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Bjarne Thorup Thomsen:

New Nordic Environments in Eyvind Johnson's Factual and Fictional Prose, 1928-1932

Abstract: The main aim of the article is to offer a closer examination of interfaces between Johnson's factual and fictional modes of writing around 1930, with a particular emphasis on analysing accounts and appreciations of modern environments, infrastructures and mentalities in 'peripheral' as well as 'central' Swedish locations. To frame theoretically this examination the article opens by considering some aspects of the current scholarly discourse on the hybrid genre of travel writing, to which the nonfictional texts in question broadly belong, and on the interrelationship between factual and fictional modes of representation. The article goes on to consider three of Johnson's newspaper reportage pieces that may be located in the subgenre of domestic travel writing, popular in the interwar period, while they also, as 'foreign' correspondence of sorts, contribute to confounding the very concept of home nation as well as challenging the distinction between 'off-centre' and 'centre' in the nation space. In its third phase, the article discusses two novels that illustrate, respectively, the 'marginal' and the metropolitan variant of domestic modernism in Johnson's fictional work, thus complementing the reportage pieces. The article demonstrates how topics and tropes of traffic, motorisation, building, acceleration, coordination and internationalisation influence in various ways the new national topographies of the north presented in all five of Johnson's texts. The article argues that the texts thereby contribute to renegotiating a sense of national selfhood in an era of rapid change in technologies and communications and of increased international interaction. The comparative lens of the article illuminates furthermore some of the fictionalising stylistic devices that inform Johnson's factual narratives, while demonstrating conversely that closeness of correspondence with authentic infrastructural features may find its most manifest use in Johnson's fictional narratives. The proposed quintet of texts serves, additionally, to show the significance of subjective, multiple and contested perception in Johnson's new northern environments. The article concludes by situating the discussion of Johnson's narratives in the context of new approaches to Scandinavian literary modernism.

In the autumn of 1929, Eyvind Johnson published three reportage pieces in the *Stockholms-Tidningen* newspaper that record what could be described as journeys of discovery in a transformed terrain of home: 'Svenskt och svenskar' (25 August), 'Det nya Sverige' (8 September) and 'Svenskt och svenskar' (3 November). Johnson had spent much of the

preceding eight-year period on the European continent, in Germany and, primarily, France, while establishing himself as a new voice in Swedish literature with novels such as *Stad i mörker* (1927) and *Stad i ljus* (1928). These narratives, together with his debut novel *Timans och rättfärdigheten* (1925), showcased the spatial diversity and fluidity of Johnson's early modernism. Their contemporary storylines and literary experimentation are played out in modern environments that range from the northern Swedish 'periphery' to the central-European metropolises of Berlin and Paris.¹ In comparison, the 'intermediate' position of the northern nation's own metropolitan environment, the Stockholm cityscape, had hitherto played a somewhat subdued role in Johnson's prose fiction. This was, however, about to change, while Johnson continued and developed his re-assessment of the periphery, fictional and factual.

Johnson had reacquainted himself with his homeland in July and August 1929 on journeys from south to north and north to south that took him through larger parts of the country. His station stops included the southern coastal town of Trelleborg, the capital, and the towns of Boden and Luleå in Sweden's northernmost, and Johnson's native, region of Norrbotten; in the southbound direction, they included the minor town of Alingsås and the city of Gothenburg near or by the Swedish west coast (see Lindberger 1986: 256-57).² The long extensions of Johnson's travel trajectory thus appear almost emblematic of national reach and coverage, peripheral as well as 'central'. Johnson subsequently distilled his impressions of the nation in the three above-mentioned newspaper articles. These use tropes and techniques of travel writing focused on 'foreign' places to capture the processes of modernisation that were redefining domestically the country and the city alike. Below, we shall present a comparison of the second and third of the articles, while the first article will be referenced more cursorily at the beginning of the discussion. We shall argue that 'Det nya Sverige' may be read as an implicit assertion that the Swedish peripheral modernity which had already found articulations in Johnson's fictions was in the process of being widely translated into material fact, while 'Svenskt och svenskar' (the second instalment), focused on the transforming Stockholm cityscape, could, conversely, be viewed as identifying some of the factual foundations for Johnson's ongoing and future realisation of the modernist potential of the Stockholm environment in prose fictions such as *Kommentar till et stjärnfall* (1929) and, not least, *Bobinack* (1932).

¹ For a comparative study of the role of modernist topography in Johnson's early work, see Thomsen (2015b), and for an in-depth analysis of environment and affect in *Stad i mörker*, see Thomsen (2015a).

² In his retrospective essay 'Perspektiv på 20- och 30-talen', Johnson characterises his journey as a 'möjlighetsorientering i den svenska sommaren 1929' (1992 [1961]: 81) that led to his and his newly established family's relocation to Sweden (and Norway for a shorter period) in early summer 1930. The new decade thus coincides in his case with a decidedly new phase in his relationship with his home country.

A closer examination of such interfaces between Johnson's factual and fictional modes of writing around 1930 will form the overarching aim of the present article. Thus, the proposed discussion of the articulation and appreciation of Swedish environmental and infrastructural modernity, peripheral and central, in the three travel reportage articles shall serve to frame and inform a second set of comparative perspectives, centred on two of Johnson's novels published on either side of the articles. The novels in question are *Minnas* (1928) and the aforementioned *Bobinack*. Complementing the reportage pieces, the selected novels illustrate, respectively, the 'marginal' and the metropolitan variant of domestic modernity in Johnson's fictional work. First, however, we shall preface our examination of the reportage articles specifically and of interconnections within the proposed quartet of texts more broadly by considering some aspects of the scholarly discourse on travel writing, within which genre Johnson's articles may be located, including travel writing in the interwar period, and on the interrelationship between factual and fictional modes of representation.

Facets of (inter-war) travel writing and its interface with reportage and fiction

In his exploration of the many manifestations of travel writing, *Travel Writing*, Carl Thompson emphasises the hybridity and porous boundaries of the genre and considers its interface with a range of bordering forms, among which he includes 'bulletins and articles sent back to newspapers and magazines by foreign correspondents' (2011: 11). In his 1929 reportage pieces, Johnson operates to an extent like a foreign correspondent responding to the 'new' Sweden that is emerging around him. The modernisation of the country's rural as well as urban domains implies a degree of foreignisation, especially to the traveller who is returning 'home' after a longer absence, with an acuter sense of abrupt and accelerated change. This pushes Johnson's articles towards an account of an unfamiliar people or place, which is central to definitions of travel writing and bound up with its representational, legitimising and stylistic strategies. Carl Thompson identifies a number of such strategies or principles that travel writers have tended to employ when making the foreign experience comprehensible and credible to domestic audiences. Among these are: the autoptic principle by which travel writers assert the accuracy of their accounts 'through a vigorous insistence on their eye-witness status' (2011: 65); the principle of attachment by which unknown entities are connected to familiar frameworks of meaning; and the trope of wonderment by which the travel writer can mediate experiences of estrangement and the exotic. As we shall document below, in the 1929 articles Johnson playfully gestures towards several of these principles and tropes in capturing the exotic imprint modernisation has made on his home country and conveying a sense of humorous wonderment at witnessing the newness of the nation.

Both Carl Thompson, Helen Carr in 'Modernism and travel (1880-1940)' and Tim Youngs in his recent *Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* identify the 1920s and 1930s as a golden age of travel writing, exploring connections between modernity, mobility, modernism and the popularity of the genre. Of clear relevance to Johnson's literary practice, and to the present study, is Carr's acknowledgement of '[t]he shared concerns of imaginative literature and travel writing at this time' (2002: 74). The cited scholarly studies share an emphasis on the role of new transport technologies in the 'petrol age' – emblematised by the automobile and the aeroplane in particular – in furthering a broader sense of acceleration and interconnection across distance that informs much factual and fictional writing in the period after the end of the First World War and the attendant restrictions on free travel. These developments represented profound changes to 'people's sense of speed, their engagement with the landscape and their relationship with one another', as Youngs argues (2013: 68). We shall see below how topics and tropes of traffic, motorisation, acceleration and internationalisation all influence the new national topographies of the north presented in Johnson's four texts. There is, however, a pronounced tension evident in these developments between, on the one hand, an enhanced sense of spatial cohesion and, on the other hand, an intensified sense of fragmentation. While increased interconnectedness and early globalism are reflected in travel writing and imaginative literature of the period, so too are the multiperspectivism, the unexpected juxtaposition, the disjointedness and the uncertainties of perception that constitute, equally, the mental effects of the interwar era of acceleration. Thus, Thompson observes that 'much Modernist literature and art bears the imprint of the faster lifestyle and the disorientating kinesis that is seemingly characteristic of modernity' (2011: 57). An effect of these uncertainties and contingencies is a heightened awareness and more overt articulation of the subjectivity of registration and representation. Carr reflects that 'increasingly in the twentieth century [travel writing] has become a more subjective form [...] and often an alternative form of writing for novelists' (2002: 74). Similarly, Youngs analyses how modernist travel writing experiments with point of view, undermines the authority of a singular perspective and scrutinises 'the relationship between observer and observed' (2013: 72).³ As we shall demonstrate below, Johnson's factual as well as fictional texts are recurrently occupied with questions of perception, perspective and alternative or partial understandings of the modern 'realities'.

Moving beyond the interwar period, it is evident that notions of compositeness, fluidity, and interface with fiction are central to current approaches to defining travel writing as a genre. Arne Melberg suggests in a Swedish-language study entitled *Resa och skriva. En guide till den*

³ In exploring the subjective dimension of modern travel writing, Swedish scholar Arne Melberg (cf. the continuation of the current section) goes as far as contemplating the genre as 'ett slags allegori för jagets tolkande och perspektiviska tillägnelse av världen' (2005: 25).

moderna reselitteraturen that mobility is a key facet not only of the subject matter of travel writing but of the writing mode itself, which he labels as nomadic: 'Reselitteraturen [är] inte [...] en tydligt avgränsad genre med en bestämd uppsättning regler utan en "nomadisk" skrivform, som lånar från t.ex. guideboken, det journalistiske reportaget, vittnesmålet, biografen, skissen, novellen, romanen och poesin' (2005: 32). We notice in the context of the current study that Melberg identifies reportage as one of the more factual modes of representation that can constitute or feed into travel writing, while also recognising the fictional underpinnings of the form. In a related fashion, Carl Thompson views travel writing as an act of negotiation between processes of reporting and of storytelling, adding that the attempted fusion of these processes 'ensures that the distinction between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' in travel writing is not as clear-cut as one might initially assume' (2011: 27).

A seminal, although more radical, precursor of generic understandings such as those articulated by Melberg and Thompson is the position taken by historian and literary scholar Hayden White. In a study, 'The Fictions of Factual Representation', from his influential 1978 collection of essays in cultural criticism entitled *Tropics of Discourse*, Hayden White makes the argument, of obvious relevance to reportage and travel writing, that, while literature of fact and imaginary literature may deal with different types of event, 'the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of a representation is a poetic process' (1978: 125), involving what White terms 'alternative linguistic protocols' (1978: 129) in the composition of discourses. Both factual and fictional modes of representation, White argues further, need to negotiate 'the truth of correspondence' as well as 'the truth of coherence' (1978: 122), so the two poles of this conceptual pair, with which Thompson's notions of reporting and storytelling show obvious similarity, cannot be used to distinguish systematically between the modes. In a more recent study, 'Natural Authors, Unnatural Narration', Henrik Skov Nielsen argues that narratives can employ techniques of fictionalisation 'regardless of whether the narrative is presented as fiction or not' (2010: 276). While disagreeing with what he terms the 'panfictionalist position' (2010: 280) associated with Hayden White, Skov Nielsen acknowledges that nonfictional narratives can locally produce fictionality by using techniques such as imaginative supplementation, omniscience, counterfactual observation and ironic asides. Building on the work of Richard Walsh, Skov Nielsen therefore proposes a distinction between fiction and fictionality, the latter of which may be found in nonfictional texts too, while adding his own distinction between global and local application of fictionality in narrative. In *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, Richard Walsh explains fictionality in functional and rhetorical terms, as a use of language and as a particular appeal to the reader's interpretative attention, and claims a communicative continuity between fictional and

nonfictional uses of language: 'Fictionality is rhetorical resource integral to the direct and serious use of language within a real-world communicative framework' (2007: 15-16).

Framed by these theoretical considerations and debates, we shall in the following explore some of the techniques of fictionalisation and alternative linguistic protocols, including patterning by metaphors and leitmotifs, that inform Johnson's factual narratives, while demonstrating conversely that truth of correspondence with actual environmental and infrastructural features (such as specific metropolitan streetscapes and landmark buildings) in contemporary Sweden may find its most manifest use in Johnson's fictional narratives.

Foreign correspondence from the land of home

Johnson begins his trio of Swedish travel reports by describing arrival by ferry at the southern shores of the country, but at the same time subverting any sense of essential border or threshold. In narrative terms, his account in the first instalment of 'Svenskt och svenskar' opens, unusually, with a coordinating 'and', with temporal markers that pretend the continuation of a larger travelogue, and on a distinctly downbeat, almost tired, note: 'Och slutligen, långt inne på andra dygnet, blev det ju Sverige' (Johnson 1929a: 2). These techniques serve to destabilise, disappoint or delay the meeting of expectations of decisive spatial change. Similarly, in terms of argument and figurative language, the article claims the existence of a European continental continuum to which it attaches Sweden by the modern metaphor of the chewing gum, typifying the humouristic inventiveness that informs Johnson's 'factual' style: 'Kontinenten är slut, men det kontinentala hänger i som ett segt tuggummi, utdraget från Moder Europas mun. [...] det är [...] svårt att släppa för dotter Svea' (Johnson 1929a: 2). The unsettling of fixed boundaries and binary relations between domestic and 'foreign' environments and mentalities is, as we shall see, a fundamental feature of Johnson's conceptualisations of the new national landscapes he explores in the narratives. In their resistance towards essentialising the national border, the narratives bear out current trends in border studies that emphasise the uncertain, non-natural, socially constructed, shifting and 'thick' or extended character of (national) borders, as exemplified by French anthropologist Michel Agier's recent study entitled *Borderlands* (2016: 15-36). Meanwhile, in the first instalment of 'Svenskt och svenskar', the journey continues by train towards the capital, whose built environment and entrepreneurial mentality is then scrutinised in further depth and detail in the second instalment, which we shall examine below.

In contrast, in the middle piece of the article trio, 'Det nya Sverige', to which we shall now turn out attention, Eyvind Johnson records his impressions of a journey through what we may term 'off-centre' Sweden after a prolonged absence. The unfamiliarity of the recording consciousness with the new landscape of the home nation aligns the perspective of the article with foreign correspondence. The changes to the make-up of the country(side), as asserted in the article, are of a profound and diverse nature, impacting on phenomena that range from road surfaces to gender characteristics. The mode of perception that governs the reportage piece is itself grounded in the new technologies of travel of the petrol age – and connected to collective transport, in keeping with the sense of a society 'on the move' that permeates the piece – in that the narrator observes places and people from on board an omnibus.⁴ Travel writing's principle of attachment and technique of the unexpected juxtaposition are activated in a hyperbolised form from the outset of Johnson's article, as the omnibus is conceived as a giant multicoloured reptile carrying the passengers in its belly: 'här kommer det underliga djuret krypande. Vi sitta i dess buk' (Johnson 1929b: 2⁵). Following Skov Nielsen above, the representation of this exotic entity may further be categorised as an instance of imaginative or counterfactual supplementation. In Johnson's narrative, the mobility of the omnibus as reptile is key in connecting formerly remote villages, its modern inclinations revealingly shining through in its preference for traveling on tarmac rather than crushed stone or, even worse, outmoded gravel. A new punctuality that some critics reserve for the modern metropolis is detectable in the precision by which the adherence of the bus to its timetable is assessed by onlookers along its route: 'Man [...] konstaterar, att chauffören är så mycket som en och en halv minut försenad, om man undrar smått bekymrat om det hänt omnibussen något.' The ironic register of the passage typifies the style of the piece. The principle of attachment is similarly in play when tractors are transformed into super-sized snails observable outside, snorting and rattling while moving their strange joints across the soil. Overall, the article foregrounds motorisation, the mechanisation of everyday life and the attendant sensory impacts as main manifestations of modernisation. Thus, more traditional smells of summer are filtered through the vapour of petrol emanating from the omnibus, while a new rural soundscape emerges dominated by a rich poetic variety of engine and traffic noises and corresponding onomatopoeia: 'fräser', 'pustar', 'smattrar', 'smäller', 'bullra', 'susa'.

⁴ Longer-distance travel by omnibus may read as an updated variant of the train journey, whose role in introducing travellers to new sensory experiences and an industrialised mode of consciousness in the nineteenth century Wolfgang Scivelbusch analyses in his seminal study *The Railway Journey*. However, Tim Youngs (2013: 69) documents that an aspect of the early twentieth-century enthusiasm for the automobile as a new mode of transport was the fact that it was seen as permitting a freer, less obscured view of nature and the travel route than that afforded by the railway infrastructure, including tunnelling and other hindrances to visual perception.

⁵ In the continuation of the current section of the article, citations from Johnson's article (1929b) will be provided without further referencing.

Even the article's conception of and nomenclature for modern man is bound up with mechanisation and motorisation when the farmhands observed in the fields are renamed as 'maskinskötare', their main emblems being the spanner protruding from the boiler suit pocket and the motorcycle as an indicator of increased leisure time. As for the modern woman, the travel account's arguably most pronounced and enchanted sequence concerns a group of female farm labourers whose tomboyish and trendy appearance is captured in a passage that casts the women as film stars of sorts, referencing iconic figures of contemporary world cinema such as Swedish Hollywood actress Greta Garbo and Canadian-American director Mack Sennett: 'Mack Sennetgirls, shinglade eller garbiska, smalhöftade och ringögda, klädda i blåa eller ljusgröna overalls och med sådana där förfalskade amerikanska matrosmössor på huvudena.' In keeping with the tradition of travel writing for drawing on the affective category of wonder when confronted with the sublime and the strange, the women are figured as 'åtta *under*'. The innovative and internationalised articulation of the cited passage and the alternative nomenclatures Johnson proposes suggest that both women ('räfs-girls') and men belong to a modern lexis – both are referred to as 'tecken', signs – that mark the arrival of a new epoch.⁶

Moreover, the country's factually changing linguistic landscape in an era of global interconnections forms part of the terrain Johnson traverses in his reflections when he identifies the 'radikalförändring' that the Swedish language is undergoing. He notices the proliferation of primarily Anglo-American loanwords linked to new technology, leisure culture and a faster-paced sense of time, citing nouns such as 'radio', 'sport' and 'camping', and hybrid verbal formations such as 'speeda' and 'rusha'. These innovations are conceived as indicative of a new national tonal register that mirrors internationalisation as well as societal acceleration and growth in the age of the engine, as articulated in a summing-up statement that gestures stylistically towards this new national lexis, while also providing an instance of Hayden White's alternative linguistic protocols: 'For övrigt verkar hela nationen att spida, att sätta full fräs, att på mycket kort tid ha sparkat in treans växel på den allmänna samhällseliga motorsnurren.' As the omnibus approaches its destination, a northern town, the intense symphony of the town's traffic and the modernity of its infrastructure provide further evidence for the travelogue's main assertion and discovery that a modern watershed – 'en slags revolution' – manifests itself also in the country's off-centre locations.

The article acknowledges, however, that this conclusion is dependent on viewpoint. In Johnson's travel account, the autoptic principle operates not so much as a means of

⁶ In the Stockholm segment of the first of Johnson's articles it is similarly registered and applauded how the modern Swedish woman has liberated herself by shedding traditional cultural baggage in favour of a uniform contemporary style. A degree of narratorial (self-)irony is displayed when fictionality is applied locally to convey the narrator's confused experience of decoding a number of different women as the same single person.

verifying and legitimising the reporting by recourse to the narrator's eye-witness status, as analysed by Carl Thompson, but rather as a source of potential subjectivity and contingency. A characteristic of Johnson's narrative is that the account of the state of the nation is punctuated by a self-reflective dimension that considers the extent to which the autoptic principle may tend to enlarge the experience of otherness and skew representation in the direction of difference and foreignisation: 'eftersom ögat blivit inställt på att se undantagen, märkvärdigheterna, undren, kanske det bara ser detta'. Throughout the travel account, Johnson's reflections strike a fine balance between understanding the processes of seeing (and indeed hearing, for example when the new word formations 'riva en i örat') as sources of perceptual precision or as sources of distortion, especially when tied to the consciousness of someone approaching from abroad after a lengthy absence. The article recognises that the manifestations of modernisation constitute a foreground – 'de stå i förgrunden' – that partly obscures a hinterland of more traditional ways of life.

Together, the use of pictorial perspective and terminology, the interrogation of the autoptic principle and the scrutiny of the relationship between the observed and the observer, as well as the inclusion of imaginative supplementation and alternative linguistic protocols contribute to positioning Johnson's travel report as a creative composition poised between fact and fiction. These features, in turn, bears out current understandings of modern and modernist travel writing as we have discussed them above. Furthermore, Johnson's reportage piece could be said to occupy a liminal position between domestic and foreign 'correspondence', confounding the boundary between home and away, familiarity and alterity, while also challenging the distinction between periphery and centre.

Building a new epoch

Whereas 'Det nya Sverige' centres programmatically on the countryside and its people, the follow-up piece, 'Svenskt och svenskar' (second instalment), published eight weeks later, concentrates complementarily on the capital, especially the transformation of its built environment, followed by a broader attempt at assessing the modern Swedish mentality at home and abroad. Together, the trio of texts we are considering suggests a systematic coverage of the national field from the borderland to the 'centre' and from rural to metropolitan. Johnson's articles appeared prominently and with eye-catching comic illustrations in the popular Sunday magazine of *Stockholms-Tidningen*, one of Sweden's first mass-circulation dailies, with political allegiances to the advancing Social Democratic party. The editorial presentation of the third piece positions it, in the same light-hearted register that informs Johnson's narratives themselves, as a continuation of the author's probing into

the state of the nation and the hearts and minds of its inhabitants: his 'närgångna rannsaken av svenska hjärtan och njurar'.⁷ It is possible to view the trio of articles as belonging to what Carl Thompson identifies as a well-established literature of 'home-travels' in which 'writers variously celebrate, lament or poke fun at their compatriots, and at the state of their own nation' (2011: 17). In terms of periodisation of this type of travel writing, Martin Walter in a recent study, "The Song They Sing Is the Song of the Road". Motoring and the Semantics of Space in Early Twentieth-Century British Travel Writing', observes that 'the time following the World War saw the revival of the home tour' (2015: 23) and that the domestic travel book flourished in the interwar period. In an important argument of obvious relevance to the current study, Walter (2015: 25) connects, moreover, the popularity of home-orientated travel writing with a need to renegotiate a sense of national selfhood in an era of rapid technological change. At the same time as Johnson's articles may be located in the sub-generic field of domestic travel writing, they contribute, as we have exemplified above, to confounding the very concept of home. The problematisation or re-articulation of national attributes in a period of growing global interconnectedness is likewise evident in the editorial presentation of the third piece when iconic Nordic images rooted in a deep past are replaced by an unorthodox notion of contemporary nationhood connected to transnational flows of culture and capital as well as to consumerism and materialism: 'Tvärt emot främlingars uppfattning om vår nation som en skara drömmande vikingar, äro vi snarere ett folk av amerikaniserade nutidsbarn, för vilka tanken på pengarnas mångfald och god mat inte är fullständigt främmande.'

In the representation of the national capital environment in 'Svenskt och svenskar' (second instalment), the main metaphors and markers of modernisation are buildings and building processes as well as the transformative role of labour in the construction of a new epoch. The gradual illumination and acknowledgement of the agency of working people in producing societal progress forms part of a wider ideological endeavour in the article towards resisting the temptation to perceive societal growth as organic or autonomous, instead insisting on the impossibility of divorcing processes of modernisation from actual acts of labour: 'Mer än någonsin är svenska folket ett folk av arbetare'. In this article, the autoptic principle is activated when the reporter joins a group of bystanders who share a vertical perspective on the construction of a multi-story building: 'Där nedanför stå vi och titta'. Like in the previous piece, the visual perception is supplemented by a strong emphasis on aural stimuli, contributing to further asserting the sensory accuracy and intensity of the account: 'det slamrar, dundrar, hamrar och smattrar av material och motorer'. At the same time, competing understandings of the observed phenomena are in play in this piece, too.

⁷ In the continuation of the current section of the article, citations from Johnson's article (1929c) will be provided without further referencing.

While the tangible, high-tempo infrastructural growth that is evident everywhere in the cityscape may initially appear as a surreal instance of buildings building themselves in search of sun, space and splendour – a vision worthy of wonderment in keeping with the tradition of reporting encounters with awesome strangeness in travel writing – this is subsequently refuted by recourse to the faculty of seeing and an implied principle of realism: *om man tittar efter ser man att just detta gör att huset växer – just detta att lägga sten på sten*. This trajectory from the fictional to the factual may be seen as a dynamic that bears out Skov Nielsen's argument, as outlined above, that fictionality can operate *locally* in nonfictional narratives. Furthermore, the trajectory feeds into a wider conceptualisation of the modern Swedish nation as a network of labour-based and commercial transactions, suggesting the formation of an alternative work-orientated vision of a great power: *'Man ser något, som kanske håller på att bli en stormakt, i arbete'*. In agreement with the German early-twentieth-century sociologist Georg Simmel's understanding in his seminal essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903) of the metropolis as 'the seat of the money economy' (2000: 176) and as characterised by a multiplicity and concentration of economic exchange, Johnson employs in his article the city context of Stockholm to visualise the nation as engaged in a variety of activities all aimed at *'få pengarna att rulla'*. As we shall demonstrate below, this method is paralleled in Johnson's novel *Bobinack*, which, within a particularised Stockholm topography, interconnects its collective of characters by way of their status as costumers, competitors, clients, providers etc. in multiple commercial relationships and transactions ranging from tenancy to prostitution.

In the latter parts of the third of Johnson's reportage pieces, its perspectives on urban and national space are supplemented by comparative reflections on the Swedish mentality and patriotic sensibility at home and abroad, identifying fluctuations and relativities according to patterns of proximity and distance within an international field of vision. The prioritisation of the practical, the material and the mechanical remains, however, a constant in Johnson's conceptualisation of the modern national mindset, as evidenced by the citing in the conclusion of the final article of the perception of the Swede as a *'dålig psykolog men god mekaniker'*.

Thus, almost by the entry point into the new decade, but before the sharp rise of totalitarianism in Europe during the 1930s, Johnson's trio of articles offer a largely optimistic examination of the rapid modernisation of metropolitan as well as 'marginal' environments in a 'minor' northern nation. Similar environments would serve, as we shall now seek to show, as settings in Johnson's fictional narratives from the same period.

Arenas of alienation, accident and affect

Operating in the different locations of a minor northern town and a capital city, Johnson's novels *Minnas* and *Bobinack* nevertheless show strong shared emphases on urban infrastructural, institutional and commercial modernity, on coordination and affective atmospheres in urban space, on topics and tropes of traffic including the traffic accident as plot device, and on the town/city as crime scene, both novels borrowing crime narrative components in a literary period perceived not only as a golden age of travel writing but of crime writing too.⁸ These similarities work to blur the boundary between the understandings of centre and off-centre environments in ways that are related to the aims and effects of Johnson's reportage articles. With these, the novels also have specific themes, motifs and figurative fields in common such as entertainment, sports and commercial culture, the mechanisation and motorisation of everyday life, the attendant new nomenclatures, the contemporary built environment including high-rise structures, and punctuality and synchronisation as modern temporalities.

Minnas centres on the charting of coming-of-age, fractured interpersonal relations (cf. its original subtitle of 'En gruppering' (Johnson: 1998)) and existential disorientation in a confined but complex northern town setting. In so doing, it displays a locational preference for public, semi-public and semi-private places such as the sports field, the shop, the office, the cinema, the communal library, the lunch restaurant, the illicit drinking place, the rented room, the park and, not least, the street. These are places that reflect early welfare provision, municipal culture, new leisure activities, commercialisation and commodification. Throughout the narrative, routes taken, or not taken, through the townscape, as conditioned by the climactic realities of the North, communicate the nature and degree of characters' emotional investments. Directional decisions, dilemmas and dramas (including accidental but fatal encounters) read as a lexis for existential choices, complications and crises. Maneuvering within and among the modern nodes of the town articulates interpersonal attractions, avoidances and reorientations.

The novel signals its modern intent by affording the football field a framing and symbolic function in the narrative. The search for a different life direction by one of its protagonists, the young office worker and talented local footballer Ivar Berr, is played out in the opening scene on the most contemporary and popular of public stages when he abandons a match in mid-play. The motif of football then resurfaces during the course of the narrative as an innovative trope for existential wilderness as the town develops into a labyrinth and arena of

⁸ John Scaggs notes in *Crime Fiction* that 'the inter-war period of detective fiction [is] known as the Golden Age (2005: 26).

alienation for the protagonist, whose fruitless traversing of it gesture back to the opening scene: 'Han går i sin labyrint og kan icke komma ur den; [...] han sparkar livets hemlighet som en boll framför sig' (Johnson 1928: 128).⁹ And in the final manifestation of the motif, in the conclusion of the novel after Ivar has decided to leave the northern town and go south to Stockholm, it is a shared trajectory towards the football field that indicates a degree of rapprochement between Ivar and, it is suggested, his unacknowledged biological father, the head librarian Herr Clerk. To the latter, the area and terminology of football is a hitherto unknown terrain of the town culture, leaving him in his own assessment behind the times:

- Man sparkar boll där borta? frågade herr Clerk som om han först nu upptäckt att det fanns en idrottsförening i staden; och då han såg Ivars småleende, fortsatte han:
- Jag har aldrig sett en riktig fotbollsmatch. Det är att vara efter sin tid – men jag har alltid varit så upptagen... Är det en riktig match man spelar nu eller övar man sig bara?
- Man tränar, sade Ivar. (292)

Ivar's deep familiarity with the modern parlance of the sport is shared by the style of narrative itself, whose hyperbolic, colloquial and rhythmical opening excels in formulations such as 'Andra elvan spelade ojämnt', '[d]en gjorde off-sider titt tätt og skördade frisparkar' (7). As the novel finishes, its metaphorical development of the topic of football has turned it into a unifying and healing motif of sorts, when Herr Clerk compensates for Ivar's absence and a range of other ruptures by a new presence 'nere på fotbollsplan nästan varenda kväll' (299), a locational articulation of affect typical of the novel's method.

Alongside the football field, several other locational leitmotifs punctuate the narrative, prominent among which is the affordable eatery and guesthouse, 'Kristina Galéns Matservering & Rum för Resande' (17), where several members of the novel's character collective take their lunch and interact. The elaborate name carries echoes of Knut Hamsun's seminal novel *Sult* – a major influence on Johnson's urban modernism – in the fourth part of which the starving writer resides in a 'Beværtning & logi for reisende' (115). As for the role of the urban outdoors in *Minnas* beyond the football arena, the modern streetscape supplies a variety of affective atmospheres throughout the narrative. It is bound up with romance as well as loss and death, again not unlike its overarching functions in *Sult*. The nocturnal street and park represent the pull of Ivar's passion for the shop assistant Birgit Erlandsson, away from the confines of the familial flat and his sympathy in principle with his widowed mother and the educational ambition of his younger brother. The romance between Ivar and Birgit originates in the town park at night time, when they engage, as urban solitaires and strangers, in a Hamsunesque play of spatial and visual approach and avoidance. The romance begins to materialise when sightlines connect the male in the street below and the

⁹ In the continuation of the current section of the article, citations from the stated edition of *Minnas* will be followed by page numbers only.

female in her flat above (cf. the positioning of the protagonist and his love interest named Ylayali in part one of *Sult*): 'Utan att tända ljus ställde hon sig vid fönstret och såg ner på gatan: ynglingen stod där nere och tittade upp' (44). And equally, the first signs of the deterioration of the romance due to a third-party threat are observed by Ivar from a parallel street-level position, elsewhere in the town: fönstret täcktes av två skuggor [...]. En liknade Birgit; men den andra var en man' (126). Thus, it may be argued that the novel bears out the following reflection by Hana Wirth Neshier in *City Codes. Reading the Modern Urban Novel* but, significantly, transfers the depiction of the mental effects of the urban environment to a smaller-town setting: '[c]ities intensify the human condition of missed opportunities, choices, and inaccessibility. Every glimpsed interior, every passerby, every figure in a distant window, every row of doors [...] is both an invitation and a rebuff' (1996: 9).

The urban street and the outlying road in Johnson's novel are, moreover, bound up with the death of both Ivar's mother and brother. In our discussion above of 'Det nya Sverige', we identified Johnson's interest in the modern topics and tropes of traffic and motorisation in 'peripheral' places. A similar emphasis is in evidence as plot device in *Minnas* when a combination of the wintry reshaping of the road layout and an oncoming heavy vehicle causes the death of Ivar's mother by traffic accident as her boot gets stuck in a snow wall along the pavement and she fails to notice 'en tung lastbil' (121) which hits her. The cause of the death of Ivar's brother Martin is of a very different nature – he is murdered by the mentally unstable and symbolically named character of J. A. Galén in an act that seems aimed at eradicating an object of his oppressed homoerotic desire – but the focus on fatal roads and routes remains constant as the unsuspecting Martin is taken on a sinister walk 'genom stan och långt ud på landsvägen' (265), into an unknown liminal zone where he meets his destiny. At this point the town changes into a veritable crime fiction scene, complete with police cars, sirens, chases and last-minute intervention, the novel thus gesturing towards contemporary urban crime writing modes. It is noteworthy, moreover, that the modern trope of the car collision contributes to an underlying figurative connection between the deaths of the mother and the brother. The connection in question is enabled by the status of the town as a memory-scape for several of the novel's characters, in this instance Ivar. While a heavy lorry is directly implicated in the mother's fatal accident, as we saw, the threat to Martin's life is prefigured by an unsettling combination of Ivar's childhood memory of the brother's close escape from a similar accident and a present-level perception, informed by visual and aural stimuli, of a waiting heavy vehicle ominously occupying the same 'chronotope': 'Här ett hus, en port där Martin en gång höll på att bli överkörd av en lastauto. Ivar kände en lätt ångest för minnet; det fick honom att vrida på huvudet och se in i portgången, där en tungt lastad auto väntade och signalerade.' (218) A related figurative language is used, furthermore, to articulate the psychological necessity of Ivar's concluding

decision to leave the town after the bereavements and losses: the decision is figured as being as instinctive and essential as the urge to jump aside when meeting an automobile in the bend of a road 'för att icke bli överkörd' (291). The threats and tensions evident in these uses of the trope of the motorcar may be connected to considerations made by Martin Walter in his aforementioned article on motoring and the semantics of space in British travel writing. Walter discusses how interwar society responded with ambivalence when the increased intrusion of the car onto urban and rural roads challenged existing notions of aesthetics, perception and safety, resulting in a tendency to conceptualise the automobile 'as a technological phenomenon and a cultural force that had to be "tamed"' (2015: 25). Related ideas of as yet un-tamed dimensions of motoring may be traceable not only in *Minnas*, but also in the defamiliarising and 'monstrous' rendering of the omnibus in 'Det nya Sverige' as discussed above and, as we shall see below, in the central role of car collision and traffic trouble in the composition of the novel *Bobinack*.

We shall close our consideration of the role of environmental modernity in *Minnas* by emphasising that the representation of the mechanisation of everyday life and culture in the novel is by no means restricted to traffic and the automobile. The telephone, the typewriter, the radio and the gramophone are recurring phenomena in the narrative, the latter, for example, contributing at Christmas time to an ironic fusion of traditional and mechanised sound as reproduced by use of modern onomatopoeia, a stylistic feature favoured by Johnson in this and other texts: "'Rrrr, klick, rrr... Stilla natt, heliga natt...'" (119). The impact of mechanised sound and vision is portrayed as particularly pronounced in the site of the silent-era cinema. This is depicted as a vivid sensory space of popular culture in the town, the following passage capturing and mirroring the tempo, the unexpected juxtapositions and the abrupt jumps from one sensation to the next that form part of the filmic experience: 'bions levande mörker, knäppningar, viskningar, folkträngsel och höga förklarande ord. Dramaet snurrade på, och ett två tre tog rullen slut och det blev ljust i salongen' (176). Thus, the town cinema, just like the novel itself, bears the imprint of the dynamics of technological, cultural and social modernity in the north.

Twin towers and traffic trouble

Whereas *Minnas* focuses on modern existence and environments in the 'periphery' and finishes with an implied travel route towards the capital, *Bobinack* is bound to the centre throughout. Centripetal forces are fundamental to the composition of the novel. The narrative is played out in a particularised Stockholm topography, rich in authentic street and landmark references. The novel shows, like the Stockholm reportage of 'Svenskt och

svenskar' (second instalment), a notable attraction to high-rise buildings. Authentic structures at the heart of the urban geography of the novel are the twin towers of Kungstornen, which were completed in 1924-1925, inspired by the architecture of Lower Manhattan, and are considered among the first modern skyscrapers in Europe. The towers function in the narrative as markers of modernity, as sites of spatial suspense and as vantage points enabling overview, in particular of the principal avenue of Kungsgatan, inaugurated in 1911 (and the site of Stockholm's first experimentation with tramcar traffic and of its first traffic lights in 1925), which in turn feeds into the Stureplan public square, a key city-centre interchange. These adjoining city-centre locations are foregrounded in the storyline and operate in the overarching composition of the novel as a centripetal zone of recurrence and character intersection. They signal, moreover, the novel's credentials as a publication aligned with the cutting edge of domestic modernity¹⁰ – and of international literary innovation. Örjan Lindberger observes in his discussion of *Bobinack* in the first volume, *Norrbottningen som blev europé* of his study of Johnson's life and work that the novel's central setting represents '[l]okaliteten [...] som vid början av 1930-talet uppfattades som den mest moderna och storstadsmässiga i Stockholm' (1986: 275). Lindberger goes on to point out that the device of using a central area or square in a metropolis as a site for the interconnection of human destinies had been showcased a few years previously by Dos Passos in *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and by Döblin in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), both of which Johnson was familiar with and is likely to have been influenced by.¹¹

Key to the novel's composition, and to the organisation of its character collective, is a carefully choreographed traffic accident scene set in Kungsgatan below the twin towers that flank it. The scene displays a collision between a tramcar and an automobile, thus developing plot devices used in *Minnas* as discussed above. The Kungsgatan accident scene opens *Bobinack* and is witnessed from the high-rise buildings, from a road arch bridge, Malmkillnadsbron, that crosses Kungsgatan adjacent to the towers, and from street level. During the course of the subsequent development of the novel's storylines, the scene is 're-

¹⁰ *Bobinack* may be regarded as a precursor of important instances in Swedish novel writing of the 1930s of compositionally centring narratives on contemporary Stockholm infrastructural arteries or landmarks such as Ivar Lo-Johansson's *Kungsgatan* (1935) (for a fuller consideration of this novel, see Williams (1999)) and Josef Kjellgren's *Människor kring en bro* (1935), the latter depicting the construction of Västerbron, a new bridge connection between the northern and southern parts of the city, opened in November 1935. The intrinsic role of a Nordic capital streetscape in Johnson's novels from this period would ultimately be indebted to the paradigmatic use of the Kristiania topography in *Slut*, Hamsun's urban geography thus obliquely informing both of the novelistic environments, complementary in other respects, under consideration in this article. The closest and fullest counterpart to *Sult* found in Johnson's work is the novel *Stad i ljus* (1928), depicting a starving Swedish writer in Paris while gesturing back to similar experiences in Stockholm (for a fuller consideration of this novel, see Thomsen (2015b: 81-86)).

¹¹ While published in 1932, *Bobinack* finishes with the temporal marker of '1930-32' (Johnson 1932: 321), presumably an indication of its period of conception, which positions the novel even closer in time to its international literary precursors.

taken' from various angles, in a fashion reminiscent of film, and focalised through the gazes of different members of the novel's character ensemble, who have either witnessed or been directly implicated in the accident, while the collision also features as a conversational topic. A sophisticated system of multidirectional seeing in urban space is gradually built around the collision site. The novel thus shares with modernist travel writing, as discussed earlier in this article, an emphasis on experimenting with viewpoint and questioning the authority of a singular perspective. Only towards the end of the novel is the accident drama mapped in a manner that seems fully informed of its causes and cast of characters, the narrative thus cumulatively clarifying positions, both mental and spatial, of everybody involved. In its re-takings of the past incident while moving forward, the novel gestures, moreover, towards the retrospective detection technique of the crime novel, a genre which it also references in other ways, while at the same time resisting any deeper sense of resolution.

The elevations and the facades of the high-rise structures are vital to the execution of the accident scene and the representation of the responses it creates. Furthermore, tall buildings constitute throughout the novel environments that enable observations and overviews of the urban outdoors, the creation of spatial tension, the registration of shared affective responses, and the depiction of layered or compartmentalised living, connected by stairwells and the traffic of the lift, both regular motifs. The large public canvas constituted by the facade of the office tower functions in the opening episode as a seismographic screen of sorts capturing the coordinated collective response to the collision. The conjoined movement, across multiple storeys, of window components, hands, near-identical faces and hairdos seems choreographed to demonstrate a dominant affective atmosphere that fills space and annuls the boundary between the built environment and human beings as well as between individuals:

Själva olyckan var inte mycket att fästa sig vid. En bil som ränt snett upp mot en spårvagn och fått en törn så att den dansat runt; krossade glas, några skråmor och flämtande bröst – inget liv som gått förlorat. Men den fyllde ändå hela gatan på ett sällsamt sätt. Fönsterrad efter fönsterrad slogs upp av händer, så ivriga och samtidiga, som om de styrts av en gemensam vilja, ansikten av ungefär samma typ, med samma frisyr och samma förskräckta nyfikenhet, fyllde fönsteröppningarna våning efter våning, händer stödde sig med samma på en gång rädda och djärva grepp mot fönsterbräden och fönsterposter och alla röster hade en gemensam fråga, som genast följdes av ett gemensamt svar: kollision. (Johnson 1932: 5-6)¹²

This rhythmic rendering of a public-space response conflates architectural and bodily language, while the immaculate coordination on show in turn borders on the behaviour of

¹² In the continuation of the current section of the article, citations from the stated edition of *Bobinack* will be followed by page numbers only.

the machine, a recurring preoccupation in Johnson's texts, as we have seen. The response reads, moreover, as a collective embodiment of the careful synchronisation and sequencing that sociologist Georg Simmel sees as essential in making shared urban existence functional. Simmel argues that the aggregation of numerous city dwellers with highly differentiated interests requires a supra-personal 'technique' of metropolitan life that is 'unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule' (177). This intricate urban coordinating timekeeping could likewise be said to inform the compositional logics of centripetal character convergence and the diachronic piecing together of a picture of past synchronicity that are used in *Bobinack* in the realisation and development of the collision scene.

Tall buildings are central not only to the reporting of the collective response to the traffic accident but also to the depiction of inter-war capitalist entrepreneurship. This is represented by the socially mobile Kyndel Aromaticus, the founder and director of a company, Aromatica, specialising in a dubious range of modern toiletries and medicines, and with head offices in one of the Kungstornen tower blocks. Aromaticus could be said to both epitomise and parody the entrepreneurial spirit of the age – centred on multiple ways of putting 'money in motion' – that Johnson identifies in the Stockholm reportage of 'Svenskt och svenskar'. In *Bobinack*, the critique of capitalist ideology is explicit in the following characterisation of Aromaticus, which, similarly, echoes positions and motifs articulated in 'Svenskt och svenskar' by implicitly advocating the importance of actual acts of labour and focus on building processes: 'Omedvetet förkroppsligade han kapitalismens idé: att inte bygga, men låta bygga, att inte arbeta, men låta arbeta; att ta betalt för att bli buren' (15). The vertical grandeur of the structures that house the company is, in an interesting play with large and small scale, transformed by the director's gaze into something both universal and organic, rather than socially and humanly constructs: 'Kungstornen, stolta borst i världens hud' (7). Thus, something akin to travel writing's principle of attachment is activated in relation to the capitalist infrastructure. The stylistic (and ideological) device of conceptualising the built environment as naturally derived is, again, reminiscent of ideas tested, and rejected, in 'Svenskt och svenskar' (second instalment): 'då man inte alltid tydligt ser ansträngningen, tycker [man], att något stort växer upp helt av sig själv' (Johnson 1929c: 3).

While the tower in which the Aromatica firm is located is imbued with a sense of elevated power, it is by no means immune from the impact of the world below. On the contrary, it serves as a giant membrane of sorts, receiving the strong urban sound waves, which, in combination with the technological soundscape of the company office hotspot, exemplifies the intensified sensory stimulation that Georg Simmel associates with the modern

metropolis: 'Dels ringde telefonerna, dels smattrade skrivmaskinerna, dels kom livets larm uppstörtande från Kungsgatan och fick hela huset att darra' (6). It is from within this environment, moreover, that Aromaticus observes the traffic accident, and different responses to it, by multiple acts of 'entrepreneurial' seeing: He registers not only the aftermath of the collision itself but also the office employees' coordinated but unauthorised attraction to the street drama below (an attraction described in capitalist terms as a form of theft of work time) as well as the competitor, the eponymous Bobinack's and his assistant's own observation of the accident from the arch bridge above; the unsettling phenomenology of the latter perception is captured in a foreignising and fragmenting vision of body parts as props in a surreal modernist street performance: 'Uppe på broräcket mellan tornen såg han två huvuden. De verkade avskurna – som om någon haft två huvuden i en väska, tagit upp dem, lagt dem eller glömt dem där och gått sin väg' (7-8). Sigmund Freud's analysis of the attributes and effects of uncanny devices of literature in his seminal essay 'Das Unheimliche', published a decade or so before Johnson's novel, would seem applicable to this passage, especially the emphasis of the semi-independent role of body parts: 'Abgetrennte Glieder [...] haben etwas ungemein Unheimliches an sich' (1947 [1919]: 257).

Thus, patterns of perception, plotting and the aesthetics of place in the novel cannot be detached from the modern metropolitan environment. The narrative remains true to the significance of the contemporary Stockholm setting throughout. It seems fitting, therefore, that the (anti-)climactic celebrations of Aromaticus' fortieth birthday are located in a restaurant on the 12th floor of a high-rise building, presumably on one of the twin towers, and that the birthday present he receives from his wife is a painting displaying a further modern infrastructural Stockholm streetscape landmark of vertical attraction and risk, the Katarina Lift.¹³ During the celebrations, the multi-story building serves both as a contemporary vantage point for a sublime Stockholm panorama, the only more 'amodern' urban perspective provided in the novel ('man glömde under en lång stund bort Aromaticus för Stockholm, den gudomliga staden i mjukt ljus och mjukt mörker' (85)), and, to converse effect, as the platform for a fatal fall by one of the guests. This represents one of two deaths shrouded in mystery that the novel depicts within its intermittent crime-writing register. The fatal fall is represented not only directly, albeit in indeterminate terms, but also in a juxtaposed newspaper article version. The novel thus incorporates a fiction of factual representation and objectivity, including imitated newspaper graphics, and blurs the boundary between the discourses of the novel and of modern journalistic reportage, themes explored in various ways during the course of this article. The article fragment conveys a sense of immediacy and deadline haste and reads:

¹³ Aromaticus' adverse emotive response to the pictorial present works in the narrative as a premonition of a fatal human fall from a high-rise structure (see the continuation of the current discussion): 'I tavlan fanns något han inte tyckte om; kanske det var en hisnande känsla av höjd och fall' (83).

I pressläggningsögonblicket meddelas.

Vid tvåtiden i natt inträffade i en av våra större restauranger en olyckshändelse med dödlig utgång. En av deltagarna i en födelsedagsfest, försäkringstjänstemannen Otto Cederquist, råkade av någon anledning snava på en matta och falla så olyckligt, att han gled ut genom det öppna fönstret och störtade från tolv våningars höjd ner i gatan.

This passage sits alongside several other news items reflecting events in the novel and together imitating an entire newspaper page, including appropriate layout, transposed onto one of the book's pages.

Moving on, finally, to the novel's 'conclusion', the techniques of character confluence in urban space and mutual seeing from shifting angles are again recognisable as key drivers of the structuring and pacing of the narrative. The conclusion displays how protagonists for different reasons and along different routes make their ways on foot from outlying districts towards the Stockholm city centre; here, they intersect in the streetscape, align along pavements, ascend through the same stairwell and eventually gather in the backroom office of Bobinack's competing firm, Solkraft, which specialises in a mechanical apparatus with alleged therapeutic properties, a technological leitmotif in the novel. The destination resembles the topos of the confined room with all suspects assembled familiar from the whodunit form of crime novel that was popular in the period, but with the profound twist that a crime, the murder of the eponymous character, is committed rather than cleared up during the climactic scene. Thus, the novel programmatically resists any sense of closure, as evidenced, moreover, by the addition of a further document fiction, a postscript consisting of a letter from one of the characters, the writer Torpare, to the author, in which the character disputes the author's apparent quest for a stronger sense of an ending: 'alltså: ni anser att jag bör veta hur "det gick". Ni menar förstås hur det slutade? Då vill jag genast tala om för er, att det inte "slutade" alls' (310). The novel's conclusion thus remains true to the formal and topographical experimentation that is a common denominator of Eyvind Johnson's work, fictional and factual, from the period in question, as we have aimed to demonstrate in this article.

The experimentation and innovation featured in Johnson's prose modernism may, finally, be placed in the context of the broader complexity and cultural contribution of Scandinavian literary modernism, as mapped out by Anna Westerståhl Stenport in her essay 'Scandinavian Modernism: Stories of the Transnational and the Discontinuous'. In agreement with other recent orientations in modernism studies (such as Doyle and Winkiel (2005), cf. also Thomsen (2015a, 2015b)), Westerståhl Stenport aligns Scandinavian modernism with the challenges coming from 'so-called marginal European locales' (2012: 479) to a longstanding centrist tradition in the understanding of European modernism privileging major literatures

and major metropolises. Westerståhl Stenport argues that, with regard to periodisation as well as geography, Scandinavian modernism can be considered unusually expansive. Identifying ideological concerns that are of striking similarity and relevance to those represented in Eyvind Johnson's narratives as analysed above, Westerståhl Stenport observes that '[m]odernism in Scandinavia emerges both early and late, through starts and stops, in intermittent and localized forms, as well as in tension with ideologies of margin and center, import and export, and nation and cosmopolitanism' (2012: 479). Scandinavian modernism is shown to be informed by a radical rethinking of the nation, of national parameters as such, and of perceived marginality, as it develops through a variety of transnational relationships. Westerståhl Stenport discusses further how Scandinavia's rapid transition into social modernity called for matching aesthetic changes. This perspective, too, is valid to Johnson specifically, whom she characterises as 'one of Swedish literature's foremost innovators in prose modernism' (2012: 492) and positions within a generation of proletarian writers who contributed 'one of the most prominent and unique strands of Swedish modernism' (2012: 492), seeking to let new forms of literature both capture and contribute to social change.

Reinforcing this connection between aesthetic and social change in Swedish modernism and modernity, we can round off our discussion by briefly returning to the opening topic of Johnson's re-acquaintance with, and subsequent relocation to, Sweden in 1929-30. In his retrospective reflections entitled 'Perspektiv på 20- och 30-talen', Johnson situates his domestic encounter with 'det nya' (1992: 93, his own emphasis) not so much within literature as within the environmental innovations of architecture, as epitomised by the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930. Johnson views the exhibition and the experimentation it promoted as significant both in pioneering a new aesthetics – 'en ny uppfattning om vad som är vackert' (1992: 94) – and in signalling through a vision of functional building a social watershed: the ideas informing the exhibition 'bottnade i, härleddes av och ledde in i en social omvälvning av hela samhället' (1992: 94). In the field of literature, Johnson's own fictional and factual prose from the period pioneers parallel reorientations and ambitions.

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