Unspeakable Spaces
racisms past and present
on exhibit in Stockholm, or
the unaddressable addressed

ALLAN PRED
University of California, Berkeley

The denials, displacements, and collective amnesia often associated with Sweden's widespread cultural racism are explored through bringing three unspeakable spaces into conjunction and tension with one another: a "wax cabinet and anatomical museum" in Stockholm during the 1890s; a resurrection of that same exhibition during 1999; and Stockholm's principal downtown square, which in 1999 was being considered for radical architectural redesign in order to make it more "human." In each instance the taken for granted, the forgotten, the taboo-laden, the literally unsayable, and the absolutely appalling are shown to be mutually enmeshed. [Cultural racism, dis(re)membering, popular imagination, stereotypes, the taken for granted].

[T]he muffled fiction of history is "a place of rest, certainty, reconciliation, a place of tranquilized sleep."
[Michel Foucault 1972:14, as reframed by Boyer 1992:191]

The nineteenth century—to borrow the Surrealists' terms—is the set of noises that invades our dream, and which we interpret on awakening.
[Walter Benjamin 1999 (1927-40):831]

ALLOW ME TO TRANSGRESS MULTIPLY, to speak of the unspeakable in multiple ways. Every space of daily life, every site at which women and men bodily engage in everyday practice, every meaning-filled location of the quotidian, is riddled with the unspeakable. Every local and wider geography of human activity has its counterpart geographies of the unspeakable. Every conjunction of situated practice, circulating discourses, and power relations is one with the (re)production of the unspeakable.
The unspeakable is, in short, a constant presence. A constant presence that in one way or another bespeaks an absence, a silence, an invisibility. Riddling every space of daily life? But bespeaking absence? No riddles here!

The unspeakable as that which goes without saying, as the taken for granted. As that which just makes (common) sense, which demands no comment. As that which is seemingly self-evident, which requires no discussion. As that which is most thoroughly socially constructed, that which appears so incapable of being otherwise, so (second) natural, so obviously meaning-filled that it would be meaningless to give it expression. As that which is automatically remembered in place, recalled without reflection, put into action without recourse to words. As a matter of habit(us), as a habit-of-thought repertoire—always built up in practice on the ground, always triggered by specific sign(al)s in specific social settings, in specific spatial contexts.

The unspeakable as the individually or collectively forgotten, as that which is unutterable because unrecallable for one reason or another. As that bundle of situated experiences whose occurrence has been packed away, shut down under lid and lock, repressed because so deeply disturbing, so unbelievably unpleasant, so terribly traumatic. As all those details of locally lived out life that are so fleeting, so fragmented, so momentarily observed, so briefly perceived, so numerous, so without apparent connection, as to leave no lasting impression, no possible means of expression. As all those past (geographical) histories that have been pushed beyond the horizon of collective memory because erased, made opaque, covered up, culturally reworked, radically reinvented, socially reconstructed and remythologized, given a new (would-be) hegemonic version, or otherwise removed from encounterable discourse.

The unspeakable as the taboo-laden, as the forbidden word, as that which absolutely may not be said. Under any circumstances! In any situation! Or at least beyond the earshot of those in power. As that which ought to be totally unmentionable, universally unnameable, fully silent. As that which is verbally completely out of line, out of place, off the map. As power speaking by way of the gag and the muzzle, by way of the openly wielded stick and the glove-hidden brass-knuckled fist, by way of the tied tongue, the locked lip, and the stilled statement, by way of subjecting individuals to (self)discipline, (self)control, (self)censorship.
The unspeakable as that for which there literally are no words. As those feelings and sensations, those desires and moods, which, although evoked by concrete circumstances, are inexplicable, inexpressible, inarticulatable, unconvertible to language, beyond words. As those here and now moments of intense joy, of stupendous sorrow or stunning shock, which cannot be put into words, which leave one at a loss for words, which are impossible to voice.

The unspeakable as the ‘indescribably objectionable or hateful’ (Webster’s 1966:2511), as the ‘inexpressibly bad’ (Shorter Oxford 1962:2314). As that sited phenomenon which is so terribly attributed, so far beyond the norms of the acceptable, so gruesome or grotesque, so disgusting or distasteful, so repulsive or revolting, as to leave one speechless. In a word (or two), as the simply horrendous.

Unspeakable spaces, then, as enmeshed in geographies of the taken for granted, the forgotten, the taboo-laden, the literally unsayable, the absolutely appalling. Spaces and geographies not necessarily existing on their own, but sometimes also in localized conjunction with one another, in joint constellation. Spaces and geographies of consequence produced by way of specific situated practices, by way of variously scaled power relations and intersecting discursive networks.

On Exhibit: Unspeakable Space #1

Museums are important venues in which a society can identify itself and present itself publicly. Museums solidify culture, endow it with a tangibility, in a way few other things do. Museums have always featured displays of power. [Steven C. Dubin 1999:3, emphasis in original]

Subsequent to its eighteenth-century invention, the museum evolved as a factory for the production of modern subjects. Museums thus became part of a network of eclectic modern institutions designed explicitly to illuminate and demonstrate important ‘truths’ about individuals, peoples, nations, genders, classes, and races—in short, about precisely those things that museums are simultaneously complicit in fabricating and factualizing. [Donald Preziosi 1999:3]
ALLOW ME TO TRANSgress multiply, to speak of an unspeakable space in multiple ways. A particular(ly) unspeakable space, a peculiar place in (un)becoming process, a singular site at once remarkably alluring and repellent. More precisely, Hartkopf’s Wax Cabinet and Anatomical Museum, a wax museum temporarily located in Stockholm between 1895 and 1898 on a major downtown thoroughfare. Here was a space—like the very modernizing city in which it was located—that was characterized by fragmented juxtapositions, by disjointed and constantly shifting scenes, by the presence of the multivalent and the polysemous, by the convergence of items and influences from near and far, by overlapping fields of power, by a diversity of multiply scaled (hi)stories, relations and discourses come into conjuncture, by anything and everything converted into the commodity form. Here was a space that housed a spectacle, a spectacle that in some measure had been placed there to take advantage of the crowds to be drawn to the most spectacular of late-nineteenth-century Stockholm spectacles, the Art and Industrial Exhibition of 1897. Here was a space containing a spectacle that was an entrepreneurial speculation, a venture to accumulate capital in the capital of Swedish capital, a small echo of the just-named 1897 international exposition which—by way of object lessons and (would-be) hegemonic discourse—simultaneously promoted national identity reinforcement and the papering over of class conflicts while underscoring the accelerated commodification of Stockholm’s everyday life (Pred 1995:31–95; Ekström 1994). Here was a space that was many, often contradictory, things at once. A space in which reality was commodified by way of reproductions, by way of the “authentic replica” (H. Schwartz 1996:105), by way of the waxen-dead come to life. A space that was designed to yield profits by amusing its visitors, by distracting its working and (lower?)middle-class clientele from the anxieties and hardships of everyday urban existence. And yet, a space at least pretending to educate its customers. A space whose displays and personifications of truth often resonated with those of non-profit public museums—those “machines for progress” where the exhibition of artefacts was an exercise in governmentality, an order(ing) of things “aimed at reshaping general norms of social behaviour,” a state-sponsored “showing and telling” project “calculated to embody and communicate specific cultural meanings and values” (Bennet 1995:10, 6). Here was a space which made fingerpointing distinctions between “good” and “evil” through juxtaposing mannequin effigies of Florence Nightingale, Otto von
Bismarck, Pope Pius IX, and the "Yngsjö murderess" Anna Månsdotter, as well as other (in)famous celebrities. And yet, here was a space that was at least as much voyeuristic peep-show and freak-show as venue for subject formation, at least as much about titillation and heterosexual male arousal as about edification and the production of self-regulated, self-monitored conduct. For here was a space that was supercharged with the erotic and the sexual by way of a diaphonously (un)dressed "Venus after the bath" in beckoning recline, the allurements of "[Sultan] Abdul Hamid's favorite slave-woman," and the suggestiveness of a chastity-belt display—a space that was by virtue of these and other soon to be introduced items far removed from the realm of middle-class propriety normal(izing)ly marketed at other commodified wax displays in Stockholm (Sandberg, forthcoming).

Albinos from Madagascar, the foot of a Chinese child, the hairy lady and the skeleton man. The strange, the odd—the scandalous. The apetite for the deviant during the late nineteenth century was boundless.

[Gunnar Broberg 1991:118]

Imagine, now, that space of distractions and attractions. Imagine that space of extraordinary phenomena remarkably jumbled, indiscriminately mingled. Imagine that space of oh-so-life-like effigies of the politically, criminally and otherwise distinguished in no-rhyme-or-reason proximity to each other. Imagine that space of would-be anatomical and hygienic lessons, their fleshier than flesh waxen bodies super-real down to the last pubic hair, in improbable promiscuity with the completely unrelated. Imagine that space of uncanny facsimiles of "the Japanese with two heads," "the pregnant dwarf," and other examples of the freakishly formed and grotesque—oddly juxtapositioned oddities whose very oddness could serve as a confirmation of the observer's normality, as a reassurance to even the economically pressed that, in the absence of bodily malformation, one's everyday existence was relatively secure (cf. Broberg 1991). Imagine, now, if you possibly can, amid this stunning array of the seductive and the repulsive, amid this assemblage of the arresting and the awe-inspiring, amid this hodge-podge of the pleasurable and the fascinatingly unpleasant, a stop-you-in-your-tracks glass-topped display case containing a horizontally laid out door-sized wooden panel. And, fully stretched out and nailed to its constituent planks, the skin of a black African "native." And, within that same case a smaller case. Housing an object a few inches in length. Beside it, a card labelled
with impeccably neat penmanship: A Negro penis. In the former case, no claims to mere verisimilitude, no insistence upon an equivalent simulacrum, no resort to auraless mechanical reproduction. But assertion of the real “native” thing. In the latter case, pure detachment. Imagine that! Unspeakably unspeakable!

In order to gain knowledge from museums, viewers, whether they are aware of it or not, both reify the objects they examine, treating them as decontextualized commodities, and identify with them, allowing them to generate memories, associations, fantasies. They have experiences as a result of interacting with the museum environment, which gives them novelty, pleasure, and possibly pain.

[Ludmilla Jordanova 1989a:25, 33]

Vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification. An observer is . . . one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations.

[Jonathan Crary 1990:5–6]

What was or was not going on at this unspeakable space? What kinds of observational conventions were brought into play, what socially constructed images were evoked, what templates of knowledge became salient, what discursively established and seemingly unproblematic truths awaited verification, what practice-based preconceptions were immediately summoned to the surface, what taken for granteds came unreflectingly to mind, what went without saying, when the nailed-down hide and the dismembered member came into sight, when those simply horrendous subject-remnant objects entered the visitor’s field of vision? What confronted by the flayed African and the severed sex-organ, what was the range of responses, the spectrum of emotions, the forms of recognition, the chain of associations, the composition of experiential connection? What, on exposure, was remembered and thereby simultaneously forgotten because repressed or socially erased? What, upon startled reaction, could one allow oneself to say to those standing at one’s elbow or encountered afterward? What, if anything, among the (shock-following?) rush of sentiments was completely beyond words, entirely inexpressible? What, not least of all, had made the elicited possible? What situated practices,
power relations and discursive networks had come into conjunction at this very spot?

Darwin’s rebuttal of theories of polygenesis entailed that different means be found for establishing and representing the fractured unity of the human species. By and large, this was achieved by the representation of ‘primitive peoples’ as instances of arrested development, as examples of an earlier stage of species development which Western civilizations had long surpassed.

[Tony Bennett 1988:92; 1995:78]

[The Bushmen of Africa] are barely above animal standing and are among the world’s most uncivilized inhabitants. Their language, which sounds like the jabbering of animals, seems extremely limited.

[K. Kastman and T. Brunius in a Swedish geography textbook of the mid-1860s (1866: 325–26) (Agaján-Lester 1997:33) that was “widely distributed and checked by government authorities” (Agaján-Lester 1997:14)]

Since long back in time Negroes have lived in the hottest regions of Africa. They are distinguished by their dark brown or blackish skin, wooly hair, sparse beard growth and protruding thick lips. Although the Negroes generally dwell in settlements, they stand at a very low level of culture.

[E. Carlson, J. J. Dalström and C. Lidman, in a primary school geography book that was first published in 1887 and remained in use until 1948, generally regarded as one of Sweden’s first “modern” textbooks 1905: 87–88 (Agaján-Lester: 1997:54)]

Questions not easily answered. For there was no universal observer. No homogeneous Swede, no unitary working- or middle-class subject, no genderless subject, with an undifferentiated set of readings and reactions. All the same, at least one key common denominator provides a ground for educated speculation

During the mid and late nineteenth century, the geography and history textbooks of Stockholm’s compulsory primary schools were sprinkled with references to the supposed physical, cultural and behavioral attributes of black Africans, with descriptions of their supposed “animal-like” and “uncivilized” qualities. These representations of the supposedly primitive and savage were in consid-
erable measure derived from German and English sources (Agaján-Lester 1997:55), from the international circulation of discourses that legitimated the colonization of Africa—as well as from the mid-eighteenth-century writings of the Swedish naturalist and master taxonomist, Linnaeus (Carl von Linne). Unless a perpetual truant, no child attending Swedish schools could escape repeated exposure to these verbal and pictorial images, could escape being drilled in an alphabet of interrelated ideas that systematically shaped the African as negative object, could escape the redundancy necessary to impression inscription and memory etching. Thus, many Stockholm residents or tourists who came upon the nailed down hide might very well have spontaneously reacted with thoughts that were in resonance with racist imagery they had packed down into mental storage during their early years, might very well have been momentarily surprised but by no means perplexed by the sight, might very well have thought of the human remains as subhuman remains, might very well have almost instantly regarded the display of an African male's hide as perhaps little more unnatural than the display of an African lion's or zebra's hide—African wild things, one and all; nature's culture-lacking creatures, one and all. Such a spontaneous reaction would have been all the more likely among those wax-cabinet visitors who were devoted readers of Stockholm's daily press and various illustrated magazines, of publications whose veracity and authority were as yet seldom questioned. For there too distantly-origined stories and pictures occasionally appeared which could reinforce what one had been exposed to in school, which could underscore that black Africans were without doubt far less evolved than Swedes (and other Western Europeans), and which, in so doing, could reaffirm the more general rhetoric of Swedish progress and civilizational superiority so loudly broadcast at the Stockholm Exhibition of 1897 (Ekström 1994; Pred 1995:31–95).

Indeed, such ["primitive"] peoples were typically represented as the still-living examples of the earliest stage in human development, the point of transition between nature and culture, between ape and man, the missing link necessary to account for the transition between animal and human history.

[Tony Bennett 1988:92; 1995:78]

The Negroes constitute but a single race. The flatness of their skulls gives the Hottentot's head an apelike touch. [Franz Otto, in a Swedish school reader circulating in the late 1880s Otto, 1886:25, 34 (Ajagán-Lester, 1997:36, 38)]

No. 14: The Ape as Photographer, showing his foul mood because the ape to be photographed refuses to sit still.
No. 16: An Ape as Magician, with two musicians, performing several amazing transformations on the table, à la Bosco.
No. 19: Four Grimacing Apes, representing a Painter, a Lady, a Shoemaker and a Maître de.
[Excerpts from a catalog for a wax cabinet, with mechanically operated figures, doing business in the city of Sundsvall, 1877 Catalog, no author, 1877:7]

Whatever their pre-existing repertoire of relevant taken-for-granteds, whatever their associational predilections, whatever their observational (pre)dispositions, whatever connections were being made to published texts, visiting gazers and gawkers were not spontaneously reacting in an immediate vacuum, but in the context of a field of possible visual resonances, of here and now representational intersections. In all likelihood, whatever was being seen was not being seen out of mere habit(us). Whatever meanings men and women attached to the stretched out and detached African life-remnants were apt to have been influenced or reinforced by other objects encountered within the confines of Hartkopf's Wax Cabinet. In a setting where replicas of the real were commodified, where real-life distractions were marketed, where ticket-payers could presume themselves to be purchasing access to (reproduced) authenticity, what responses might have emerged as a consequence of other African representations in juxtaposition, in echoing tension with each other? What responses might have been formed if the starkly displayed hide and penis were mentally conjoined with the relatively innocent vision that greeted one's eye upon peeping through a hole into a “panorama of
Hottentot daily life,” the central piece of which was a lightly clad, spear-carrying, shield-wielding male in full dance? Did this suggest that the skinned African, when alive, might have been much like the dancer, been near naked and wild in everyday life, been prone to ‘primitive’ frenzied movement? Not much above the animal, after all! Did the spear, thrust upward, suggest anything of the dancer’s sexuality, produce some forbidden or fearful fantasy, or even lead to a direct and unmitigated association with the disconnected penis itself? . . . What fleeting thoughts might have appeared if some connection was made between the encased hide and penis and a scene depicting two fully dressed apes playing cards outside a thatched hut in a lush tropical garden? Did the unmistakably human attire and capacity for (pretending at) civilized play bring more than a smile, bring mental monkey-business, bring yet another affirming suggestion that the human-like ape and the “ape-like” African were occupants of the same blurred zone, were of virtually the same evolutionary stage? Of virtually the same (un)intelligence? Equally unequal to US!?

The most powerful stereotypes in nineteenth-century Western Europe and the United States were those that associated images of race, sexuality, and the all-pervasive idea of pathology. During the rise of modernism [in German-speaking Europe], . . . the black, whether male or female, came to represent the genitalia through a series of analogies. Miscegnation was a fear (and a word) from the late nineteenth-century vocabulary of sexuality.


What additional thoughts might have raced to mind if the observing man or woman coupled the African hide and penis with a display given prominence in Hartkopff’s newspaper advertisements, with a true-to-life depiction of a “Gorilla carrying off a young white girl,” with a graphic reproduction elaborated upon as follows in the wax-cabinet’s own catalog?

The Gorilla (Gorilla Trygladytes, Gorilla Engina), discovered in 1847 at the Gabon River in Africa by a missionary named Savage, is an ape—called the “Forest Man”—belonging to the same family as the chimpanzee. The Gorilla is feared for his ill-temperedness and extraordinary strength, which is so great that in a fight he can easily defeat a leopard, a tiger and a lion at the same time.
Some years ago news that was as frightening as it was remarkable reached Europe from the Transvaal Republic in South Africa. The daughter of a plantation-owner, accompanied by several female servants, went to a nearby river to bathe. Nearly undressed and ready to step into the water, they heard a crashing sound and in the next moment an unusually large ape, a Gorilla, came out of the forest. Paralyzed with horror, the girl was unable to attempt to rescue herself by instantly fleeing. The chambermaids, with their typical Negro-race cowardice, had immediately taken to flight, while the Gorilla, captivated by the young, beautiful eighteen-year-old girl, threw himself in the water and swam to the bathing place. Realizing her desperate situation, the girl now attempted to escape, but didn’t manage more than about fifty steps before the Gorilla caught up and grabbed her, and then with a dreadful roar dragged her into the woods. Informed of the calamity by the fleeing negresses, who had seen what happened from a distance, some natives soon arrived at the scene, armed with bows and arrows, in pursuit of the Gorilla, whose haunt they determined through the girl’s heart-breaking cries of distress. Soon they saw how it caressed the girl in typical ape fashion. Once within bow-shooting distance, they began the battle, but the Gorilla didn’t release his victim, instead defending himself against his attackers, throwing stones against them, hitting three men with such violent force that they fell to the ground severely wounded. The natives, however, failed to the kill the Gorilla before the girl’s father brought it down to the earth with a well aimed rifle shot. The girl had meanwhile been crushed to death by the ape’s powerful arms. The group we see here represents the moment when the Gorilla holds its offer in its right hand while using the left to defend itself against its attackers.

Would the catalog’s identification of the gorilla as “Forest Man”—as tropical forest man, as man of the jungle—have encouraged some cognitive commingling of that fearsome creature’s attraction to white women and the unspeakable desires of the skinned African? Would some (con)fusing of the racial and the racy have readily occurred? Would exposure to the story in progress have precipitated some imaginatively feverish conflation of the sexually driven primate’s propensity for primitive violence and the sexually driven primitive’s propensity for primate vio-
lence? Would the entire drama-drenched tableau, given a heavy overtone of scientific veracity by the resort to Latin names, have proved both erotic and threatening—the nearly undressed young beauty! the animal caresses! the shrieks for help!? Would it have proved both blood-rushing and anxiety-producing in such a manner that unspeakable thoughts of the nearby sexual appendage could not be kept at bay, in such a manner that impermissible objects of desire could not be locked out of consciousness, in such a manner that repressed sexual fantasies could not be prevented from surfacing, in such a manner that image(ining)s of how They make love could not be surpressed? Or would the sliced-off and limp character of that proximate penis, the fact that it was obviously not in a state of erection, have proven anxiety relieving, an antidote to psychic tremblings over one's own male sexuality, a sign that the subhuman African male was really not a threat to white women, that he was little able to miscegnate or propagate degeneration—that he had been conquered, colonized, disciplined and brought under control, nailed down and rendered impotent? That he, the wild ignoble savage, the bestial subject, an ape man rather than a Swedish (super)man, was not as fit for survival, was deserving of sub-ordination, of the ultimate domination, of threat-ending emasculation?

Over the course of the nineteenth century, an observer increasingly had to function within disjunct and defamiliarized urban spaces, the perceptual and temporal dislocations of railroad travel, telegraphy, industrial production, and flows of typographic and visual information.

[Jonathan Crary 1990:11]

Of course, whatever emotional responses erupted at the stunning sight of the callously commodified African, whatever the preconceptions and taken-for-granted truths that instantly surfaced upon viewing the parted penis, the reactions of most wax-cabinet customers very probably were not only affected by images first implanted via elementary-school textbooks and later reinforced by occasional local newspaper or magazine accounts of distant origin. Nor were they apt to be solely influenced by juxtapositions of the moment. Whatever the thoughts and experiences of the observer, they must also have been entangled with the details of his or her everyday life, they must have resonated with meanings embedded in the situated practices, informal verbal discourses and power relations that constituted his or her daily urban existence. What “com-
mon sense" stereotypes did the observer bring to Hartkopff's as a consequence of workplace chit-chat, of dinner-table discussion, of bar-room banter, of words exchanged in the street with friends or acquaintances? How many readings were mapped out in advance by the gasp-filled or teeheehee-ridden accounts of earlier visitors, by the fanciful embellishments of second- or third-hand narrations, by the raunchy whisperings of gleeful rumor spreaders? How many filtered what they saw through messages received in midst of the quotidian via personal networks stretching far beyond Stockholm? How many thought they knew what they were seeing because they "knew"—or had at least actually "seen"—a living male African, one of at most a handful who were apparently to be found in the dock areas of central Stockholm where, having jumped ship, they hung about looking for stevedoring work? How many were especially prone to wild interpretation because they had seen forty-seven "Dinka Negroes" on public exhibition in June 1895, or because they had seen "100 natives from Africa's Gold Coast" on display during November 1897, because they had seen the subject made commodified object lesson, because they had seen the spear carrying and the war-dancing, the near naked with their bone-pierced ears and noses, because they had been instructed they were witnessing flesh and blood examples of "the hardly civilized" (Hvad Nytt från Stockholm, 22 June, 1895; 13 November, 1897). How many, lacking even ephemeral exposure to blacks, all the same thought they knew what they were seeing because they "knew" what Africans were really like by way of the tales or popular re-presentations conveyed to them by emigrants returning from the United States, by way of letters received from relatives or friends still residing there. Or by way of the things said by people who had been to London, Paris, Berlin or Vienna, where they had seen Ashantis, Senegalese, Zulus, Ndebeles, or other "real Africans" on display in simulated villages or dance performances that were a part of mass-audience attracting exhibitions—live exhibitions whose racial and more or less overt sexual messages often "gained credibility through their association with the 'science' of anthropology" (Coombes 1994: 215)? How many thought they knew what they were seeing because they themselves actually had either lived in America or been to an African exhibition in one of Europe's major capital cities?

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

[Walter Benjamin 1969 (1940):256]
The preserved black-man's hide and encased sex organ exhibited at Hartkopf's Wax Cabinet between 1895 and 1898 did not merely spontaneously mobilize a certain range of observational conventions, did not merely trigger an array of confused and contradictory feelings or an assortment of sexual fantasies and anxieties that were grounded in an already existing and variously constructed popular racist imagination, that were based upon stereotypes already held. Whatever went on at that multiply unspeakable space upon exposure to those two objects was not confined to the instant of reaction, to then and there thoughts and sensations. For those objects—especially if brought into constellation with the Gorilla tableau, the card-playing apes and the dancing Hottentot—constituted object lessons in themselves. Things that could dramatically instruct by way of the visual and therefore become deeply inculcated, well remembered. Things that could flesh out already possessed images. Things that could provide physical proof of taken-for-granted truths. Things that could lend substance to previously acquired templates of knowledge. Things that could give stereotype-buttressing evidence. Things that could visually exemplify an accepted vision. Things that could serve as intensifying agents. Things that begged to be talked about and thereby reaffirmed. Things that were likely to have a lasting affective effect because, in fortifying and seemingly verifying a stereotype, they presumably lent stability to a stubbornly instable urban world, to a world that was volatile and disturbingly beyond personal control, to a world of constant change and severe social tensions, to a world where anxieties, uncertainties and alienation were daily encountered in new and old forms. Things whose presence did not merely speak of a racialized imagination already in place, but also could further emplace by way of further (mis)education. Things (mis)leading to future consequences. Things that contributed to the further construction of a popular imagination which racialized and essentialized the Other. Things that became part of an (un)becoming popular imagination which, although periodically dormant in subsequent decades, has time and again oozed to the surface during the twentieth century, has time and again been discursively reactivated, has time and again been put into situated practice, has time and again been reworked, modified and embellished in Stockholm and elsewhere in Sweden, not least of all during the late 1980s and 1990s.
[T]he stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated—as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. [Homi K. Bhabha 1994:66]

[A] young man [of Ghanian birth] completes his day's work as a care-giver at a residential facility for the elderly. On the way home, in a Stockholm subway-car, a man stares at him wild-eyed with aggression. A few stations later he of the hostile look detrains and the object of his gaze heaves a sigh of relief. Only to be jolted, shiveringly startled, by the sound of fists pounding on the window beside him. And a voice screaming: "MONKEY! MONKEY! MONKEY!"
[Account of a 1996 incident (Pred 2000:231); based on Karlsson 1996:8]

DON'T LET YOUR DAUGHTER BECOME A NIGGER'S TOY
[Message widely dropped into the mailboxes of residents of Södermalm, a district within central-city Stockholm, during 1994 (Sondlo 1994)]

ALLOW ME ONCE AGAIN TO transgress multiply, to speak of an unspeakable space in multiple ways. Allow me to move the clock forward a century, to the just-yesterday present, and to focus on another exhibitionary site, one where the past is echoed and is yet unheard, because publicly stifled, not openly discussed, left unaddressed.

An Itinerant Wax Cabinet is today just as much an exhibition about human vision[s] as a journey in time. Contemporary people need to have some perspective on their existence, to look backward and understand why things have become what they have become. Many explanations are here given to thought patterns and human behavior, even of our own times.
[Inga Lundström, curator for An Itinerant Wax Cabinet (Statens historiska museum 1999:5)]
During the period March 17–December 31, 1999, the National Historical Museum (Statens historiska museum) housed an exhibition in Stockholm, “An Itinerant Wax Cabinet” (Ett Resande Vaxkabinett). Imagine, now, the very same melange of wax figures and objects as exhibited in Stockholm at the end of the nineteenth century, the very same mish-mash assortment of the famous and the freakish, the very same repulsive-attractive collection of exotic, erotic, sensational and “educational” displays. All of it there except for the Gorilla tableau. Imagine now, if you possibly can, the presence of the skin of a black African “native”—once again stretched out and nailed down, figuratively and literally fixed in place; the presence of A Negro penis—once again faultlessly hand-labelled and set aside in a separate small case, as one would with something precious or something dangerous; and the absence of any well-publicized calling into question, the absence of any widely broadcast statements of critical concern or ethical dismay, the absence of any controversy or debate in those mass media outlets where the arts and other elements of Kultur are reviewed and extensively discussed. Nothing but thundering discursive silence. Imagine that! The unspeakable unspoken of!

If efforts against racism and hostility toward foreigners are to have a long-term effect, then it is the real reasons which must be uncovered and worked upon, reasons that lie on a structural level. It is necessary to get at the more widespread forms of hostility toward foreigners. It is the task of museums to widen the perspective of people and add nuance to their historical images. [To believe that one can treat a subject neutrally is treacherous. Such neutrality always rests upon the long-existing, upon dominant thought. It is obvious that the attitudes and values which exhibitions give expression to, whether spoken or unspoken, are far more important than previously realized. The contents of an exhibition are dependent upon the exhibitor as an individual. It is particularly important that the exhibitor is capable of articulating her view of life and has the ability to make it visible within the exhibit.

Even the exhibition’s catalog itself allocated not a word to the African hide or the detached black member. The curator—who only three years earlier had officially pronounced that museums were to be at the vanguard of anti-racism, who trumpeted the need for explicit commentary, for openly addressing structural issues, for shunning any pretense to neutrality—in practice chose virtual speechlessness. In commenting upon late nineteenth-century wax cabinets more generally, she did note that “strange races and exotic peoples” were a given attraction, that the displays offered the visitor “no reason to reevaluate his prejudices,” that scientists of the time devoted much effort to proving that other peoples were of “lower standing,” that the “savage” was typically shown in “crazed dance or warlike poses” (Statens historiska museum 1999:13–14). But why did she avoid the particulars of this instance while elsewhere providing specifics? Why did she say not a word, say not a word? Did she deem the amputated appendage and long-dead skin an exception to her own entreaties? Were the unspeakable contents of the display case thought to speak for themselves? Was this lesson thought so obvious that the teacher need not resort to a (penis-)pointer? Or did she (subconsciously?) realize that things had perhaps been taken too far, that some ethical transgression had been committed, that actual presence—even if it were to be described with historical nuance—did everything but counter racism, that the African’s unmentionables were best left unmentioned? Or were her textual (in)actions quite simply in keeping with other national identity-sustaining discourses, with other strategies of silence?

The itinerant wax cabinets of Europe surely numbered in the hundreds. Did the merry fair public also finance death patrols in Europe’s colonies which shot real natives and [then] skinned and nailed them to boards for delivery by post-order? Or were the skins only a by-product of the colonial states’ normal extermination of native populations? And was the distribution of the nailed skins to fair exhibition tents a means for white men of power to boost European morale at home, so that everybody learned how a native should best be treated? Or is the history of the nailed-down man simply one of a captured native who, for a fee, was shown at the fairs living in a cage? And when he died of food poisoning, did the commercial entertainment industry, as usual, remove his skin to display it and get back the money which the food cost? Perhaps by studying the genetic pattern of this foreigner from another conti-
If the curator chose to evade the (in)delicate issue, if she chose to contradict her own publicly broadcast principles, the owner of the exhibited objects felt it absolutely necessary to voice his understandings and sentiments, felt obliged to remark upon one of the most remarkable of his displayed possessions, felt compelled to speculate as to which of many odious and inhuman colonial practices had been visited upon the African. Was this an uncalculated attempt to counter considerable cognitive dissonance, to allay ambivalence, to rationalize the questionable, to justify the showing of a most monstrous property? Were the sad suggestion that modern science might relieve him of his burden, the wistful wish that DNA tests could pinpoint the skinned African’s geographical origins, the sorry hope that—more than a hundred years after the fact—relatives remained waiting for remains, all part of an unreflected effort to combat guilt? Was the absence in Edström’s remarks of any reference to the barbarically severed sex-organ, to the most extraordinary of his belongings, an expression of his own repressed thoughts or doubts? Did he subconsciously suspect himself of barbarously breaking some taboo? Or, did both the said and the unsaid involve nothing more than the verbalization of good intentions? Sincere innocence put into words?

How are the contents of an exhibition related to current research and ongoing social debates?

[Inga Lundström and Marja-Leena Pilvesmaa 1996:53]

However significant the stances of the curator and wax-cabinet owner may be, however important the question of unspeakable-space readings given by 1999 museum visitors may be, it is the public silence greeting the exhibit’s most stunning elements which most begs interrogation. Especially since the controversy-threshold is not particularly high in Stockholm when it comes to the contents of museum exhibitions. Especially since a mass-media storm, a gale-force moral panic, blew over the city (and nation) but one year earlier, when a one-artist photography show consisting entirely of portrait shots of naked, prematurely well-endowed
early-teenage boys opened at the National Historical Museum.\(^\text{17}\) (The winds of shrill reportage—state legitimated child pornography!—and more reasoned culture-page debate subsided only after the exhibit was completely trashed by a gang of avowedly homophobic skinheads who had been steered to the museum by all the mass-media commotion.) Why no SENSATION in this instance? Why, when the Then-and-There of 1895–98 and the Here-and-Now of 1999 were brought into constellation, was there no visible flash of lighting, no illumination, no awakening with a startled shout (from the fantasy-filled [bad]dream world of nineteenth-century racism), no fleeting revelation converted into written expression, no shock of re-cognition followed by a critical explosion of words, no dialectical image worth speaking about, but instead a dialectics of not seeing?\(^\text{18}\) What is it that made the museum's unspeakable space so elsewhere unspeakable? What were the discursive silence? What were the strategies of silence and politics of forgetting here at work? What goes-without-saying taken-for-granteds were in operation?

Silence itself—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.

[Michel Foucault 1990 (1976):27]

While definitive answers are definitely unavailable, while anything as widespread as this phenomenon is almost inevitably multiply (over)determined, at least one thing is abundantly clear to a long-term observer, to an inside-outsider deeply steeped in everyday Stockholm life and the daily contents of its mass media.\(^\text{19}\) This silence did not emerge out of a void. It did not spring up out of nothingness. It was not born of a vacuum. It instead was a resounding sound. A reverberation that reverberated. An unsilent silence. A silence that could be heard—rattling, rumbling and roaring as it echoed a larger field of identity-sustaining discourse, as it resonated with the denials, projections and displacements characteristic of the way so many Swedes individually and collectively coped with the (re)blossoming of racisms in their country during the late 1980s and 1990s.
Swedish national identity has been [long] organized around the idea that Swedes are more, not less, ‘democratic,’ ‘progressive,’ and ‘egalitarian’ than other nations. [Lars Trädgår dh, historian 1997:4]

It is fundamental to the self-image held by many native Swedes that Sweden is a tolerant, rational and generous society. [Christian Catomeris, journalist Statens offentliga utredningar 1998:29]

For a great many of Swedes there was a vast discrepancy between the ways in which they liked to think of themselves and their nation, and the circumstances increasingly endured by residents of non-European and Muslim background—by those from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the former Yugoslavia collectively slurred as “blackheads.” On the one hand, people of color and Muslims, regardless of whether or not they were born in the country, were subject to: extreme forms of labor-market discrimination despite frequently being highly educated; housing conditions that were becoming ever more segregated (not least of all in certain high-rise Stockholm suburbs) as processes of racialization, (under)classification and spatial exclusion fed into one another; almost total (de facto) social apartheid; and frequently encountered state-bureaucratic paternalism. These circumstances were largely, but not entirely, attributable to the country’s widespread discourses and practices of cultural racism. To discourses and practices wherein negative ethnic stereotyping leads to marginalization and other racist effects; wherein skin pigment, hair color and other bodily markers are unreflectedly translated into highly charged cultural markers; wherein outward biological difference and (essentialized) cultural difference become automatically (con)fused with one another and entire groups thereby racialized. On the other hand, most adult Swedes, whether deeply committed to Social Democratic notions of solidarity and social justice or to liberal humanitarianism, had long viewed themselves as the most egalitarian of egalitarians, the most tolerant of the tolerant, while regarding their country as a champion of the elsewhere oppressed, as a moral superpower on the world stage, as the world’s most outspoken critic of racism in the United States and South Africa.

We still believe that our standards for treating people are higher than those held by others. We haven’t become accustomed to our actually being just as racist, for example, as Americans. [Stig Hanno, chief integration and labor-market administrator for the Municipality of Stockholm]
Swedes are [still] convinced they have no prejudices. Immigrant voice on “The Journey to Swedishness,” [Resan till svenskhet, a 1997 radio documentary Program ett, Sveriges Radio, 2 June 1997]

Made uneasy by the incongruity between these central elements of identity and whatever knowledge they had of the labor-market and housing experiences of non-Europeans and Muslims, confronted by a confusion of sentiments arising from their own uncomfortableness about the difference of others, from their own discursive practices and on-the-spot emotional or practical responses to difference, many, if not a substantial majority, apparently have attempted to resolve their identity conflicts through denial, projection and displacement. Through comforting themselves with the belief that the country’s racists are somebody other than themselves. Through convincing themselves— with the help of highly redundant mass-media imagery—that only the physical violence and fascist symbolics of skinheads and right-wing extremist groups have racist consequences. Through blinding themselves to the fact that, however unquestionably hideous they may be, those same small-numbered groups cannot—by the wildest stretch of the imagination—be blamed for the employment discrimination, residential segregation and social apartheid that continues to pervade the Stockholm metropolitan area and Sweden as a whole. Through also projecting upon other locations as well as other groups. Through adhering to a mass-media-fired popular geographical imagination. Through regarding racism as “really” restricted to a small number of places associated with atrocious acts of violence or other manifestations of neo-Nazism or extremist activity.

We can never tolerate hostility toward foreigners and racism. Not in any form. [Marita Ulvskog, then Social Democratic Minister of Culture, in a 1996 statement Lundström and Pilvesmaa 1996:6]

With individually and collectively practiced racism being displaced as a question of somebody else, as something perpetrated somewhere else, would it have been possible for the exhibited hide and sex-organ to have been seriously debated in public, to have been critically discussed in the mass media, without reintensifying internal contradictions, without reawakening repressed thoughts,
Would it have been possible to have openly considered the exposure of those unspeakable objects, their willful display in the National Historical Museum, without undermining nationally held myths, without admitting that there were racism's other than those practiced by National Socialist Front members and their like, without confessing that variants of racist discourse are not monopolized by the far right, without being forced into self-recognition? Would it have been possible for public controversy to emerge without abandoning the common-sense notion that "we don't think that way," without addressing stubbornly lingering ideas about the cultural inferiority and (hyper)sexuality of the African black, without sacrificing visions of the country as the ultimate in progressiveness, as the very quintessence of enlightened social modernity? Would it have been possible to voice questions or dissent publicly without descending blindlessly into the past, without having to remember that Sweden actually had a racist past extending back into the nineteenth century (and beyond), without in the process being forced to remember that which was not to be remembered about the present, without thinking the unthinkable, without stepping beyond taboo-limits, without speaking the unspeakable, without eventually pointing to the contradictions of so much political and mass-media discourse, to the enormous chasm separating its constant calls for the "acceptance of diversity" and the cultural racism which it persistently promotes—in among a number of other ways, through occasional news-account allusions to the excessive sexual desires of blacks (and "blackheads" more generally), to their sexual abuse or rape of white Swedish women?

Forgetting takes place—or "a" place, but where precisely no one seems to be certain, except by the evacuated trail it leaves.

[Norman M. Klein 1997:301]

Allow me, one last time, to transgress multiply, to speak of an unspeakable space in multiple ways. Allow me to remain in the just-yesterday present, and to spotlight another space where racism has been on exhibit, displayed though simultaneous efforts to dismantle and to forget, through simultaneous
efforts to remake that which is concrete and to dis-place those who are socially present. And, in so doing, allow me finally to address the unaddressable.

Sergel's Square (Sergels Torg) is well known far beyond the capital city's boundaries. Even if one has never set foot in the place, everybody knows Sergel's Square, perhaps from newspapers or TV, perhaps through relatives or acquaintances. Nobody escapes Sergel's Square and Sergel's Square escapes nobody. This place, whether we like it or not, is the heart of Sweden. Nobody could even arrive at the idea of questioning the Square's obvious role in the dissemination of free speech through political meetings, demonstrations and other gatherings. This is the place where we [en masse] celebrate our Swedish heroes for their Olympic gold in hockey. Here we cross over the bare surface of "Plattan" in order to see the Leonardo da Vinci exhibit at the Culture Hall [Kulturhuset]. Here we go in order to shop at nearby department stores.

Tens of thousands of people pass over this square every day, people of different ages and of different nationalities. Therefore Sergel's Square also stands out as a multicultural meeting-place at which a large number of the world's countries are represented.

[Nicolas Jändel 1994:5]

A square literally at the center of Stockholm. Figuratively at the center of the nation. Stockholm's Times Square. A square onto which the Central Station of the metropolitan area's subway system exits. A two-leveled square: above, an elliptical traffic roundabout encompassing a multi-spouted pool and an enormous glass-sculptured phallus; below, and to the west, a completely open plaza whose surface, patterned with black and white diamonds, is readily approached from the street by an extremely wide bank of stairs.

A square, a municipally owned piece of property, whose official name, Sergels Torg, actually only applies to its upper level. A square whose sunken pedestrian portion is officially unnamed, officially unspeakable, although almost universally referred to by Stockholmers as either Sergels Torg or "Plattan" [The Flat (surface)] (Stahre, Fogelström, Ferenius, and Lundqvist 1984:172–173). A square bordered above not only by the Culture Hall (Stockholm's forerunner to the Centre Pompidou in Paris), but also by 19-story-high office buildings, a major department store, bank headquarters, and other structures which signify a
pivot point for the global circulation of capital, goods and information. A square whose lower plaza fades into a maze of dark passageways and shops beneath the roundabout, into an around-the-clock darkness lending itself to all kinds of transactions. A square which came into being in the mid-1960s as part of “The Great Demolition Wave,” as part of the most comprehensive urban renewal program in Swedish history, as part of a massive remaking of what had been an “unmodern” downtown area comprised of narrow streets, small-scale shops and businesses, and low eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings. A square created as part of a modernist planning project, as a concretization of Social Democratic rationality working in tandem with finance capital and business interests. A square, a phallus-dominated public space, produced by way of governmental (hyper)rationalities and capitalist strategies—an “abstract space” in Lefebvre’s fullest sense of the term.30 A square that came into being as a centerpiece for the new cityscape built up around it, as the center of gravity for those new surrounding buildings whose largely uninspired modernist architecture has come to make certain Conservative Party politicians and some of their neoliberal supporters see red. A square that frequently serves as a site for political rallies; including hunger strikes and other attention-grabbing demonstrations by refugees from a variety of Middle Eastern, African and Latin American countries. A square whose steps are a gathering place for youths, a large portion of whom are males of non-European parentage from the city’s segregated suburbs; a gathering place where those same suburban youths can frequently be seen mixing with young white Swedish women; a gathering place where some passing majority-Swedes can observe disapprovingly and readily imagine the eventual occurrence of unspeakable sexual contact.
With the constitution of a new right wing majority in Stockholm Town Hall [in the autumn of 1998], Sergels Torg, the most central public square in the Swedish capital, stunningly became the most contested place in all Sweden.
[Mats Franzén 1999:1]

The Square stirs up strong feelings, which has been evident in the years of debate about it.
[Dagens Nyheter, 13 August 1999]

By focusing on Sergei's Square and following what has been expressed at that place, one can get a fair picture of Sweden as a country and the important questions which have engaged its people over time.
[Nicolás Järdel 1994:22]

In the of summer 1999, when the "Itinerant Wax Cabinet" exhibit was in the middle of its run, when the National Historical Museum was still providing an opportunity for racisms past and present to be displayed, contemporary cultural racism was simultaneously being placed on unwittingly exhibit in conjunction with Sergei's Square. On August 12 six architectural proposals for a radical remaking of the square were put forth to the public with considerable fanfare, including large color reproductions of the alternatives in the country's major newspapers. Following directives conceived by two powerful Municipal Council members all of the proposals shared several features in common. Some portion of the plaza's space was given over to a residential structure. And the square was drawn up to exist on one plane rather than two. As a consequence of the latter trait, there also were to be no underground passageways and the broad bank of steps so congenial to sit-down socializing were to be totally eliminated.

[The open square is below ground—which does not enhance its status, but facilitates all kinds of associations with low life. [The shadowy labyrinth immediately connected to the square is quite simply too good for all kinds of black business, according to a representative from the police force. Plattan has become a metonym for the drug phenomenon. Sergels Torg and [the entire surrounding area] thus become matter out of place, something disturbing the order of the Stockholm inner city, a reminder of the suburbs.
[Mats Franzén 1999:4, 16, 6, 17, emphasis added]
Why is it so that the suburb has begun to be regarded as a jungle and immigrant youths as primitive natives? [Per-Markku Ristilammi 1997:81]

There is a widespread fear for areas such as the segregated Stockholm suburbs of Flemingsberg, Tensta and Fittja. They are a kind of black spot. Like southern Sudan or eastern Zaire on a map of Africa. [Per Wirten 1998:7]

Somebody I know knows a policeman in Stockholm, and he says 98 percent of the crime there is committed by immigrant youths from the suburbs. [Myth in popular circulation, first overheard 1996]

A tangle of open intentions and shut taken-for-granteds, of overt political struggles and more oblique expressions of dis-ease, had led to these proposed forms of creative destruction, to suggestions of radical surgery upon that which was but three decades old. Almost from the outset of its existence, Plattan, and especially its shadowy extensions beneath the roundabout, had been made synonymous with crime in general and drug-trafficking, shoplifting and stolen-goods dealing in particular. Since the 1980s the imagery employed in mass media accounts had increasingly suggested, by direct and indirect means, that the bulk of Plattan's unspeakable deals were the doing of Africans. (At the same time mass media and political discourses had, without serious analysis or statistical justification, succeeded in making both "crime" and "criminality" a codeword for suburban youths of non-European or Muslim background.) And then—say no more, say no more—there was the matter of what went on in open view, of the suburban-youth congregating and social intermixing that transpired on the steps. In political discourse, unspeakable activities an unspeakable space make. Thus, for those neoliberal members of the Stockholm Municipal Council whose efforts resulted in the architectural competition, Sergel's Square had to be replaced in order to make the city's downtown core more "human," in order—by extension—to rid it of the inhuman, the disorderly, the Different. For them, Sergel's Square was an impure place that was a pure crystallization of all they despised about Social Democratic planning and social engineering, an impure and disgusting place that was a concretization of the failures of the Social Democratic state and its welfare policies in general (and, implicitly, its migrant welfare policies in particular). For them it was, more-
over, an impure and disgusting place that was the very embod-
iment of all-too-high and consumption-inhibiting taxes misspent,
an impure and disgusting place which had come about because
market forces had not been allowed to operate completely unre-
strained, because total freedom of choice had not prevailed."

They have the stomach to equate Sergel's Square, that
enormously pronounced sign of political mania and bad
taste, with the old Klara District. And to believe that
any of the six proposals is going to provide vitality and
harmony for the city is like believing that you can wake
a dead person to life with a pacemaker.
[Christopher O'Regan, reader of Dagens Nyheter,
in the 14 August, 1999 issue of that newspaper

The square was wrongly built from the start, from the
very moment they tore down old Klara—people like
things on a small scale.
[Kalle Andersson, another reader given voice in the
August 14, 1999 issue of Dagens Nyheter]

In the process of carrying out "The Great Demolition Wave,"
of clearing the ground for Sergel's Square, the westernmost portion
of Harbor Street (Hamngatan) was obliterated, creatively destruc-
ted and removed from the map, along with much of the sur-
rounding Klara District. Not a few of those who were annoyed
about Sergel's Square as it was, and many of those who were dis-
pleased with the architectural alternatives proposed, readily waxed
nostalgic about the Klara District of many decades past. Feelings
of loss compensated for. Past spaces romanticized and remytholo-
gized. Not always uncontradictory stories dusted off. Remembrances revised. The no longer reinvented and exaggerat-
ed. Fictions factualized and facts fictionalized. Elements of decay
dilapidation displaced. Images conjured up of a more human
place. Of the city's true soul and an atmosphere throbbing with
life. Of charming buildings and intimate shops. Of printing estab-
ishments and newspaper offices. Of handicraft workshops and
artist studios. Of small hotels and residential units. At the end
of the nineteenth century Hamngatan was referred to in male
working-class slang, in the vocabulary of an often politically
charged popular geography, as Linkstret. This substitute signifier,
this expression of polysemous folk humor, not only involved an
obvious corruption of the English Link Street (Hamngatan was the
downtown area's principal east-west link) and a reference to the
prostitution occurring along part of its length (link was male working-class slang for pimp). It also apparently alluded to a "hobbling struggle," to limping along while striving to get by, to the difficult realities of making a economic go of it in Stockholm’s industrial and financial core. Along that thoroughfare where modernity’s contradictions existed in practice—where bustling commerce was closely juxtaposed with female degradation and “underclass” men in search of an underpaid day’s labor—Hartkopf’s Wax Cabinet and Anatomical Museum occupied a building between 1895 and 1898. Its address was number 38. Hamngatan 38 exists no more. It is, in multiple senses, a dis(re)membered space. If it still existed, it would be found somewhere on Sergel’s Square, not far from the center of Plattan.

Lefebvre’s abstract space, the space of contemporary capitalism and concretized governmental rationalities is supposed to be a space from which previous histories have been erased.

[Derek Gregory 1994:360]

[In abstract space] economic space and political space . . . converge towards an elimination of all differences.

[Henri Lefebvre 1979:293]

**Unspeakable Spaces in Constellation**

The unaddressable addressed.
The muffled fiction of history unmuffled.
The noise of the nineteenth century made to intrude.
The ruptures of memory disrupted.
The nailed down hide and the severed penis nailed down in place.
The wax cabinet, past and present, spatially coupled with Sergel’s Square.
Three unbecoming (dis)junctures brought into illuminating conjunction.
Exhibitions of racism in triple constellation.
Trialectical image.
Lightning bolts released.
Heretical empiricism conducted.
Interrogation almost completed.
Memory, as we all know, is a fragile thing, subject to simplifications, distortions and the tricks played upon it by distance.

[Peter Englund, Swedish historian 1998:8]

Nations are built on great rememberings and great forgettings. Getting history wrong is an essential part of being a nation.

[Ernest Renan Minow 1998:118]

But what of the politicians, the mass-media discourse producers, and others among that majority of Swedes who refuse to confront their own cultural racism directly, who cannot accept their own role in racializing non-European or Muslim Others and thereby condemning them to extreme forms of social and economic exclusion, who insist upon attempting to sustain identity through denial and projection, who remain content with the histories they (don't) know, who thereby remain in Foucault's "place of tranquilized sleep," who thereby remain locked into, unawakened from, Benjamin's nineteenth-century "dreams"?

What are they to make of the unspeakable (geographical hi)stories co-related in this text?

What remains for them to unsilence, to remove from the realm of the taken for granted, to unforget and re-member, to unveil and re-view, to re-call and rename, to detaboo, to leave no longer unspeakable?

What remains for them to recognize?

That it is not only the racism displayed a century ago at the current site of Sergei's Square which is forgotten, blacked out, banned from collective memory, unspoken of?

That the failure to openly debate the resurrection of Hartkopf's Wax Cabinet, to publicly question the reshowing of its unmentionable objects, involved an effort to forget the present as well as the past?

That the planned physical erasure of Sergei's Square also involves an effort to forget the present? Not least of all because it seeks to terminate crime and unapproved forms of social intermingling through forcing young men of non-European or Muslim background from the core of the city (and the nation), through dis-placing them, through deporting them back to the segregated suburbs, through putting them out of sight and out of (uncomfortable, discontented) mind, through acting in congruence with various national and local policies promoting the repatriation of resident refugees (Pred 2000:54–55).
That the yearning for the Klara District of the past is less a yearning for another space than a yearning for another time, than a yearning for a time when (racialized) difference didn't make such a (local) difference, than a desire to bleach out the present, to whitewash the here and now?

That collective amnesia does not grant collective amnesty to those who perpetuate racialization and under-classification?

That the unspeakable is often unpardonable?

And that?

The interval that we assert between ourselves and the past may be much less than we assume. We may be more bound up with its categories than we think. Culture and race developed together, imbricated within each other, their discontinuous forms of repetition suggest, as Foucault puts it, 'how we have been trapped in our own history.' The nightmare of the ideologies and categories of racism continue to repeat upon the living.

[Robert J. C. Young 1995:28]

Today it is more important than ever to remember.

[Peter Englund 1998:9]

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

[Walter Benjamin 1969 (1940):255]

Notes

1(Would-be) hegemonic discourses in late nineteenth-century Sweden, as elsewhere in Europe, were "fixated with normality"; thereby encouraging institutions such as Hartkopf's to commodify deviance (Statens historiska museum, 1999:11).

2It cannot be established with certainty that the hide, the detached penis, or any one of the effigies named in this and the preceding paragraph were to be actually encountered at Hartkopf's Wax Cabinet. They may, instead, have been on exhibition at Thiodolf Lütze's Wax Cabinet, or Grand Musee du Plastique, which during the period 1895–98 occupied two different sites on the Stockholm island of Djurgården. Confusion arises because items from the two wax museums eventually became stored together some time subsequent to 1898 (Edström 1999:26). The fact that some of the items in question may have
been viewable at one Stockholm location rather than another does not significantly detract from the observations and arguments developed below.

In 1751 Linnaeus asserted that: “Some peoples nevertheless are no better than beasts.” In the tenth edition of his famed Systema Naturae he contended that Africans, or Homo Afer, were “lazy, dishonest, incapable of ruling themselves,” and thus much less civilized than Homo Europaeus, whose white members were described as “inventive, perceptive, meticulous and law abiding” (1758:21–22). Linnaeus’s observations were not independently arrived at but in some measure emerged out of and contributed to continental academic discourses.


Ajagün-Lester (1997:15) notes: “It is difficult to determine the extent to which [Otto’s text and its 127 illustrations] was distributed in the schools, even if the contents in themselves can be judged as typical of then prevailing representations of Africa.”

Because of the anatomical explicitness of some its displays, Hartkopf’s Wax Cabinet, and other establishments like it, were normally not visited by men and women at the same time. Newspaper advertisements usually specified one or two days per week when “the entire museum would be open only to ladies.”

Newspaper advertisement (Edström 1999:24). Once again, for reasons given in note 2, it should be emphasized that it is not entirely certain whether the hide and detached penis were actually on exhibit at Hartkopf’s or another relatively nearby wax cabinet. If they were seen at the other establishment, here speculated associations still could have been made, either because of repeated exposure to Hartkopf’s newspaper advertisements and street posters, or because people had been to both exhibits.

To the extent that fin-de-siècle fantasies of African genitalia were the product of discursive stereotyping, to unities of accepted vision, to visions of the black as “pure” race and “pure” sexuality, Gilman refers to them as “publicly repressed sexual fantasies” (1985b:111). He additionally notes: “The black, both male and female, becomes by the eighteenth century an icon for deviant sexuality in general, almost always, however, paired with a white figure of the opposite sex ” (1985b:81).

Cf. Bhabha on Fanon, “Western sexuality” and “fear and desire for the Negro” (Bhabha 1994:41).


According to Gay (1993:68 ff.), Darwinian-buttressed racial thinking among the European bourgeoisie during the latter decades of the nineteenth century served as a ready justification for aggression. As
he would have it, overtly negative images—bolstered by an unconscious male projection of anxiety regarding the sexual potency of the racialized Other—provided an alibi for aggression, a license for patronizing, ridiculing, bullying or exterminating, and in so doing provided pleasure.

12The pedagogic technique of “object lessons” was highly popular during the final decades of the nineteenth century, being employed in international expositions and world’s fairs, museums and a variety of colonial governmental projects as well as in schools. Derived from the writings of Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827), a Swiss educator and social reformer much influenced by Rousseau, the technique called for unifying “objects” and “lessons” through visual (or other sensual) means in such a way as to prove revealing, as to call forth specific perceptions or moral capacities, as to define the (ab)normal, as to form subjects along desired lines (Glover 1999; cf. Bennett 1988:59–88, on the “object lessons in power” associated with museums and other elements of “the exhibitionary complex”). Whether or not the operators of Hartkopf’s intentionally set up object lessons, whether or not they even only subconsciously imitated that didactic technique from other institutions, whether or not they were simply putting their own uspeakable taken-for-granted into practice, they all the same were in the business of teaching racial lessons by way of exhibited objects, they all the same employed objects in such a manner as to help (re)produce racialized subjectivities while producing profits for themselves.

13Note Gilman (1985b:11–35) on the conditions under which stereotypes emerge and become reinforced or transformed—even in the virtual absence of the stereotyped group (cf. Gilman 1982). If stereotypes of the African black helped bring personal stability to residents of a turbulent Stockholm, they were not the only racialized stereotypes that did so. Perhaps a much more important role was played by racialized stereotypes of the Jew and the Saami, or Lapp, both of whom, while not numerous, were much more likely to be actually seen in Stockholm (Andersson 1996; Amft 1998; and Broberg 1981–82).

14The National Historical Museum exhibit consisted of a personally inherited collection, only a part of which had been shown at Hartkopf’s. The remainder of the collection had been displayed at another Stockholm wax cabinet (see note 2, above). When the present owner initially unpacked his collection a large bag marked GORILLA was found empty (Edstrom 1999:28).

15While the owner did provide textual matter for the catalog (Edstrom 1999), nowhere else at the exhibit itself did he openly identify himself as a caption author. Because the ultimate focus of this article is the politics and cultural reworkings of contemporary racisms in Sweden, and their nineteenth-century antecedents, the heinous colonial practices which could result in the original display at Hartkopf’s Wax Cabinet are not considered here.

16While 1999 readings are not directly considered here, to deal with the public-silence issue is in large measure to deal with some of the key filters through which most readings presumably were made, with taken-
for-granted cultural reworkings brought to the site of display.

17 During 1998, when Stockholm was officially serving as the "Cultural Capital of Europe," the National Historical Museum relinquished some of its space for art exhibitions.


19 The author has spent an average of four months per year in Sweden since first coming to that country in 1960 to conduct dissertation research.

20 This widely employed epithet, which on occasion even has been known to slip into the vocabulary of mainstream politicians, may also encompass swarthy southern Europeans as well as Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims.

21 Throughout the mid and late-1990s the unemployment rate for those of non-European nationality or parentage fluctuated between 33 and 45 percent, or six to seven times the rate of those "real" Swedes whose family history had been associated with the country for many generations. By 1994 the labor-force participation rate for those of African birth had fallen to 19 percent, and Sweden, along with Norway and Denmark, had the worst record among all OECD countries for labor-market discrimination against the foreign born (Bevelander, Carlson and Rojas 1997:264).

22 A 1997 OECD report indicates that the immigrant share of the total population of poor suburban areas is higher in Sweden than in other OECD countries. The same is true of the ratio of immigrants respectively living in poor and other residential areas. (Wirten 1998:9).

23 For background to all of the circumstances named in this sentence, discussion of the processes involved, as well as further details and numerous sources, see Pred 2000.

24 The workings of cultural racism in Sweden may be conceptualized and empirically specified in terms of ontological and metonymical "dirty tricks." Ontological dirty tricks operate through socially constructed categories and concrete circumstances being repeatedly transformed into each other; while metonymical dirty tricks involve making the individual analytically synoymous with the entire group, transferring the Universal upon the Particular, thereby making the distinguishing characteristics of any specifically encountered individual disappear. See Pred (2000) for treatment at length.

25 Public pronouncements and other evidence also indicate that some fraction of the population have experienced a further destabilization of identity because what was arguably the world's most generous refugee policy during the 1970s and 1980s was terminated in 1994. Because Sweden's current strict policy, including frequent denial of admission to torture victims—has come under periodic criticism from the UN High Commission for Refugees, the UN Committee against Torture, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Because it has now
become almost impossible for people of color or Muslim background to migrate to Sweden unless, by means of ever more narrowly defined criteria, they can prove themselves dependent upon previously admitted migrants.

26 The popular geographical imagination largely propagated by the mass media also demonizes the segregated and highly multiethnic suburbs of the country's three largest metropolitan centers as "problem areas," allowing that term to become synonymous with "problematic" non-European and Muslim people, further allowing the name of any one segregated suburb to serve as a stand-in for all such suburbs—and by extension, for the entire sum of their residential populations.

27 For a lengthy consideration of these contradictions see Pred (2000: 265–287).

28 Throughout the 1990s, including the summer of 1999, the press and broadcast media have periodically equated virtually all rape of Swedish women with the actions of youths of Middle Eastern or African background. In stark contrast, 1993 data indicate that only 21 percent of the 314 men arrested for rape were of non-Northern European extraction (Statens offentliga utredningar 1996:150).

30 Nicolas Jäandel, 5.

31 Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) characterizes abstract space in a number of ways, often emphasizing its embodiment of visual-phallic-geometric power. His various usages are contextualized and unpacked in Derek Gregory's extended commentary on "modernity and the production of space" (1994:348–416).

32 Much of the drug dealing popularly attributed to Plattan does not actually occur there, but on the abutting Drottninggatan (Queen Street) and other proximate downtown locations (Franzén, 1999:14–15).

33 Whether or not the transactions have occurred at Plattan, the purported drug crimes of men of African origins are not infrequently reported or problematized in the press, more often than not in a manner that reinforces prejudice—especially since the nationality, ethnicity or geographical background of other drug criminals is generally not specified. Cf. Tesfahuney (1998) on the "hermeneutics of suspicion," which in his non-Ricoeurian usage refers to the various means by which the non-white immigrant becomes a priori regarded as suspect, to the ways in which such suspicion both emerges out of and informs the discourses of cultural racism.

34 This argument is developed by Franzén (1999) who appropriately points out that, all their criticisms of the Social Democrats to the contrary, the neoliberal proponents of redeveloping Sergel's Square still obviously chose, in their own execution of power, to "put trust in the rationality of social engineering and its capability to design social life through the planning of space." He also notes that neoliberal promoters of the scheme had gained the support of local retailers and the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce, who triply envisage a reduction in crime, the insertion of more high-price boutiques and other up-scale usages into the area, and the capturing of customers who might otherwise frequent out-
lying shopping malls. At the same time many Stockholm residents were vehemently against any rebuilding of Sergel's Square, feeling that “it is the taxpayers who will be hit,” that “when Stockholm can't afford to take care of the poor and vulnerable, the physically and mentally ill, they shouldn't be constructing a monument to themselves” (readers expressing themselves in Dagens Nyheter, August 14, 1999). Because of the breadth of these and other oppositional sentiments, by June of 2000 Conservative Party backers of the rebuilding proposal felt compelled “to carry out a dialogue with Stockholmers” before determining the actual scope and design of the project (Dagens Nyheter, June 6, 2000). The possibility of merely renovating the square and leaving two planes was even being left open.

The Swedish verb linka means to hobble, or walk with a limp; while the verb streta means to strive or struggle. For sources, further elaboration and a more general discussion of the symbolic discontent and ideological counterpunching associated with this and other elements of Stockholm’s popular geography during the 1890s see Pred (1990: 92–142).

"Underclass" is not a recent linguistic borrowing in Swedish. In nineteenth-century parlance distinctions were already drawn between the “overclass,” the “bourgeois” or “middle” class, and the “underclass.”

See the illuminating theoretical discussion of presence, erasure and spatial signification contained in Landzelius (1999).

References Cited

Agaján-Lester

Amft, Andrea

Andersson, Lars M.

Benjamin, Walter

Bennett, Tony

Bevelander, Pieter, Benny Carlson, and Mauricio Rojas

Bhabha, Homi K.

Boyer, M. Christine

Broberg, Gunnar

Buck-Morss, Susan

Carlson, Ernst, J. J. Dalström and Carl Lidman

Catalog, no author
Coombes, Annie E.

Crary, Jonathan

Dubin, Steven C.

Edström, Per Simon

Ekström, Anders

Englund, Peter

Foucault, Michel

Franzén, Mats

Gay, Peter

Gilman, Sander L.
1985a Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art,

Glover, William J.

Gregory, Derek

Järdel, Nicolas

Jordanova, Ludmilla

Karlsson, Lars Melvin

Kastman, Karl and Thor Brunius

Klein, Norman M.

Landzelius, Michael
1999 Dis[re]membering Spaces: Swedish Modernism in Law Courts Controversy. Göteborg: Göteborg University, Institute of Conservation,

Lefebvre, Henri

Linnaeus (Carl von Linné)

Lundström, Inga, and Marja-Leena Pilvesmaa

Minow, Martha

Otto, Franz

Pred, Allan

Preziosi, Donald

Ratzel, Friedrich

Ristilammi, Per Markku

Sandberg, Mark
Schwartz, Hillel

Schwartz, Vanessa R.

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

Sondlo, Cecil Inti

Stahre, Nils-Gustaf, Per Anders Fogelström, Jonas Ferenius and Gunnar Lundqvist

Statens historiska museum

Statens offentliga utredningar [Swedish Government Official Report]

Stoler, Ann Laura

Tesfahuney, Mekonnen
1998 Imag(in)ing the Other(s): Migration, Racism and the Discursive Construction of Migrants. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, Geografiska Regionstudier 34.

Trädgårdh, Lars
1997 European Integration and the Question of National Sovereignty: Germany and Sweden. Berkeley: Center for German and European Studies, University of California at Berkeley, Working Paper 2.50.
Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language

Wirtén, Per

Young, Robert J. C.

Young, Robert J. C.