



Resisting Postmodernity: Swedish social policy in the 1990s

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to introduce ideas that have emerged during the course of writing a book on Swedish welfare in the 1990s. The book is the result of many years of writing about two subjects: Swedish drug policy and the Swedish welfare state. The one very specialised, the other, more general. I first became interested in Swedish drug policy on a research visit to Örebro Län in 1986. A social worker showed me a copy of the county's drug policy programme and explained the significance of the 'restrictive line'. I have spent the years since that visit, trying to understand and explain the Swedish goal of a drug-free society (Gould 1988, 1994, 1996b). I only began to write about the welfare state in Sweden in the early 1990s, just as things were beginning to go wrong for the economy (Gould 1993a, 1993b, 1996a, 1999). For the last few years I have intended to write a book on the events covered by the period 1991-1998 - the years of a Bourgeois and a Social Democratic Government - which would bring the two halves of my work together.

Material for this study has been accumulated over many years. A number of research visits have been made; large numbers of academics, politicians, civil servants, journalists, unemployed people, social workers and their clients have been interviewed; and extensive use has been made of academic, administrative and public libraries. Since September 1991 I have systematically collected articles from *Dagens Nyheter* about social services, social insurance, health care, employment, social issues and problems, the economy and politics. The journal *Riksdag och Departement* (Parliament and Ministry), which summarises a wide range of public documents, has been invaluable. Friends and informal contacts have also given me insights into the Swedish way of life. The new book is based upon all of these experiences.

This paper will begin with a brief account of major global social and economic changes that have occurred in the last twenty years. This is intended to provide a background to the more recent changes that have occurred in Swedish society in the last decade. It will be suggested that the changes in Sweden, particularly in the field of welfare, have been less severe than elsewhere and that this is due to political, institutional and cultural resistance. The paper will conclude by arguing that Sweden, as an exemplar of an Apollonian modern society, has had much to fear from the Dionysian characteristics of postmodernity.

From modernity to postmodernity

Various terms have been used to describe the major changes that have taken place in capitalist societies in the last quarter of a century. I shall opt for *modernity* and *postmodernity*. The terms themselves are not so important as what one means by them. For the purposes of this paper, I shall take modernity to refer to that period in the middle of the 20th century when governments

began to exert greater control over the economy and to build welfare states based upon full employment. It was also a period of *liberal corporatism* when policy decisions were made in consultation with business, trade union and other major social interests. Modernity is said to have been a period in which grand narratives were developed to describe and explain the inexorable progress of industrial society, economic growth and social improvement. Modernity was a period in which the rational benefits of science and technology were taken for granted.

However, from the mid-1970s, capitalism began to move in a different direction. Mass unemployment became a 'price worth paying' for controlling inflation. Greater priority was given to the free market and competition. National wage-bargaining was rejected in favour of plant-bargaining. A company's workforce was divided between the elite 'core' and the dispensable 'periphery'. The power of trade unions was eroded and their policy-making role reduced. The solidarity of working class politics gave way to fragmentation, diversity and difference and new social movements came to the fore. The welfare state was abandoned in favour of welfare pluralism. Public and social expenditure were controlled and benefits were reduced. The dominance of the state in providing health care and social services was questioned and the private, voluntary and informal sectors were expected to play a bigger role. While many on the left saw these changes as retrograde, others began to take a more positive view.

Far from seeing modernity as rational and progressive, postmodern thinkers highlighted its irrational and regressive consequences. Lyotard, according to Leonard, argued that:

Against the progress that has been supposedly achieved ... the crimes against humanity must be weighed. Other names signifying recent history - Dresden, Hiroshima, the Gulag, Cambodia - all refer to crimes, like Auschwitz, justified in the name of ideologies committed to the pursuit of progress and order ... (Leonard, 1997, p. 8).

Grand narratives with their scientific claims on truth had become discredited. The work of Michel Foucault, which had questioned the liberal and humane claims of the enlightenment, was also influential in raising doubts about the beneficial effects of welfare policies and institutions. Instead of stressing the benefits of welfare policies, the totalitarian effects of welfare discourses were emphasised (Hewitt, 1992; Squires 1990). People were not liberated by the power which welfare professionals and administrators possessed, they were controlled and manipulated through knowledge and discursive practices. It has recently been argued by some social policy writers that that the false universalism of state welfare had, in reality, privileged working class men to the neglect of the needs of other social groups (Hillyard and Watson, 1996; Penna and O'Brien, 1996). Feminists complained that the welfare state had been built on patriarchal assumptions (Williams, 1989). Those regarded as insignificant and even deviant during modernity were now recognised as having legitimate claims to social policy provision. Under conditions of postmodernity they felt able to demand liberation.

Swedish welfare in the 90s

It was against this background of a shift from modernity to postmodernity that I chose to examine the supposed *system shift* that had occurred in Sweden in the 1990s. Sweden had been described as the *prototype* of a modern society. It represented the grand narrative of progress and reform. It was the exemplar of social engineering and state planning. It was hardly surprising that trends associated with postmodernity were regarded by Swedes with suspicion. Sweden successfully

resisted many of the adverse changes to social policy experienced by other countries in the 1980s but economic problems from 1989 onwards made such resistance difficult. Two successive governments - a Bourgeois coalition (1991-4) and a minority Social Democratic government (1994-8) - grappled with problems of inflation, low growth and unemployment. An application to join the EU was made by the Social Democrats in 1991; negotiations were successfully undertaken by the coalition; and a referendum in 1994 led to membership in 1995. Partly in anticipation of one day joining the single Sweden's large public sector deficit and national debt had to be reduced.

What then happened to the Swedish welfare state between 1991 and 1998? To find out, the following areas were selected for examination in the book:

- Welfare services and benefits
- Two groups: the elderly and women
- Two social issues: unemployment and substance misuse

The general chapter on services and benefits covers, health care, social services, social insurance and social assistance. Particular attention was given to the elderly since this was a large and significant section of the population about which much had been written. The reputation Sweden had for gender equality influenced the choice of the other significant group. Unemployment and a range of related issues were thought to be essential for inclusion. Sweden's restrictive line on alcohol and drugs gave a dimension to the study that brought out interesting questions of culture and national identity.

As Mishra once observed, the persistence of high unemployment makes it very difficult to maintain a commitment to the welfare state (Mishra, 1993). The European welfare state was predicated upon the Keynesian policy of full employment. Without full employment, it is difficult for governments to maintain high levels of welfare expenditure. They begin to adopt a much more stringent approach to claimants and eligibility, services begin to decline and provision is shared between the state and other actors. Moreover social divisions widen and the solidarity maintained by welfare expenditure becomes a much greater source of conflict between the *haves* and *have nots*. All this happened in Sweden during the 1990s.

The poor, the unemployed, young people and lone mothers became worse off in the 90s and it is difficult to see their position changing greatly in the future. The numbers living on benefits increased while the value of the benefits decreased. The neo-liberal climate has damaged solidarity as the position of ethnic minorities has deteriorated largely due to the unequal impact of unemployment. Sweden's non-Nordic ethnic minorities came to be seen as a cost rather than a benefit to the economy. They have become quite segregated from the rest of the population. More resentment is felt towards them by Swedes who have themselves been hit badly by recession. In its more extreme forms this racism has manifested itself in violent attacks, neo-nazi demonstrations and murder.

EU membership was feared by many because of its possible impact on social policy, gender equality and Sweden's restrictive line on alcohol and drugs and to some extent these fears have been realised. Four out of Sweden's five state alcohol monopolies have been abolished, but the aim of a *drug-free society* - which remains the goal of a widespread political consensus - has had a significant impact on the European Parliament. Membership of the EU has accompanied and perhaps even caused some erosion of Swedish welfare but it hasn't changed its character.

There has then been change, even deterioration, but what is remarkable to an outsider is the resilience of the system. Taxation is not only still the highest in the world but promising to cut taxation is not an election winner. Earnings-related social insurance benefits were reduced from 90% of income to 75% but despite pressure from some quarters to reduce them further they were raised to 80%. Cuts are made to public services but the government is anxious to show that they will be restored as soon as is prudently possible. Full employment has not been abandoned as an aim of economic policy. Employment rights are still jealously guarded and the redistribution of work has been forced onto the political agenda by an alliance between the women's movement, the Left and Green parties. The new pension system remains one which will guarantee a good quality of life to most pensioners and women can still claim to live in one of the most gender equal societies in the world. Nor has Sweden's gender-friendly state been inimical to other emerging social groups demanding recognition such as gay men and lesbians.

Why, given the outside pressures from the world economy, and international institutions like the IMF, OECD and the EU itself, and internal pressures from the political right and business interests, has the welfare system changed relatively little? I would like to suggest that we can analyse the resistance to changing the welfare system by looking at it in political terms, in institutional terms and in terms of culture.

Political resistance

Sweden's system of proportional representation did not result in majority Governments in the 90s. The Centre-right Government was a minority four-party coalition. The clear-cut neo-liberal intentions of the Conservatives were lost in a constant stream of negotiations with their partners. Proposals to reduce public and social expenditure were watered down by a long budgetary process which allowed inter- and intra-party interests in the Riksdag to make amendments which often resulted in little change. Moreover, the three-year mandate was clearly insufficient to allow a reforming Government to make much headway before having to think in terms of the next election. To some extent these limitations were recognised and reforms brought in. The Social Democratic Government subsequently benefited from both a slim-lined budgetary system and a four-year parliament. Ironically, it was therefore able to do more to reduce public expenditure than its predecessor.

While the Swedish system of proportional representation limits the possibility of majority government, it does not, of course, predetermine how the Swedish electorate will vote. Had Swedes really wanted a system change in 1991 more could have voted for the Conservative Party. Swedes have steadfastly refused to give the Conservatives more than 23% of the votes.

Between elections, public opinion polls have indicated 30% support but this never becomes a reality. In Britain the landed interest had always been associated with the Conservatives and a large section of the working class had traditionally given them its support. Neither situation existed in Sweden. There, the landed interest had developed its own (the Agrarian, now Centre) party, which had been happy on occasions to cooperate with the Social Democrats. Nor has Sweden a tradition of working class conservatism even though class-voting patterns have, in recent decades, become more volatile.

The Centre-right Government was, of course, not helped by the role played by the Liberal leader, Bengt Westerberg, who became the Minister for Health and Social Affairs. Westerberg was reluctant to dismantle the welfare state and even showed himself to be an expansionist on the issue of disability. Given his status as Carl Bildt's partner for the neo-liberal manifesto of 1991, his defence of welfare was difficult for his Conservative colleagues to criticise. Westerberg would

not have been out of place in the Social Democratic Government. Indeed, while in office, he even co-authored a book defending the welfare state with Sture Nordh, the Chairperson of SKTF (the municipal service workers' union) (Nordh and Westerberg, 1993).

The flirtation with neo-liberalism was short-lived and led to a rejection of the Centre-right parties in the 94 election. While the Social Democrats received a healthy 45% of the votes in 1994, they required the support of one of the smaller parties and subsequently settled for the Centre party. If the Conservative aims of 1991 had been moderated by their coalition partners so the Social Democrats were at times limited by the Centre party. They could have chosen to cooperate with the Left party (the erstwhile Communist party) but the party leadership clearly felt that the country at that time would not have been best served by undiluted socialist politics. This changed in 1998, when the electorate showed its displeasure with the Social Democrats NOT by shifting its allegiance to the centre and the right but to the left. It was clear to Göran Persson that many of his party's traditional supporters had deserted to the Left party. Cooperation in these circumstances dictated that an attempt should be made to govern with the latter's support. The electorate had declared itself to be "no more happy" with the financial prudence of the Social Democrats than it had been with neo-liberalism.

Both Governments in the 90s had to proceed by consensus and cooperation. The two spectacular examples of this were the agreement reached by the Bourgeois government with the Social Democrats during the economic crisis of 1992 and the cross-party negotiations which led to the new pension legislation of 1997. There was also a consensus on the issue of gender equality. The Centre-right set up Commissions to investigate women's relative lack of power and the violence they experienced. Given that the latter was a subject which has been almost taboo for many years, this was commendable. Subsequently it was the Social Democrats who passed legislation, which had cross-party support, to further protect women from male aggression.

The Social Democratic government itself may have made more savings and cut more services than its predecessor, but it did so reluctantly, out of economic necessity. While the traditionalists criticised the modernisers for betraying the labour movement, Government ministers were not acting as neo-liberal converts. Their attitude was not so different to those of Social Democratic leaders pre-Olof Palme. They were concerned with efficiency as well as equality. They knew that changes were necessary if Sweden was to be able to compete in the international economy. Their analysis *may* have been faulty and some of the measures they took *may* have been ineffective, but they did not act as committed neo-liberal ideologues. They continued to share the aims and aspirations of their traditionalist critics. Their enthusiasm for cuts, savings and efficiencies was not allowed to get out of hand however. There were other factors acting to prevent them from being carried away.

Institutional resistance

Considerable emphasis has been made in recent years on the importance of institutions in social policy analysis. While there are different schools of thought within institutionalism, what they stress in common is "the role of institutions in articulating individual and pressure group preferences" (Immergut, 1992, p. 20). Immergut said of Sweden:

Proper representation for policy issues is a matter of consensual agreements between interest groups whose large memberships and democratic procedures ensure their responsiveness to the public" (Ibid, p. xii).

Rothstein has argued that the responsiveness of many Swedish political institutions has to do with the aims and aspirations of the early Social Democrats. In particular, Gustav Möller, Minister for Social Affairs for many years in the 1930s and 1940s, is credited with ensuring that old and new institutional forms could not be easily obstructed by established civil service bureaucracies (Rothstein, 1985). Sweden's administrative boards however date back to the 19th century and have the task of administering the policies framed for Government by civil servants. The Social Democrats ensured that they were run by those whose interests were directly affected by them. AMS (the Labour Market Board) has traditionally been dominated by trade union representatives; educationists sit on educational boards; local authorities, social workers and the medical profession are represented on Socialstyrelsen (the Administrative Board for Health and Social Welfare). It was partly for this reason that SAF (the Federation of Employers) decided in the early 90s to withdraw its support for such corporatist institutions.

In its view, they were packed with Social Democratic sympathisers.

Both AMS and Socialstyrelsen played important roles in policy development in the 1990s. AMS came under threat but survived. Whatever criticisms people had of AMS, there was agreement that the Active Labour Market Policy preserved the 'working line' - the belief that it was better for the unemployed to engage in some useful work-related activity rather than simply receive cash benefits. AMS was vigorous in its own defence arguing that could not be expected to solve the problem of mass unemployment. Nor could it do a proper job if Governments were only prepared to finance poor quality projects. The belief in the efficacy of AMS was evidenced by the Social Democratic Government's proposal that the EU should adopt an approach similar to that of Swedish labour market policy. Socialstyrelsen, on the other hand, was much more proactive in criticising counties and municipalities for their failings. Its supervisory role ensured that considerable publicity was given to failings in the field of health care, the care of the elderly, the disabled and those living on social assistance. The research carried out and the guidelines issued in a number of controversial policy areas meant that neither central nor local government could escape the neglect of their social policy responsibilities.

In spite of Assar Lindbeck's warnings about the way in which state-financed interest groups had a disproportionate impact on public expenditure, little was done reduce either their numbers or their state-financing. Sweden boasts a wide range of national and local associations for all sorts of activities and interests. Whenever they feel threatened they have the resources to make their voices heard. Pensioners' organisations were vociferous in attacking poorer services and lower pensions for their members. Women's groups were not content to settle for Sweden having the reputation of being the world leader in gender equality. They were highly critical the significant inequalities that remained within the system. Trade unions organised their members to demonstrate and attack Social Democratic Government attempts to change unemployment benefits and employment rights and were largely successful in doing so. Trade union membership remained high throughout the 1990s largely because no government was prepared to abolish the link with earnings-related unemployment benefit. Trade unions are still a strong and vital part of the Swedish policy-making process.

Not only does the state routinely finance interest groups, the system of involving them in the policy-making process is an important institutional feature of Swedish politics. Commissions to investigate social issues are set up as a matter of course. They are not left to the whim of individual governments. In the 90s, such commissions they continued to produce proposals such as em-

ployment measures, on gender issues¹, and on EMU. Commission membership is broadly-based and not exclusive. Once established, a commission is expected to seek evidence and views from a broad cross-section of Swedish society. Moreover, once it has produced a report, its proposals are sent out on *remiss* (consultation process) to all relevant organisations. The responses are usually published and taken into consideration by government before any new legislation or change in policy is introduced.

This brings us to another important feature of the Swedish policy-making process - the importance attached to scientific research. Commissions are expected to carry out their own research or, as in the case of the Commission on women's power, to make use of existing research. Governments have continued to finance independent social research in universities and other research bodies, much of which is critical of central and local government policies. Although the organisation of official statistics has been reformed - much has been devolved from the Central Bureau to Administrative Boards - the range of consistent and high quality material published by state organisations enables policy-makers and the public at large to continue to engage in informed debate.

Social science research continues to enjoy high status in a society which values science and technology and has always devoted considerable resource to research and development. Marquis Childs was impressed by the number of Swedish households with telephones in the 1930s. Today, Sweden boasts the highest per capita use of mobile phones and personal computers. Sweden is technologically advanced and its social sciences continue to be positivistic. Although there are those who indulge in discourse analysis and postmodern navel-gazing, social research tends to be heavily statistical. This has the advantage of carrying a lot of weight in terms of research into inequalities and inefficiencies. The quantitative artillery aimed at the effects of government policies and economic change helps to maintain the fortress of the welfare state

Swedish modernist corporatism is alive and kicking. The institutions that accompanied the development of the welfare state have not been weakened and abandoned. They operate vociferously in its defence.

Cultural resistance

Institutionalism may be a preferable approach to policy analysis than - what Rothstein refers to as - an individualistic counting of heads (Rothstein, 1998). However, it is not enough in itself.

We have to ask what sustains institutions. The answer, I would suggest, is culture - society's system of norms and values.

In Sweden the work of Åke Daun has provided impressive support for the idea of national culture and character. He has suggested that one of the reasons for Swedes not being keen to admit to having a national identity in the post-war years is that in the age of modernity "the idea of Sweden as a modern country, and one distinguished by justice and rationality" seemed to suggest that "Swedes ...did not have any special culture" (Daun, 1996, p. 2). Swedes had reached the advanced stage of not having a national identity in contrast to more primitive societies that hung to "picturesque customs and irrational beliefs" (Ibid.). His book is based upon a wide range of ethnographic studies and attitude surveys, carried out by Swedes and non-Swedes alike. Time and again he refers to a range of inter-related characteristics: the strong emotional objection to confrontation and heated argument (which would not surprise anyone familiar with the dignified

¹ When the Social Democrats tried to appoint a male academic to chair the commission on women's power, women's groups successfully lobbied to have him replaced by a woman.

boredom of the Riksdag in comparison with the schoolboy antics of the British House of Commons); controlled behaviour; and feelings; a preference for the softly-spoken; orderliness and punctuality; seriousness and rationality; limited opportunities for the loosening of norms and the expression of feelings. These characteristics are exactly what one would expect to find in a rational, orderly and sober society. To accept the findings of Daun is not to endorse the simplistic and stereotypical. On the contrary: Daun himself admits and discusses the rich variation in the Swedish mentality. No-one is suggesting there are no irrational Swedes who mouth their crude feelings at the earliest opportunity. In Sweden as in all societies, there is a wide range of behaviours, values and feelings - from the rational to the irrational, from the clean to the dirty; from the fun loving to the puritanical; from the inhibited to the passionate. What marks one society from another, however, is the tendency for a set of norms, a median, a pattern to emerge over time. Nor does Daun suggest that the Swedish mentality is immutable:

The belief in rationality will presumably be increasingly challenged, spreading confusion as a result. More and more people have difficulties believing in the 'grand modernisation project' - that is, building up a modern, humane welfare state, with its quality of life and intrinsic rationality (Ibid, p. 212).

What I want to suggest is that an important reason for the survival of the Swedish welfare state is not just political and institutional but cultural. There are those who prefer to emphasise the role of the labour movement in the creation and maintenance of a universalistic set of social policies. Rothstein for example, was very critical of Yvonne Hirdman's thesis that early welfarism was influenced by the social engineering ideas of the Myrdals. He claimed that Hirdman had focussed too much on the Myrdals' ideas and not enough on Social Democratic practice (Rothstein, 1998, p. 173). If this is so then many others apart from Hirdman are also in error (including Olsson, 1990, p. 21 and Holgersson, 1994, p. 117). For me, social engineering and social democracy are aspects of a wider, rational mentality. To discuss the Swedish welfare state with reference only to social democratic values is a form of political reductionsism. The irony is that Rothstein admits as much in his book *Just Institutions Matter*. He admits that Swedes are no more egalitarian or leftist than the English or the Germans (Rothstein, 1998, 132). Swedes have been electing Social Democratic governments all these years not because they are Social Democrats themselves but because, when they look at what the different political parties have to offer, the Social Democrats have come closest in spirit to what they perceive as their own values and interests. Svallfors, who Rothstein often quotes with approval, expressed it well when he said simply that Swedes recognised a greater public interest. They strove for integration and wanted to avoid marginalisation. Swedes approve of a strong state which seeks to regulate and control unpredictable social forces - whether it be the privately owned economy, unemployment, coping with old age or being under the influence of mind-altering substances. While not dismissive of matters of individual liberty and choice there is nonetheless a greater tendency to trust the state than in Anglo-Saxon countries.

Through the welfare state, amongst other institutions, Sweden has sought to create a rational, stable society in which the vast majority of its people can lead rational, orderly, enjoyable and healthy lives. Through its restrictive alcohol and drug policies, it has shown its disapproval of drunken and disorderly behaviour. This *Apollonian* vision of a *modern* society was bound to come into conflict with the *Dionysian* forces of a *postmodern* world.

Apollo versus Dionysus

Bryman, in a review of the sociological literature, has summarised the distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian cultures as follows (Bryman, 1978)²:

Apollonian

Order and form
Control
Self-restraint
Temperance
Predictability
Reason and rationalism

Dionysian

Disorder and chaos
Excess, ecstasy
Impulsiveness
Spontaneity
Unpredictability
Instinctiveness and irrationality

The Apollonian/Dionysian conflict is a universal one. It exists within us as individuals, within and between societies and cultures. How much freedom from constraint do we want to experience? How much should society allow? Without constraint, there can be no order, without freedom there can be no individuality and creativity. Too much moderation makes us dull; too much excess leads to self-destruction. Nietzsche used the dichotomy to discuss aspects of ancient Greek tragedy. Although he defined them as opposite tendencies, he saw them as complementary. Good drama could not exist without both elements.

These two very different tendencies walk side by side usually in violent opposition to one another, inciting one another to ever more powerful births, perpetuating the struggle of the opposition only apparently bridged by the word 'art'; until, finally, by an effort of the Hellenic 'will', the two seemed coupled, and in this coupling they seem at last to beget the work of art that is as Dionysian as it is Apollonian (Nietzsche, 1993, p. 14).

Apollo could not live without Dionysus! The 'Titanic' and the 'barbaric' were, in the end, just as necessary as the Apollonian (Ibid, p. 26).

Ruth Benedict, the American anthropologist, used the dichotomy to describe the different cultures of American Indian tribes. Most of them were Dionysian.

American Indians as a whole.....valued all violent experience, all means by which human beings may break through the usual sensory routine, and to all such experiences they attributed the highest value (Benedict, 1961, p. 58).

In contrast, the culture of the Pueblos of New Mexico was Apollonian.

Whether by the use of drugs, of alcohol, of fasting, of torture, or of the dance, no experiences are sought or tolerated among the Pueblos that are outside the sensory routine. The Pueblos will have nothing to do with disruptive individual experiences of this type. The love of moderation to which their civilisation is committed has no place for them. Therefore they have no shamas (Ibid, p. 68).

Ritual dance for many Indians was wild, abandoned and ecstatic but for the Pueblo Zunis it was "a monotonous compulsion of natural forces by reiteration" (Ibid, p. 66).

² I have omitted two distinctions listed by Bryman - *individuation/communion with others* and *constraint and hierarchy/freedom and equality*. They do not seem to emanate from the work of either Nietzsche or Benedict.

Within capitalism the Apollonian/Dionysian conflict has played out over time. It was there in the early stages of capitalism. Protestantism can be seen as an Apollonian reaction against the Dionysian excesses of medieval Catholicism. Weber saw the Protestant ethic as closely linked with the development of capitalism, with an emphasis upon production, saving and investment. The Protestant ethic was about work and the avoidance of sin. However, Campbell has reminded us that alongside the Protestant ethic, there existed a romantic ethic that celebrated consumption and pleasure (Campbell, 1989). Early capitalist societies created new forms of leisure and fashion. Capitalism never was simply about production, it was inevitably about consumption from its very inception.

What is important about all these examples is that rationality, order and sobriety were seen as complementary. In our own century, it can be argued that modernity can be seen as tending towards the Apollonian and postmodernity towards the Dionysian. Modernity was associated with production, rationality and control and postmodernity with consumption, the unpredictable and liberty. Under conditions of modernity it was fashionable on the left to criticise capitalism for promoting materialistic, hedonistic values. Capitalism, it was argued, created false needs in order to make a profit. Austerity was good, consumption a moral evil. Yet under conditions of postmodernity, even the left has conceded that consumerism can be celebrated (Mort, 1989). What had once been condemned as built-in obsolescence could now be seen a justifiable expression of individual preference, fashionable taste and even political resistance. Competition and choice had been slogans of the right and were now appropriated by the left. People should be free to choose their own lifestyles their own sexual orientation and even their own drugs.

In the last 20 years we have lived through a more Dionysian period. Capitalism has been freed of the shackles of state control and regulation; hitherto repressed social groups have demanded recognition and have celebrated their identity and diversity; artists and intellectuals have thrown away the constraints of rigid genres and forms of expression; and social scientists have abandoned the canons of scientific truth. In its *extreme* form, liberation became licence and consumption excessive. As we sought more pleasure, ate more food, drank more alcohol and more people became obese, bloated and inebriated. Drugtaking, and drug problems were widespread. Censorship of sex has been made redundant. Pornography and the sex trade have flourished. Environmental pollution threatens the entire planet, HIV and AIDS the human species itself. Excess has become a way of life.

I have deliberately used exaggerated language to emphasise the adverse effects of recent social and economic change in an attempt to suggest the fear and anxiety many would have felt faced with such a scenario. It is a perspective of the postmodern world shared by Baudrillard, with his repugnance for global obscenity, violence and obesity. His was not simply outrage about manifestations of individual behaviour but at the obscenity of a whole culture, the violence of nuclear destruction and the obesity of information technology. "The saturation of systems brings them to their point of inertia", he cried in *Fatal strategies* (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 5)

Sweden and postmodernity

What I am trying to suggest is that Sweden was an exemplar of modernity precisely because of its Apollonian culture. It was well suited to take advantage of the economic and political circumstances of the middle of the 20th Century. Sweden was good at what modernity was supposed to be about. From the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 to the mid-1970s Sweden built an international reputation for its successful economy and its large, international corporations; its commitment to science, technology and functional architecture. It was the successful middle way between capi-

talism and socialism. Full employment and the 'People's Home' provided the mass of people with security and independence. It built a range of successful corporatist institutions to bring order and stability to an advanced capitalist economy. For many people – Swedes and non-Swedes alike - Sweden was *the* grand narrative, *the* rational society.

It is therefore not difficult to understand why many Swedes been so reluctant to embrace the excesses and the chaos of postmodernity. It is due partly to inertia, partly to national pride and partly to fear. Inertia arises when a society has created a successful set of values and institutions. What is successful does not need to change. The aims, values and institutions that had served the country well for over half a century could not easily be abandoned. This inertia, in turn, is related to the national pride that Swedes feel in their achievements. They had created a 'paradise' which was the envy of the world. When Olof Palme was assassinated, when unemployment rose, when motor-cycle gangs fought each other with bombs, when neo-nazis murdered members of ethnic minorities, people said 'We didn't think this could happen here'. This pride was well-expressed by Mona Sahlin and an interviewer in 1994. The topic of conversation had been the EU, alcohol and drugs.

Interviewer: *I have been working in this area since 1988 and looked at Sweden from a European perspective. What I have learnt is that we are so unique in so incredibly many areas.....*

MS.: *Why haven't we considered the uniqueness of the Swedish model at all levels until now?*

Interviewer: *It is when you begin to compare us with other countries that the uniqueness stands out in all its glory.*

MS.: *We are so unique and successful in so many areas.*

(Thorgren 1994, p. 92)

Pride of this kind can make it difficult to see the need for change.

Lastly, I want to come to fear. The success of, and national pride in, Swedish modernity has led to a sense of superiority to and a fear of the outside world. In spite of the rhetoric and practice surrounding the acceptance of immigrants and refugees, it has been difficult to embrace the need for a genuinely multi-cultural society. Ethnic minorities are feared for the effect they will have upon the Swedish way of life. Entry into the EU was feared for a similar reason. It was an organisation dominated by strange Catholic concepts like *subsidiarity*. The EU symbolised mass unemployment, poor welfare standards and less equality for women. Europeans didn't understand the public health need for a restrictive alcohol policy. Membership would also mean the loss of border controls. Not only would alien drugs flood into the country but also alien ideas such as *harm reduction* and *decriminalisation*.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper I said I wanted to find a way of bringing the two sides of my work on Sweden together. It has been the contention of this paper that the concept of a national culture helps us to understand the development of the Swedish welfare state in the last decade. By identifying Swedish culture as strongly Apollonian, we can understand why Sweden became the 'prototype' of a modern society; why it created a rational and orderly welfare state; and why it has been suspicious of, and hostile towards, the 'irrationality' of drug-induced behaviour. It is also clear why Sweden has tried to resist many of the changes which it sees as a threat to the stability and integrity of the Swedish way of life. The phenomenon of postmodernity tends towards the Dionysian.

My own view is there are positive and negative aspects of Swedish resistance. The good thing is that Swedes have been largely successful in protecting their social infrastructure. The elderly will continue to receive good pensions, many women will continue to benefit from the provision of public sector jobs, most citizens will benefit from high quality health care and social services. But these positive features should blind us to the fact that postmodernists have brought our attention to the more 'repressive' aspects of the modernist project. An example of this from Sweden's past would be the compulsory sterilisation programme. Another example from the early 80s might be the number of children taken into compulsory care. The aim of a drug-free society and the extreme measures that entails is a more contemporary illustration. And perhaps the most recent example is making the purchase of a prostitute's services an imprisonable offence. While resisting the excesses of Dionysian postmodernity, Swedes should not blind themselves to their own. It may seem like a contradiction in terms but it is also possible to be guilty of Apollonian excess. But that's another paper.

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