.fokus.se/2009/10/svenska-vapen-ar-deras-vardag>.

¹² This is according to the *London Stock Exchange Aggregated Regulatory News Service* (ARNS) in a report dated 1 August 2008 entitled ‘BAE Systems plc Interim Results -6-’. BAE Systems had at the time a 20.5% shareholding in Saab AB. Accessed via <http://www.lexisnexis.com>.

Banal Nordism

Sweden and its northern European neighbours have been likened to a structure built of bricks.¹³ The bricks represent the nations. They are connected by a diffuse 'Nordic element', which functions as a sort of 'cohesive mortar'. Trying to identify the precise nature of this 'mortar' is, however, far from straightforward. This is because the formula of this binding agent varies over time and across disciplines. At one moment it is embodied in the figure of the 'Nordic peasant'.¹⁴ At another it is distilled on the canvas of a 'Nordic painting'.¹⁵ The 'Nordic element' can, in other words, be equated with all manner of things including 'suicide, free sex, angst, darkness, stillness, inwardness, the eradication of poverty, utopian social democracy, etc.'¹⁶

Nordic is a catch-all category. This means that one should be very wary of joining the misguided band of true believers intent on identifying some sort of Nordic Holy Grail. Instead, a far more fruitful endeavour would be to take up the train of thought prompted by Rogers Brubaker in his study of nationalism. In order to do so, all we need do is to replace the words *nation* and *nationalism* with *Norden* (a term meaning 'the North'):

We should not ask "what is *Norden*" but rather: how is *Nordenhood* as a political and cultural form institutionalised within and among states? How does *Norden* work as practical category, as classificatory scheme, as cognitive frame? What makes the use of that category by or against states more or less resonant or effective? What makes

¹³ The brick and mortar metaphor is derived from Øystein Sørensen & Bo Stråth (eds.), *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1997, pp. 15, 19 & 22-23.

¹⁴ Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, p. 1.

¹⁵ Stuart Burch, 'Norden, Reframed', *Culture Unbound*, Vol. 2, 2010, pp. 571ff, accessed 25 March 2011 at, <http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v2/a33>.

¹⁶ Lundström, Jan-Erik (1994) 'Family Reunion: Contemporary Nordic Photography', *Stranger Than Paradise: Contemporary Scandinavian Photography*, New York, The International Center of Photography, pp. 13-17 (p. 13).

the *Norden*-evoking, *Norden*-invoking efforts of political [plus cultural, financial and academic] entrepreneurs more or less likely to succeed?’¹⁷

As we shall see, adopting such an approach reveals that the ‘bricks’ of Northern Europe can be differently configured by diverse ‘political entrepreneurs’ in their various attempts to construct their vision of ‘the North’ (*Norden*).

It is important to note, however, that one thing that these ‘bricks’ do *not* build is an imperial parliament at the heart of a Nordic empire.¹⁸ This is because national concerns *always* take priority, even when a regional dimension is promoted.¹⁹ The concept of *Norden* provides a means for the nations of ‘the North’ to differentiate themselves from ‘Europe’.²⁰ It does *not* connote a pooling of sovereignty. The Kalmar Union might have unified the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden under a common monarch from 1397 until 1523, but all subsequent attempts to bind the region into a political union have failed.²¹ And even far more modest efforts at cooperation can be abortive – as demonstrated by the squabbles over how to share the Nordic Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.²² It is striking how real-world setbacks

¹⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 16.

¹⁸ Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, p. 15. It is telling that the palatial *Nordiska museet* (literally ‘the Nordic museum’) in Stockholm is fundamentally a Swedish (i.e. national) institution.

¹⁹ Thorsten Olesen emphasised the priority of national over Nordic concerns in his contribution to the conference to launch the book *The Nordic Countries: From War to Cold War, 1944-1951*. Lancaster House, London, 1 April 2011; cf. Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, pp. 15, 19 & 22-23.

²⁰ Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, pp. 22-23.

²¹ Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, p. 23; Björn Hettne, Sverker Sörlin & Uffe Østergård, *Den globala nationalismen: nationalstatens historia och framtid*, Stockholm, SNS, 1998, pp. 285-6.

²² Designed by Sverre Fehn in 1962, it is shared by Finland, Norway and Sweden (Denmark’s pavilion, meanwhile, is right next door). Responsibility for curating the show rotates among the three nations. However, from 2011, the three countries will take it in turns to display their own artists. See Julie Sjøwall Oftedal, ‘Misnøye i

such as these never seem to dampen enthusiasm for conjuring up Nordic castles in the air. Norden has been and remains a 'projection screen for fantasies'.²³ One of the latest indications of this syndrome is an utterly improbable call to establish a 'United Nordic Federation' within the next twenty years.²⁴ This will no doubt prove to be as unrealisable as earlier attempts to unite the region.²⁵ In reality, however, the motivation for such an initiative is threefold: to enliven debate; to attract attention to 'the North'; and to add more of that 'cohesive mortar' to the Nordic idea.

Normally Norden remains humming along unremarkably in the background like a muzak soundtrack to 'the North'. It is the antithesis of flag-waving 'hot' nationalism. As such it bears some similarity to Michael Billig's exploration of the banal, day-to-day manifestations of nationalism. For Billig, 'the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being constantly waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.'²⁶ That this captures perfectly the notion of Norden is clear from a crossword that appeared in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on Wednesday 23 March 2011 (Fig.2). Its first clue was accompanied by a photograph of flags fluttering in the breeze and a text that read: 'Today is Norden's day! It was founded in a cooperation agreement signed on 23

Venezia: – Vi vurderer egen norsk utstilling', 28 August 2010, accessed 15 September 2010 at,

<http://www.arkitektnytt.no/-vi-vurderer-egen-norsk-utstilling>; Jersti Nipen, 'Vil endre nordisk samarbeid om

Venezia-biennalen', *Aftenposten*, 31 August 2010, accessed 15 September 2010 at,

http://www.aftenposten.no/kul_und/article3790347.ece.

²³ Lundström, 1994, p. 13.

²⁴ Gunnar Wetterberg, *Förbundsstaten Norden*, TemaNord 582, Copenhagen, Nordic Council, 2010.

²⁵ Anon, 'Kalmarunion inte på nordisk tapet', *Dagens Nyheter*, undated, accessed 25 March 2011 at,

<http://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/kalmarunion-inte-pa-nordisk-tapet>.

²⁶ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, London, Sage, 1995, p. 7.

March 1962 in this city.'²⁷ An impromptu questionnaire sent to fellow authors of this Nordic book series would suggest that many people would have struggled to answer this question. Of those who responded, very few had even heard of Norden's day.²⁸ This is hardly surprising given that the *only* mention of it in *Dagens Nyheter* was the first clue of its daily crossword. Despite this lack of coverage the compiler of the quiz was clearly sufficiently confident to set it as one of the questions. That it was mentioned in this way is revealing. Norden is not 'news'. It is a banal, commonplace and unexceptional 'truth' that is unconsciously tolerated, largely ignored and only very occasionally questioned.

This is not to say that Norden is devoid of any real substance. Coincident with Norden's day 2011, the telecommunications company, Telenor ran a series of advertisements featuring a variety of Nordic flags beneath headings written in a range of Nordic languages. These announced that customers of 'Telenor Borderless' could call numbers in 'Sweden from the whole of Norden for the same price as at home'.²⁹ Telenor's customers could rest assured that, whether they were in Nuuk, Norrköping, Naantali, Narvik, Næstved, Neskaupstaður, Näfsby or Norðragøta, they could feel at home in 'the North'.

Messages such as these represent but one instance of the banal 'flagging' of Norden in everyday life. A further example is the Nordic Ecolabel that can be found

²⁷ *Dagens Nyheter*, 'Kultur', 23 March 2011, p. 18.

²⁸ I sent an email to approximately 60 people. The only person to respond with any real knowledge of the day was Peter Stadius, lecturer in Nordic Studies at the University of Helsinki. He participated in a number of media-reported events, proving that Norden's day of 2011 did have a presence, at least in Finland.

²⁹ See, for example, 'Huippu-utinen sinulle, joka matkustat Pohjoismaissa', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 22 March 2011, 'Näringsliv', p. 7.

on a range of 'environmentally-sound products'.³⁰ This label can be understood as a double flagging of 'the North' given that a concern for 'sustainable consumption' and an awareness of the need to safeguard the environment is automatically associated with Norden.

The Nordic Ecolabel takes the form of a swan. This was inspired by Hans Hartvig Pedersen's poem 'The Nordic Swans' (1936). The same motif – this time coloured blue – also provides the logo for the Nordic Council. Founded in 1952 this unelected body is made up of 87 members drawn from the five states and three semi-autonomous areas that habitually constitute 'the North'. This octet is banally flagged whenever the swan motif is used: it features eight stripes, each of which stands for one of the eight 'nations' that make up the primary designation of Norden. These are respectively Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden plus the territories of Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. Of the latter category, Greenland and the Faroes form part of the Danish realm whilst Åland is an autonomous region of Finland. The flagging of Norden in Mariehamn – the capital of Åland – is particularly noteworthy. Its parliament building – *Självstyrelsegården* – was inaugurated in 1978. In a ceremonial space outside are a series of plaques describing 'landmark years' in Åland's independence story. They commence in 1809 when Åland and Finland shifted from Swedish to Russian control; and culminate in the Nordic Council's recognition of the Åland Islands in 1970. This provides further evidence of the 'Nordic element' being flagged for reasons of national identity, i.e. the Åland 'nation' within the Finnish state.

³⁰ 'The Nordic Ecolabel – the official Ecolabel in the Nordic countries', undated, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://www.nordic-ecolabel.org/about>.

Åland's flag and that of the other Nordic 'nations' appeared in the Norden's day 2011 issue of *Dagens Nyheter's* crossword. The answer to the clue was HELSINGFORS (Helsinki). The agreement signed there on 23 March 1962 is supposed to be marked on an annual basis by local authorities within Norden. They are encouraged to fly the flags of the region. Meanwhile an organisation such as the Norden Association arranges Nordic banquets (*gästbud*).³¹ This association (*Föreningen Norden*) was established in 1919. It is an NGO that seeks 'to stimulate and improve Nordic co-operation at all levels, especially in the fields of education, culture, the labour market, industry, mass media, international aid and environmental care.'³² The association promotes itself as a parallel organisation to the 'official' Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers (established in 1971), respectively the fora for inter-parliamentary and inter-governmental co-operation. The logotype of the Norden Association is described as

a symbol for Nordic co-operation. The eight dots represent the five Nordic countries and the three autonomous regions. The globe represents the fact that the co-operation not only serves the Nordic countries, but also serves the interest of peace and justice throughout the whole world.³³

Every action sponsored by the Norden Association or the Nordic Council leads to a reiteration and reframing of the 'Nordic element'.³⁴ This is a regional

³¹ 'Nordens dag', undated, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://www.norden.se/Mot-Norden/Nordens-dag>.

³² "'Norden" and the Norden Association', undated, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://www.norden.se/Om-oss/Foreningen-Nordens-verksamhet/In-English>.

³³ "'Norden" and the Norden Association'.

³⁴ Burch, 2010.

'meso-layer' which, just like the nations of which it is composed, is 'continually being re-written, and the re-writing reflects current balances of hegemony.'³⁵

In truth Norden's day attracted little attention in 2011. Norden's vital statistics – and with it its viability as a going concern – will come under particular scrutiny the following year given that 2012 will mark the fiftieth and sixtieth anniversaries of Norden's day and the Nordic Council respectively.

Previous Norden's day 're-writings' include 23 March 1991. On that day the governments of Denmark and Sweden signed an agreement for a fixed link across Øresund, the strait separating the Danish island of Zealand (Sjælland) from the province of Scania (Skåne) in southern Sweden.³⁶ The resulting bridge was inaugurated on 1 July 2000 with speeches given by King Carl Gustaf of Sweden and his Danish counterpart, Queen Margrethe of Denmark. Its official name is Øresundsbron, a suitably Nordic mix of the two Scandinavian languages.

Similar use of pomp and pageantry was used to herald the opening of another regional link some five years later, this time at the southern end of the Norway–Sweden border at Svinesund, a sound east of Oslo. This transnational region encapsulates the shared history of the two nations, in both peace and war. The area became fortified following the drawing of the border in 1658 and the first crossing of the sound came in 1716 when Sweden's Karl XII constructed a pontoon bridge in order to attack the Norwegian defences. Within two years the warmongering king was dead – shot by an unidentified sniper whilst vainly besieging the nearby Norwegian castle at Halden.

³⁵ Billig, 1995, p. 71.

³⁶ 'Øresund Bridge: our history', undated, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://uk.oresundsbron.com/page/373>.

Just under a century later the Napoleonic wars brought to an end four hundred years of Danish control over Norway. A brief war with Sweden led to the Treaty of Kiel (1814). Norway was granted considerable autonomy and its own parliament, but in return it had to accept the Swedish king as its head of state. In addition, all matters pertaining to foreign relations were ceded to Stockholm. This remained the case until 1905. In that year the parliament in Kristiania (Oslo) voted to withdraw from the union. This triggered a series of events culminating in King Oscar II's abdication from the Norwegian throne and the appointment of Prince Carl of Denmark as king of a fully independent Norway.

Tensions had mounted in the run up to these dramatic events. A token of this was Norway's decision to establish a military fortification overlooking the sound at Svinesund. This was decommissioned in 1906 following successful peace negotiations that took place in the Swedish city of Karlstad in September 1905.

The first permanent bridge at Svinesund was begun in April 1939, one year before the Nazis invaded Norway. Sweden avoided such a fate and remained officially neutral during the conflict. However, on 6 July 1942 a supposedly accidental explosion on the Swedish side destroyed a large part of the nearly complete bridge. Its eventual inauguration in 1946 was a symbolically loaded occasion. Fifty-nine years later a new bridge, running parallel with the old, was opened. In 2005, as in 1946, the royal families of both countries conducted the inauguration, with the two monarchs meeting halfway across the bridge alongside a granite sculpture of two hands greeting.

Svinesund with its crossings and citadels reveals a tale of conflict and mistrust as well as peace and reconciliation. The shared pasts and yet very different fates of Norway and Sweden are played out in their contrasting attitudes towards history.

This became apparent during the centennial marking of 1905. In Norway this anniversary prompted an extensive and well-funded series of events under the mantra of 'A Voice of Our Own'.³⁷ This reflects the fact that 1905 is perceived as marking a crucial hiatus in Norwegian history. In contrast it represents a minor year in the Swedish annals.³⁸ This had implications for the manner in which the events of 1905 were commemorated or forgotten a hundred years later. In Norway, 7 June became the key focus. This was the day in 1905 when the *Storting* (the Norwegian parliament) unilaterally voted to sever the union. However, it was notable that, in Sweden, the focal point was 23 September, the moment when the peace negotiations reached their successful conclusion, the union was legally annulled and the Swedish king abdicated from the Norwegian throne.

Sweden and Norway, superficially at least, have much in common. Yet, as the anniversary of 1905 revealed, important factors differentiate the two. They are both Scandinavian countries with mutually comprehensible languages (a factor which helps facilitate lots of jokes at each other's expense). They share one of the longest land borders in Europe. Both are ancient nations, but Norway is a comparatively new state. This, plus its gruelling experiences in the Second World War and its now bountiful natural resources help explain Norway's membership of NATO but not of the European Union. Sweden on the other hand *is* a member of the EU (but does not use the Euro) and continues to maintain an official policy of military non-alignment.

Despite such anomalies, the centenary of the dissolution of the union was deployed to underpin the cordiality of present-day Sveco-Norwegian relations.

³⁷ This phrase alluded to the fact that Norwegian foreign affairs were directed from Stockholm during the union period. Norway achieved 'a voice of its own' on the international stage following the events of 1905.

³⁸ Torbjörn Nilsson, 'Sverige och 1905 – glömska eller förträngning?' *Historiska Tidsskrift*, 84, 2005, pp. 217-228.

Nowhere was this more apparent than during the inauguration by the two royal families of the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo, built at a cost of some 107m Norwegian kroner. All the annual Nobel prizes are conferred by Sweden, with the exception of the Nobel Peace Prize, which is administered and awarded in Norway. This contributes a great deal to the branding of Norway as ‘a peace nation’ and a self-declared world leader in international conflict resolution.³⁹ This ‘living legacy’ has been given additional performative impetus with the establishment of the Nobel Peace Center. The director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute, Geir Lundestad envisioned it as ‘a living center for communicating the ideals of the Nobel Peace Prize and focusing attention on current conflicts.’⁴⁰ The centenary of the dissolution of the Swedish–Norwegian union provided a further opportunity to bolster this image of ‘the North’: in an open letter of February 2005 the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan referred to the peaceful separation of 1905 as ‘an example to aspire to in... a world still riven by conflict’, adding that the ‘centennial is an inspiring occasion for all of us working in the cause of peace.’⁴¹

This instrumentalism is a particularly unambiguous example of how historical narratives are never the simple conveyance of ‘facts’. The ‘cohesive mortar’ of Norden is literally used to build bridges *and* girder rhetorical arguments about Norden and peace. The 1905-2005 centennial marked a highpoint of this. Yet it can

³⁹ Øystein Haga Skånland, ‘“Norway is a peace nation”: A discourse analytic reading of the Norwegian peace engagement’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2010, 45, pp. 34-54; Ivar Libæk and Øivind Stenersen, *The History of Norway: From the Ice Age to Today*, trans. James Anderson, Lysaker, Dinamo forl, 2003, p. 177.

⁴⁰ ‘The Nobel Peace Center – A Place of Peace’, undated, accessed 29 April 2006 at, www.norway.org/policy/peace/center/center.htm.

⁴¹ Kofi Annan, ‘Message on the Centennial of the Peaceful Dissolution of the Union Between Norway and Sweden’ (press release), February 2005.

only be understood against a continuous backdrop of banal Nordism, insisting as it does that Norden ‘serves the interest of peace and justice throughout the whole world’ (to recall the exhortations of the Norden Association). One can equate this attempt to take ownership of ‘peace’ with the ‘link between the characteristics of certain products and their geographical origin’. This can lead to the placing of protected geographical status on specific foodstuffs associated with particular places within the European Union.⁴² Adopting the same logic one can conclude that peace promotion is to Norden what prosciutto is to Italy.

This helps explain why certain representatives of the Republic of Estonia would like to bury their country’s Soviet past by branding it as a Nordic rather than a Baltic nation. Its current president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves has argued that the Baltic States were united only in the shared memory of military occupation by hostile powers.⁴³ In so doing he conveniently forgot that the same can be said of Norden. However, the rosy hue that the passing centuries have accorded Sweden’s 17th century ‘occupation’ of Estonia has led it to become known as the ‘happy Swedish time’.⁴⁴ This cheerful imperialism is eased further by the fact that the ‘neutral’ Sweden of today is so banally associated with peace.

The mantra that Sweden has not experienced war for two hundred years is chanted on a regular basis.⁴⁵ Its capital is therefore the fitting home to such

⁴² These are termed ‘protected geographical indication’ (PGI) or ‘protected designation of origin’ (PDO). See ‘Protection of Geographical Indications and Designations of Origin’, 14 September 2010, accessed 31 March 2011 at, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/agriculture/food/l66044_en.htm.

⁴³ Burch, ‘Norden, Reframed’, pp. 576-577.

⁴⁴ Burch, ‘Norden, Reframed’, pp. 576-577.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Lena Holger (ed.), *Fredssoldater*, Stockholm: Armémuseum, 2009, p. 192; Peter Aronsson, ‘Introduction: Uses of the past – Nordic Historical Cultures in a Comparative Perspective’, *Culture Unbound*, Vol.

organisations as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, ‘an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.’⁴⁶ Stockholm was also the originating city for the Non-Violence Project established in 1993. This was triggered by a weapon that is incapable of firing, namely Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd’s sculpture *Non-Violence*, which is probably the best known artwork by a Swedish sculptor. This symbol of a gun with a knotted barrel was first sketched by Reuterswärd in 1980 in response to the murder of John Lennon. Its three-dimensional form is replicated across the world, including most famously outside the United Nations building in New York (1988). In 2002 the Nordic Council’s head office in central Copenhagen provided the venue for an exhibition examining the work.⁴⁷ In the accompanying catalogue Kofi Annan described this potent symbol as encapsulating ‘in a few simple curves, the greatest prayer of man; that which asks not for victory, but for peace’.⁴⁸

This highfalutin oratory, like Annan’s open letter in association with the centennial anniversary of the peaceful dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union, represents yet another instance of banal Nordism. Norden is elevated as the acme of peace and reconciliation. Mr Annan’s Swedish wife would probably approve of this entirely positive spin placed on her home country.⁴⁹ She is Nane Annan (née Lagergren), a lawyer and the niece of Raoul Wallenberg – an individual who has a

2, 2010, p. 558.

⁴⁶ ‘Stockholm International Peace Research Institute – A Top Global Think Tank’, undated, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://www.sipri.org/about>.

⁴⁷ ‘Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd: *Non-Violence*, 1980 – 2002’, press release, 10 January 2002, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://www.kopenhagen.dk/fileadmin/oldsite/presse/CFRsvenskpress.htm>.

⁴⁸ ‘The symbol *Non-Violence*’, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://www.nonviolence.com/about#thesymbol>.

⁴⁹ I am grateful to Nikolas Glover for drawing my attention to the nationality of Kofi Annan’s wife.

claim to be the very embodiment of non-violence and human rights. His selflessness and daring during the Second World War enabled a great many Jews in Hungary to survive the Shoah. Memorials to Wallenberg are even more numerous and widespread than are copies of Reuterswärd's *Non-Violence*.⁵⁰ This is destined to increase in 2012, which will mark the centenary of Wallenberg's birth. The ensuing commemorative events will help ensure that 'there will be no end to the Wallenberg story.'⁵¹

The mythical North

The centenary of Raoul Wallenberg's birth coincides with the diamond anniversary of the Nordic Council. It will be possible to gauge Norden's 'balances of hegemony' by scrutinising the manner in which various 'entrepreneurs' evoke and invoke 'the North' during this doubly commemorative year. Each initiative will mark a further development in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*. This, the title of a multi-authored book published in 1997, provided the brick-and-mortar metaphor cited above. It was part-financed by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond), an entrepreneur with a vested interest in the furtherance of Norden. The same organisation has served as the principal supporter for 'Nordic Spaces', the initiative behind this Nordic-themed series of publications. The book that you are holding does not simply mirror a Nordic reality: it constitutes in a literal sense the 'cohesive mortar' that makes up that elusive 'Nordic element'.

⁵⁰ Tanja Schult, 'Whose Raoul Wallenberg is it? The Man and the Myth: Between Memory, History and Popularity', *Culture Unbound*, 2, 2010, pp. 769-796.

⁵¹ Schult, 2010, p. 792.

The implications of this are rarely acknowledged or explored. *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, for example, begins by very effectively showing that Norden is an ongoing political construct based on myth.⁵² It ends with a ‘Nordic chronology’.⁵³ This timeline gives credence to the construction of Norden, providing it with a heritage and an ongoing lineage. Rather than an innocent statement of facts it is a furtherance of the myth of ‘the North’.

All such investigations run the risk of contributing to this myth-making and of ‘creating new ones’.⁵⁴ This is true even of a publication such as *Scandinavian Design Beyond the Myth: Fifty Years of Design from the Nordic Countries*. It begins with a foreword by Per Unckel, the then secretary general of the Nordic Council of Ministers which commissioned and funded the publication and associated exhibition. Unckel concedes that the notion of ‘Scandinavian design’ was a ‘fiction’ which ‘developed from a set of myths about the region, its countries, nature and the people who lived there then.’⁵⁵

The use of ‘Scandinavian’ rather than ‘Nordic’ in Unckel’s foreword confirms Norden to be a series of overlapping and contradictory myths and fictions about multiple Norths that come under a variety of headings: ‘the North’, ‘the high north’, Norden, Scandinavia and so forth. And Unckel had no need to phrase his observations in the past tense: the book that he was introducing confirms that fictions of ‘the North’ are still rampant. This is evident from an essay in *Scandinavian Design Beyond the Myth* entitled ‘Unpredictable Sweden’ written by the design

⁵² Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, pp. 21-23.

⁵³ Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, pp. 286-296.

⁵⁴ Widar Halén & Kerstin Wickman (eds.), *Scandinavian Design Beyond the Myth: Fifty Years of Design from the Nordic Countries*, Stockholm, Arvinius Förlag, 2006, p. 151.

⁵⁵ Halén & Wickman, 2006, p. 5.

historian, Kerstin Wickman. On first reading her short text gives the impression of challenging stereotypes, problematising categories of identity and undermining interpretative certainties by concluding that ‘nothing is what it seems to be.’⁵⁶ Yet in truth this empty rhetoric provides a cover for the churning out of trite clichés about ‘the light of the Swedish countryside and the magic of a summer night.’ The ceramics of Mia E. Göransson are held up as encapsulating ‘the delicate, pregnant elusiveness of Swedish nature.’ Swedish design, we are told, possesses ‘tactile characteristics... [which] aims to please in an almost invisible manner.’ Glass – that ‘seductive but elusive material’ – is identified as the substance that best expresses design from ‘this orderly and cautious country with its obsession with everyday life’.⁵⁷

The images illustrating Wickman’s text include a number of functional objects of industrial design such as telephones and even a welder’s mask. However, these are presented in pristine isolation as artistic rather than utilitarian objects. This is typical of conventional accounts of design history which tend to focus on aesthetically pleasing objects for the home to the exclusion of items from other spheres. This point is well made by Kjetil Fallan in his recent book on design history. The image he uses to visualise this missing aspect is a torpedo boat from Norway called, interestingly enough, ‘Nasty’.⁵⁸

For Kerstin Wickman to have fulfilled the promise of both her chapter title and that of the book as a whole it would have been necessary to include a similarly

⁵⁶ Halén & Wickman, 2006, p. 213.

⁵⁷ Halén & Wickman, 2006, p. 213.

⁵⁸ ‘[Fig.] 3 Conventional design history’s predilection for beautiful objects for the home has left out a vast array of material from other spheres, such as military equipment. Båtservice Verft AS, Tjeld-class (Nasty) Motor torpedo boat, 1957. Design: Jan Herman Linge. Copyright The Royal Norwegian Navy Museum.’ Kjetil Fallan, *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method*, Oxford & New York, Berg, 2010, p. 9.

unconventional design product. 'Unpredictable Sweden: Beyond the Myth' could have been summed-up in one painstakingly designed, ultra-Swedish object which 'aims to please in an almost invisible manner': the Carl-Gustaf 84 mm multi-purpose, man-portable, reusable recoilless rifle.

However, including this weapon among the canon of Swedish cultural objects and as an archetype of all things Nordic is highly problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, the nations that make up Norden are self-obsessed and prone to narcissism, meaning that they are highly sensitive to criticism.⁵⁹ Secondly, on a regional level, introducing a discordant note into Norden's musak soundtrack would threaten to undermine a barely disguised sense of 'moral supremacy' that is intrinsic to promotions of all things Nordic.⁶⁰ Even those so-called Nordic traits that are ostensibly negative can be turned into badges of pride. Thus the angst that supposedly blights 'the North' gives birth to an artistic icon in the shape of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the name of the man who pioneered dynamite is synonymous with peace rather than war.⁶² Norden's unremittingly positive message means that even those who wish to do away with the myth of Norden share a sense of pride about the region's contribution to peace.⁶³ Such traditions and stereotypes

⁵⁹ Stuart Burch, 'Nationell narcissism', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 95 (1), pp. 204-211.

⁶⁰ Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, pp. 29, 92-93.

⁶¹ This motif exists in a variety of versions in a number of media, including what is perhaps the earliest painted rendering, *Skrik* (1893, tempera & wax crayon on paper, 91 x 73.5, National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, acc. no. NG.M.00939).

⁶² The Swede, Alfred Nobel (1833-96). The terms of his will instituted the prizes given in his name. These, as has already been noted, are conferred in Stockholm, with the exception of the prize for peace which is administered and awarded in Oslo.

⁶³ See Fredrik Svedjetun's comments to this effect in Peter Fällmar Andersson, 'Vem i hela Norden bryr sig?', *Nordvästra Skånes Tidningar*, 23 March 2011, A12.

'provide enticing and comforting maps.'⁶⁴ They fulfil an additional function as well by providing a very necessary antidote to a far more sinister reading of Norden. This is apparent to all those who, at the time of writing, are searching Wikipedia for information on 'Nordism'.⁶⁵ They are redirected automatically to 'Scandinavism'. In a warning footnote inserted at the outset of this entry it is stated: 'The political movement of Nordism should not be confused with the racial ideology of Nordicism, which latter (sic) considers the Nordic people a master race.' Clicking on 'Nordicism' leads to a far from banal account of its longstanding and persistent links with race and racism.

With such objectionable facets festering beneath the surface it is hardly surprising that 'the North' is incapable of standing up to too much scrutiny. Norden 'involves a prohibition of questions. The dream is the reality, the wish is the politics... analysis is untrue and reality is a lie.'⁶⁶ This places an embargo on a too-critical critique of Norden. The risk is, therefore, that the same old myths get repeated. At its worst Norden is the last bastion of the lazy journalist. To take but one example: Iceland's financial woes, economic meltdown and impending referendum over whether to settle the foreign debts of the investment bank, Icesave. This led one commentator to muse about neo-Vikings marauding in the financial world; aggressive non-Nordic superpowers threatening the plucky little nations of Norden; and vacuous words about Nordic neighbourliness.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Lundström, 1994, p. 13.

⁶⁵ The following information was accessed on 15 April 2011 at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nordism> (redirects to 'Scandinavism'); <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nordicism> (redirects to 'Nordic race').

⁶⁶ Sørensen & Stråth, 1997, p. 120.

⁶⁷ Erik Helmersson, 'Island: De nya vikingarna plundrade sitt eget folk', *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 April 2011, p. 4.

This is all pretty innocuous stuff. Banal in the most boring sense of the word. A harmless way for a Swedish newspaper-reader to liven up his breakfast by experiencing a frisson of pride and Nordic fellowship. There is nothing wrong with this. What *is* troubling is that it tends to throw a veil over less savoury aspects of Norden. This brings us back to that wrong-sounding ‘Swedish grenade’.

Cry ‘Norden!’ and let slip the dogs of war

There is evidence that, locally at least, a debate about Sweden’s weapons industry is gaining momentum. This was patent from the radio report that woke me one Sunday morning in early March 2011. Later that month another programme on Sweden’s national radio dealt with the issue in greater depth. The feature was introduced as follows: ‘Sweden is the country that exports the most defence equipment per capita in the world whilst we wish to be ambassadors for human rights and the fight against global poverty.’⁶⁸

It is not only the scale of Sweden’s arms sales that is of note here. So too is the terminology. The use of the word ‘we’ implies that *all* Swedes agree with the state’s ambassadorial role. This human association with the nation also indicates that any condemnation of Sweden’s actions risks being interpreted as a personal attack. A further complicating factor is the image used to accompany the online version of the programme (Fig.3). It shows the newly married heir to the throne and her husband. In an excruciatingly embarrassing pastiche of the Hollywood film *Top*

⁶⁸ ‘Sverige är det land i världen som exporterar mest försvarsmateriel per capita samtidigt som vi vill vara ambassadörer för fattigdomsbekämpning och mänskliga rättigheter.’ *Människor och tro*, 25 March 2011, Sveriges Radio, P1.

Gun, we see the happy couple as they stand awkwardly in front of the ultimate symbol of Sweden's military ambitions: the JAS 39 Gripen fighter.⁶⁹

The JAS Gripen is manufactured by Saab AB, the firm responsible for the Carl-Gustaf rifle. Its development – which has been heavily subsidised by the Swedish state – has so far cost an estimated 120 billion Swedish kronor.⁷⁰ The attempted sale of this aircraft to foreign nations has led to claims of bribery and corruption. The most damning criticism relates to Sweden's dealings with South Africa in the late 1990s. Nils Resare's recent book charting this story is scathing in its condemnation of the arms industry as well as the highest echelons of Swedish civil society.⁷¹ Resare presents evidence to show that Swedish state funds earmarked for development aid (*bistånd*) were used to facilitate the sale of arms. To this end, Swedish cultural activities functioned as a stratagem to mask an ulterior motive: the sale of the JAS Gripen.

Under such circumstances banal Nordism was deployed as a cynical tool of manipulation. This was a point of view shared by one of the most vocal critics of the JAS Gripen affair, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This Nobel Peace Prize laureate has argued that Sweden 'coerced' South Africa into the purchase of the JAS 39 Gripen, an action that Tutu and others believe led to corruption in the fledgling democracy.⁷² The Swedish archbishop, K.G. Hammar opposed the sale by the then Social Democratic government under prime minister, Göran Persson. Hammar was of the

⁶⁹ I am grateful to Jonas Harvard for drawing this visual association to my attention.

⁷⁰ Olle Nygårds, 'Gripens rykte hänger i luften', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1 April 2011, Näringsliv, pp. 4-5.

⁷¹ Nils Resare, *Mutor, makt och bistånd: JAS och Sydafrikaaffären*, Stockholm, Natur & Kultur, 2010.

⁷² Anon, 'Misstänkta mutor i Jas-affär med Sydafrika', *Sveriges Radion*, 16 August 2010, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=3922269> and <http://sverigesradio.se/topsy/ljudfil/2539930.mp3>, accessed 4 April 2011.

opinion that ‘Sweden exploited... the goodwill it accrued from the fight against apartheid and used it as a reason why the newly democratic South Africa should trade with Sweden.’⁷³

These events show the dark side to banal Nordism. They also beg the question: is banal Nordism a deliberate ruse; a ploy consciously fabricated in order to deceive and conceal? In the case of the sale of JAS Gripen to South Africa the answer is almost certainly, yes it is. However, on a day-to-day basis, the production of banal Nordism is probably as banal as its reception. The ‘constant image’ of Norden is so entrenched that entrepreneurs must find themselves repeating stereotypical images of ‘the North’ even if they are ‘neither consciously nor unconsciously disposed to create such an impression.’⁷⁴ A case in point occurred during the final, abortive attempt to co-curate the Nordic Pavilion in Venice: the traditional mantra of ‘peace, harmony and new ideas’ was dutifully invoked at its inauguration, even if the process that led to this ill-fated act of Nordic (un)fellowship was clearly anything but harmonious.⁷⁵

A frank appraisal of Norden’s entanglement with contemporary conflict faces additional challenges. This is intimated in a diorama currently on show at the Armémuseum in Stockholm (Fig.4). It features two mannequins sat on their living room sofa. They watch impassively as an unceasing diet of war is fed to them via

⁷³ ‘Sverige utnyttade – det är lite hemskt att säga men jag gör det ändå – Sverige utnyttade en god vil som den hade från tiden med kamp mot apartheid och när sen den demokratiska Sydafrika kom så var det ett gott argument för att man skulle handla just med Sverige.’ ‘Korruption i spåren av JAS’, *Godmorgon, världen!* Sveriges Radio, 15 August 2010, <http://sverigesradio.se/topsy/ljudfil/2539930.mp3>.

⁷⁴ Cf. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York, Doubleday, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Julie Sjøwall Oftedal, ‘Misnøye i Venezia: – Vi vurderer egen norsk utstilling’, 28 August 2010, accessed 15 September 2010 at, <http://www.arkitektnytt.no/-vi-vurderer-egen-norsk-utstilling>.

their television. Behind them looms a huge military vehicle surmounted by a soldier armed with what looks suspiciously like a Carl-Gustaf rifle. The TV-viewing couple seem entirely oblivious to the reality of what is going on behind them, captivated as they are by the war-as-entertainment that they see on the screen. These 'normal folk' need to be turned around and brought face-to-face with a combat-proven Carl-Gustaf.

In a similar vein, Saab AB's JAS Gripen intrigues in South African and other countries – including Sweden's unsuccessful attempt to sell the aircraft to Norway in 2008 – would make fascinating topics for exhibitions at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo or the Nobel Museum in Stockholm. In so doing the unifying 'Nordic element' would take on a very different hue. The 'cohesive mortar' that binds the nations of 'the North' might be just that – mortar in the sense of 'various devices for firing a projectile with a high trajectory'.⁷⁶ This would provide a rarely-told counter narrative to Norden's 'old song of peace'. For instance, during the joyful centenary of the peaceful dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union, little mention was made of the fact that, in 2005, the Norwegian state bought a half-share in the arms manufacturer Nammo or that, in 2003, Norway was ranked as the world's sixth largest exporter of arms. In 2006 the Norwegian state broadcaster NRK refused to transmit a documentary examining Norway's role in the arms industry.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ 'Mortar, noun', *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, 3rd ed., December 2002, accessed 4 April 2011 at, <http://oed.com/view/Entry/122447>.

⁷⁷ Asle Skredderberget, 'Staten kjøper seg opp i omstridt våpenprodusent', *Aftenposten*, 24 November 2005, accessed 24 November 2005 at, <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/okonomi/article1163801.ece>. Information on Norwegian exports is derived from Statistics Norway (<http://www.ssb.no>). Arve Henriksen, 'NRK rejects film that debunks Norway's peaceful image', *Aftenposten*, 31 March 2006, accessed 31 March 2006 at, <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1264501.ece>.

Norden's museums would provide ideal locations for a much-needed discussion of the ethics of the arms trade. Armémuseum could juxtapose its Carl-Gustaf from the 1940s with Saab AB's latest model. The Non-Violence project might be asked to write a thought provoking exhibition booklet and education guide. Reuterswäld's knotted pistol displayed alongside a Carl-Gustaf would provide a trigger for debate. So too would the inclusion of a Carl-Gustaf in the design galleries of Sweden's Nationalmuseum. It would be interesting to use this novel insertion as an opportunity to compare the marketing of artefacts designed for the home with the promotion of military equipment. The sleek and seductive presentation of Saab AB's products on its website suggests that these spheres of advertising have much in common.

The question is, of course, whether such *Norden*-evoking, *Norden*-invoking efforts would be acceptable to the region's cultural, financial and academic entrepreneurs, organisations and funders. They might well lodge objections on the grounds of taste and propriety. These protests could be countered by referring to other, far more extreme precedents. The juxtapositions and provocations suggested in the preceding paragraphs are mild in comparison to the sights on show at *Body Armour*, a temporary exhibition mounted by Sweden's Armémuseum in 2011. This was devoted to Morten Traavik, the first artist in residence at Norway's Defence Museum. His exhibition featured the latest in an ongoing series of works under the general title 'HÆVERK'. This word when uttered in the phrase 'cry havoc' was an order issued to an army to signal the seizure of spoil – as in the famous Shakespearian quotation: 'Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war' (*Julius Caesar*, Act 3.1: 273).⁷⁸ In Traavik's case such 'spoils' include the morphing of weapons and

⁷⁸ 'Havoc, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, 2nd ed., 1989, accessed 15 April 2011 at,

body parts to produce disturbing and surrealistic objects that prompt reflection on the link between sex and violence (Fig.5). These and other initiatives by Traavik led to much debate in Norway, in part because the leadership of Norway's defence forces apparently attempted to censor certain works.⁷⁹

Whilst Armémuseum in Stockholm was brave enough to host a contentious Norwegian artist, would it be so willing to 'cry havoc!' on Sweden's arms industry? Could it, for instance, metamorphose the barrel of a Carl-Gustaf into an engorged penis *à la* Morten Traavik? Consideration would first have to be given to the fact that Saab AB sponsored the National Swedish Museums of Military History (SFHM) to the tune of 2.2m Swedish kronor in 2009.⁸⁰ This funded the rebuilding of the Swedish Air Force Museum, which was awarded the accolade of Swedish Museum of the Year for 2011. In 2007 Saab AB helped pay for the redisplay of Armémuseum's trophy collection featuring some 4,500 colours and standards seized during Swedish military campaigns dating from the 17th century until 1814. These and other spoils of war must have been gathered once the order 'havoc!' had been issued. Such items were taken triumphantly back to Sweden as evidence of the nation's prowess on the field of battle. Their continual display is, in other words, the antithesis of Kofi Annan's prayer 'which asks not for victory, but for peace'. Nostalgia and a pride in Sweden's past military endeavours clearly resonate with the production and sale of weapons today – as testified by Saab AB's sponsorship.

<http://oed.com/view/Entry/84740>; *The Oxford Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 173.

⁷⁹ Information derived from the introductory panel to the exhibition, *Body Armour* (Armémuseum, 12 April – 11 September 2011).

⁸⁰ *Årsredovisning 2009*, Statens Försvarshistoriska Museer, accessed 11 April 2011 at, http://www.sfhm.se/upload/SFHM_NY/Årsredovisningar/Årsredovisning_2009.pdf, p. 34.

Saab AB's generous financial support helped put the Swedish State Trophy Collection 'in [a] new light'.⁸¹ Such illumination needs to be shed on more contemporary aspects of war. The moral and ethical implications of Sweden's involvement in the arms trade is mentioned, albeit briefly, in the guidebook accompanying Armémuseum's permanent collection.⁸² The text is accompanied by a photograph of the museum's 1948 Carl-Gustaf. This, as we have seen, is no historical relic but the antecedent of its even more lethal current model. Its manufacture and sale merits far greater emphasis and scrutiny. This is particularly necessary given that in March 2011 Saab AB announced that it had clinched a deal to sell 1155 billion Swedish kronor of Carl-Gustaf rifles and ammunition to an unnamed purchaser. This will commence in September 2011 and continue throughout the following year.⁸³ It will exchange hands at the same time that the Nordic Council marks its sixtieth anniversary.

The lack of transparency regarding the destination of this lethal equipment flies in the face of Sweden's reputation for openness and democracy. It so happens that Sweden is one of the very few countries in Europe that allows large-scale donations to political parties to remain anonymous.⁸⁴ This has led to stinging criticism from the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption

⁸¹ 'Statens trofésamling i nytt ljus', accessed 11 April 2011 at,

<http://www.sfhm.se/templates/pages/ArmeStandardPage.aspx?id=5135>.

⁸² Anna Maria Forssberg (ed.) *Armémuseum: om krig och människor*, Armémuseum, Stockholm, p. 67.

⁸³ 'Carl-Gustaf system' press release, Saab AB, 11 March 2011.

⁸⁴ Ewa Stenberg, 'Sverige inte alls så öppet', *Dagens Nyheter*, 24 November 2010, accessed 11 April 2011 at, <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/sverige-inte-alls-sa-oppet-1.1214816>.

(GRECO).⁸⁵ This state of affairs is as anomalous to banal Nordism as is the knowledge that Sweden is, per capita, the world's leading exporter of arms.

Is it ethical for the National Swedish Museums of Military History to accept sponsorship from Saab AB? Does it have an impact on curatorial decisions? Would it matter if Saab AB had given anonymous financial backing to the Alliance parties of the ruling centre-right coalition or the preceding Social Democratic government? Would such support influence the political representatives that sit on the panel that advises on the export of military and other strategic equipment?⁸⁶ Similar questions concern the 'Swedishness' of Saab AB. The name Wallenberg might well be synonymous with peace, but this does not prevent the 'Wallenberg foundations' from being listed as an 8.7% shareholder in Saab AB as of December 2010.⁸⁷

A public discussion and debate about these and other such issues is hindered by banal Nordism. The commonplace assumptions that it induces will only be challenged through a thorough-going analysis of Norden's involvement in peace *and* conflict. One of the most dramatic examinations of this ilk is the documentary film *Armadillo*.⁸⁸ It deals with the activities of Danish soldiers in Afghanistan, including intimations that they revelled in the killing of the enemy. The wording of one English-language review of the film is revealing: '*Armadillo* doesn't offer conclusive proof that

⁸⁵ *Compliance Report on Sweden*, Greco RC-III (2011) 4E, Strasbourg, 1 April 2011, accessed 26 April 2011 at, http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/greco/evaluations/round3/GrecoRC3%282011%294_Sweden_EN.pdf.

⁸⁶ This is the Export Control Council (*Exportkontrollrådet*), a cross-party parliamentary body that advises the Swedish Agency for Non-Proliferation and Export Controls (*Inspektionen för strategiska produkter*).

⁸⁷ The full list of the largest shareholders (as of 31 December 2010) was as follows: Investor AB (30%); BAE Systems (10.2%); Wallenberg foundations (8.7%); Nordea Funds (5.4%); Swedbank Robur Funds (4.3%); 4th AP Fund (1.9%); Länsförsäkringar Funds (1.8%); SEB Funds (1.7%). See 'Key facts', accessed 11 April 2011 at, <http://www.saabgroup.com/en/About-Saab/Company-profile/Saab-in-brief/Key-facts/>.

⁸⁸ *Armadillo*, directed by Janus Metz, released 27 May 2010, 100 minutes, Fridthjof Film A/S.

the Danish soldiers broke the rules of engagement. Nonetheless, the very possibility that they might have done is startling in itself.⁸⁹ This can be interpreted as a further instance of banal Nordism: *the very possibility* that Danish soldiers could be as inhuman or depraved as soldiers from Britain, the United States or any other nation is shocking precisely because we are banally conditioned to expect that Norden ‘serves the interest of peace and justice throughout the whole world’ (to recall once more the words of the Norden Association).

A final reminder that Norden’s attitudes to war do not square with our banal conditioning emerged following the so-called Arab spring of 2011. Sweden’s response to the UN-backed NATO-led action against Libya was hesitant and ambiguous.⁹⁰ This was in part because Sweden, unlike Denmark and Norway, stands outside NATO. This is a concrete example of the stark national differences in policy and alignment evident in Europe, including Norden. Yet at exactly the same time that this schism re-emerged, the foreign ministers of the five Nordic states signed a ‘Nordic declaration of solidarity’. Should one of their number come under attack ‘the others will, upon request from that country, assist with relevant means.’⁹¹

This gulf between rhetoric and reality is characteristic of the myth of Norden. Despite the ‘declaration of solidarity’ it remains the case that the Nordic countries have no formal co-operation when it comes to foreign policy. One senses that the

⁸⁹ Geoffrey Macnab, ‘*Armadillo*: the Afghanistan war documentary that shocked Denmark’, *The Guardian*, 3 June 2010, accessed 11 April 2011 at, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/jun/03/armadillo-danish-documentary-afghanistan>.

⁹⁰ Peter Wolodarski, ‘Konsten att vara feg’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 10 April 2011, p. 4.

⁹¹ The agreement was signed in Helsinki on 5 April 2011. See ‘The Nordic declaration on solidarity’, *Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland*, 5 April 2011, accessed 11 April 2011 at, <http://www.formin.fi/Public/default.aspx?contentid=217312>.

fine words of Norden's foreign ministers would evaporate if they were put to the test. However, as the President of the Nordic Council, Henrik Dam Kristensen implied, their real import was symbolic rather than actual.⁹² Be that as it may, any hostile powers that might be considering an attack on Norden need to take care. They should avoid being lulled into a false sense of security by all that Nordic talk of peace. Staring down the barrel of a Carl-Gustaf would quickly confirm that the Nordic nations possess combat-proven weapons – and they are not afraid to sell them.

⁹² 'Henrik Dam Kristensen... welcomes the foreign ministers' declaration of solidarity, describing it as a major and important decision for the Nordic countries, not least symbolically.' See 'All for one, one for all', *Norden*, 7 April 2011, accessed 11 April 2011 at, <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/news/all-for-one-one-for-all>.