LOST WORDS AND LOST WORLDS: MODERNITY AND THE LANGUAGE OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY STOCKHOLM

Cambridge Human Geography

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LOST WORDS
AND LOST WORLDS:
MODERNITY AND THE
LANGUAGE OF EVERYDAY
LIFE IN LATE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
STOCKHOLM

ALLAN PRED
Department of Geography
University of California, Berkeley
History does not merely touch on language, but takes place in it.

THEODOR ADORNO

in the history of words there is much that indicates the history of men [and women].

JAMES JOYCE
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of plates</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forewording and forewarning fragments</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of abbreviations</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Pretext(s): lost words as reflections of lost worlds</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 A diversity of tongues: the practiced languages of Stockholm, 1880–1900</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mundane mouthings about things, tasks, and tactics: lost wor(l)ds of production, distribution, and consumption</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Footing about the city, or getting around the streets and ideological domination: lost wor(l)ds of spatial orientation and popular geography</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Finger-pointing at the Other and speaking I to eye: lost wor(l)ds of social reference and address</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The world of the docks and the docker in the world</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last words on lost worlds</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plates

Between pages 206 and 207

1 Skeppsbron (anchored steamboats), Slussen (open drawbridge) and The Old City, 1896. (This and all other photographs courtesy of Stockholm Stadsmuseum (the City of Stockholm Museum).)
2 Activity on Skeppsbron, 1901
3 Stadsgården, looking east, late 1890s
4 Stadsgården, further eastern section, 1896
5 Värtahamnen, 1887
6 A portion of Kornhamnen and adjacent Kornhamnstorg, The Old City, 1893
7 Unloading project, Skeppsbron, late 1890s
8 Grain bearers at the western end of Stadsgården, 1900

Between pages 232 and 233

9 Bondegatan, looking east, 1898
10 Götgatan, looking north, at the intersection of Kocksgatan, 1899
11 Götgatan, looking north at Sankt Paulsgatan, 1901
12 Götgatan, looking north at the intersection of Hornsgatan and Brunnsbacken, 1901
13 Östra Slussgatan, looking towards Slussen and Skeppsbron, 1896
14 Panoramic view, 1897
15 Österlånggatan, looking north, close to the intersection with Johannesgränd, 1893
16 A midday scene inside a public bar, situated on Österlånggatan, about 1890

All photographs by courtesy of Stockholms Stadsmuseum (the City of Stockholm Museum).
Figures

1a County and regional divisions used in table 1

1b Birthplace origins per 1,000 Stockholm residents, 1880 and 1900 (Source: Uno Gustafson, Industrialismens storstad: Studier rörande Stockholms sociala, ekonomiska och demografiska struktur, 1860–1910 [Stockholm: Monografier utgivna av Stockholms kommunalförvaltning, 37, 1976], 219–220)

2 The concentration of voting power: Stockholm municipal elections, 1881 and 1891 (Source: Berättelse angående Stockholms kommunförvaltning- År 1885 [Stockholm: 1897], 63)

3 District and island designations within Stockholm

4 The growth and transformation of Stockholm manufacturing, 1880–1900 (Source: Gustafson, Industrialisms, 235, 253–254, 257–258)

5a Location of Stockholm manufacturing employment, by establishment, 1880


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Street-name revision and the naming of new and extended streets, 1884–1885 <em>(Source: Berättelse angående, Stockholms Stadsfullmäktiges Beredningsutskottets utlättanden och memorial år 1884</em> [Stockholm: 1885])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 The <em>rotar</em>, or registration districts, of Stockholm as of 1895 <em>(Source: William-Olsson, Huvuddragen, 18)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 <em>Arsenalsgatan</em> from Gustaf Adolfs torg to Kungsträdgårdsgatan, or <em>Snobbrannan</em> (The Snob Gutter) <em>(Source: A. R. Lundgren, Atlas over Stockholm, 1885)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Population turnover in Stockholm, 1880–1900, as reflected by in- and out-migration from the city’s registration districts, or <em>rotar</em> <em>(Source: Berättelse angående Stockholms kommunförvaltning. År 1800 through År 1900)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Net percentage changes in industrial and artisanal employment: Stockholm and Sweden as a whole, 1878–1903 <em>(Source: Gustafson, Industrialisms, 202)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Docking areas of Stockholm as of the mid 1890s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Domestic shipping trade, linear shipments exceeding thirty kilometers: 1893 <em>(Source: Thomas Thorburn, Sveriges inrikes sjöfart 1818–1949</em> [Uddevalla: Barneviks tryckeri, 1958], facing 114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Hinterland brick shipments to Stockholm: 1885 <em>(Source: Bruno, Tegelindustrin, figure 11 [loose]</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Duration of immediately preceding occupation of 363 Stockholm dockworkers: 1895–96 <em>(Source: Knut Tengdahl, Material till bedömande af hamnarbetarnes i Stockholm lefnadsförhållande</em> [Skrifter utgiven af Lorenska stiftelsen, no. 13, 1897], 12–13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of figures

22 Birthplaces of 132 Stockholm dockworkers, aggregated by county (Source: SSA 1889 and 1896) 213
23 A typical general-cargo unloading project (Source: Sigurd Erixon, Stockholms hamnarbetare före fackföringens genombrott- En etnologisk studie [Stockholm: Nordisk Rotogravyr, 1949], 83) 215
24 Elements of a coal unloading project (Source: Erixon, Stockholms hamnarbetare, 66) 216
25 A typical grain unloading project (Source: Erixon, Stockholms hamnarbetare, 54) 218
26 The residential distribution of dockworker trade-union members (Source: Erixon, Stockholms hamnarbetare, 154–155) 230
27 The daily path of Sörmlands-Nisse 231
28 Information contacts and strike-support donations of the Dockworkers’ Trade Union of Stockholm, 1895–1900 (Sources: LMA, various dates 1895–1900; and Rolf Sandbäck, Hamnarbetarna och deras fackförbund- Om hamnarbetarfackföringarnas och Transportarbetarförbundets verksamhet före 1900 [Uppsala: mimeographed Fil. lic. thesis, 1966]) 239
Forewording and forewarning fragments

Stockholm between 1880 and 1900. A becoming place. A place becoming. A city in transformation. A two-decade period during which the local economy was restructured in fits and starts, during which manufacturing output became increasingly concentrated in large-scale factories, thereby undercutting the relative role of artisan and small workshop production. A two-decade period during which the city’s youthful capitalism – borne along by the uncontrolled, unfettered actions of investing agents – arose from the depression of the late 1870s, surging and lurching forward from 1880 onward, stumbling temporarily first in the mid eighties, again between 1889 and 1891, and yet again in the final year of the century, all the while responding to transformations in the international division of labor and the European world economy, all the while contributing to those same transformations. A twenty-year span during which modernity made its many-guised entrance. A twenty-year span during which consumption became marked by a whirl of quickly passing fashions and fads, during which commodity fetishism took hold, during which the circulation of money accelerated, during which the iron cage of bureaucratic regulation and surveillance was dropped down over previously ungoverned details of daily existence, during which everyday life on the streets was ever more characterized by restless and anonymous movement, by fleeting fragmented impressions. A score of years of demographic ferment, of high population turnover, of people flocking into the city, of people returning to the countryside and lesser towns, of people departing for destinations across the Atlantic, of people making repeated residential shifts within the city. A score of years during which the population of Sweden’s largest urban center expanded at an unprecedented rate, going from well under 170,000 to over 300,000. A tumultuous time during which the city’s urban geography was radically modified by successive waves of speculative investment and creative destruction. A tumultuous time during which remnants of the rural and pastoral were obliterated, during which hills of moraine and bedrock were leveled and sheer cliffs blasted away, during which the construction and reconstruction of housing led to a more pronounced spatial segregation of the classes, during which areal expan-
Forewording and forewarning fragments

sion, the appearance of broad esplanades and other forms of infrastructure development were generally inseparable, during which new monumental buildings and signifiers of technology triumphant were erected.

The end-of-the-century economic, demographic, and spatial transformation of Stockholm, its conversion from an overgrown small city into a modern European capital, its engulfment by industrial capitalism and modernity, its constant becoming, was synonymous with the appearance of new practices, with the modification or elimination of previously existing practices. The transformation of practices characterizing daily life in Stockholm was, in turn, one with new or altered power relations and modified forms of language and knowledge, of individual and collective consciousness.

In this book I re-present bits and pieces from perhaps the most dramatic era in the social and spatial transformation of Stockholm. This attempt to capture critical details of the becoming of a particular city over a particular period of time, of the uninterrupted reproduction and transformation of a specific urban region, depends largely on an interpretation of lost elements of language, of forgotten fragments of daily discourse, of lost words and meanings that belonged to individual members of the working and periodically employed classes, that belonged to speaking, thinking, feeling subjects who made history with and through their bodies as they ceaselessly moved through time-space.

The interpretive study which unfolds on these pages is informed by a specific theory – a theory of place, or region, an historically contingent process. That theory, as I have developed it in previous writings, results from the coalescence of several discourses ongoing within social theory, social philosophy, the Annales school of history, human geography, and anthropology. To accept the theory as a research-informing construct is to accept the view that human geography and social and economic history cannot be prized apart. It is to accept the view that people do not produce history under conditions of their own choosing, but in the context of already existing, directly encountered social and spatial structures. It is to accept the view that the “becoming” of any settled area involves the local coexistence of structuring processes which vary in their geographical extent and temporal duration and which concretely interpenetrate with one another through the time-space specific practices of mediating agents,
Forewording and forewarning fragments

through the lived biographies of actual people. It is to accept the view that
the production of history, the construction of human geographies and the
formation of biographies are enwrapped in one another and inseparable
from the dialectical intertwinnings of human practice, power relations, and
consciousness.

The textual strategy here employed is one of blurred genres, one of blurring
the “social scientific” and the “humanistic,” one of blurring the
“academic” and the “artistic,” one of juxtaposing conventional and
unconventional forms. It is one of cold numbers and sentences represent-
ing objects from the past intermingling with warm voices and expressions
representing subjects from the past. It is one of theoretical and conceptual
formulations reduced to aphorisms and words that dance across the page.
It is one of merging terms of analysis with phrases that bring alive. The
unwarned reader may well frown upon this strategy, may well regard the
use of repetitive devices, spelling manipulations, and what appears to be
poetry, as nothing more than annoying self-indulgence, perverse free verse,
intellectual posing and strutting, cuteness for the sake of cuteness. But, as
I speak of strategy, there is an intent-filled scheme to all this verbal
maneuvering and legerdemain. The poetics of my textual strategy are the
politics of my textual strategy.

I, the author, lack the authority to command or control what definite
meanings you extract from my text; but I am free to play the art-ificer, to
play upon words, in an effort to affect your reading, in an effort to make
you understand and mentally see what you otherwise might not under-
stand or mentally see, in an effort, somehow, to push through the filter of
preconceptions and predispositions deeply rooted in your social, bio-
ographical, and disciplinary past. Chameleon-like (mis)spellings, hyphen-
ations and word-couplings are de- and re-signed either so as to trigger pre-
viously unmade associations, or so as to convey the ambiguity, the shifting
subtleties and nuances, the multiplicity of meanings embedded in past
elements of discourse. The repetitive-phrase sentence as driving-pulsating
sentence, as pound-pound-pummmel sentence, straightforwardly strives to
violate reception barriers, to hammer home a message; while the
repetitive-phrase sentence as facet-rotating sentence, as prism-turning
sentence, by putting a cubistic face on the subject or object around which
it circles, strives to seduce, to be (mind’s) eye-opening, to whisper sweet
(and sour) newthings in the (mind’s) ear. The use of poetic forms is not an
end in itself, but
Forewording and forewarning fragments

an attempt to exploit the physicality of the text,
   to exploit the landscape of the page
   constituted by ink-black deposits and virgin spaces,
   to give the reader more than one break,
   to force a momentary stop and ponder,
   and then another,
   and another,

in order to suggest meaning,
   to emphasize and focus,
   to shed white on (what) matters.
Abbreviations

ACM Archives of the Stockholm City Museum (Stockholms Stadsmuseum). All references pertain to Uppteckningar om olika miljöer, arbetsförhållanden och företeelse i Stockholms stad, an extensive set of oral recollections gathered during the 1930s and 1940s.

AINS Archives of the division for Stockholm research, Department of Scandinavian Languages (Institutionen för nordiska språk), University of Stockholm.

LMA Archives of the Labor Movement (Arbetarrörelsens arkiv i Stockholm). All references pertain to Stockholms hamnarbetarefackförning, Mötesprotokoll 1889–1904 (minutes of the meetings of the Stockholm Dockworkers’ Trade Union).

NMA Archives of the Nordic Museum (Nordiska museet).


UDF Dialect and Popular Recollection Archives, Uppsala (Dialekt och folkminnesarkivet, Uppsala).