

## Article

# “Incisive, Dissonant” Rationality vs. Aesthetic Modernism: Hedenius and Trotzig

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**Abstract:** The Swedish “Welfare State” of the 1950s was described as a rational, well-organized society by leading Swedish philosopher, Professor Ingemar Hedenius. His biopolitical vision emphasized the scientific basis for social reforms, and he was an active opponent to any kind of religious thinking. Hedenius also worked as a literary critic, and he would use that role to confront literary representations of contemporary society that did not fit in with his promulgation of rationality. Hedenius furiously attacked Swedish writer Birgitta Trotzig’s *A Landscape* (1959). In her book, she challenges any harmonizing vision of society. She does it through representations of the body, and the gaze that does not shy away from the anguished and pained body, the body opening up and giving birth. The body in Trotzig’s work is also the tortured body of Christ. With the Swedish welfare state as a point of reference, this article explores the collision between what can be called a “rational modernism” and aesthetic modernism: Hedenius called Trotzig’s book “evil,” and Trotzig, when she commented upon this almost three decades later, saw Hedenius’s review as an authoritarian assault.

**Keywords:** welfare state; rationality; biopolitics; modernism; the body; the gaze

The 1950s in Sweden—it was as if the bodies of the people were locked down, like the whole of the country: the Cold War polarizing the world, borders guarded and armed, while at the same time the Social Democratic idea of a “people’s home” (“Folkhemmet”) evolved into the welfare state. Women were still corseted, their husbands—this was indeed the century of the family—wore nylon shirts that tended to turn yellow, with the tie strictly tightened, and garters.

Proper hygiene ruled, the homes were all tidy and shining; this was indeed a “happy and well-organized society.”<sup>1</sup> Or as Lena Lennerhed summarized the era: “During the 1950s, women could take courses on femininity.”<sup>2</sup> It was, in other words, an art to be a woman, which is also the title of Lennerhed’s chapter about the fifties in her work on the politics surrounding the question of abortion in Sweden. There she sums up several historical studies of the fifties in terms of women’s feelings of discomfort, uneasiness, fatigue, and dissatisfaction in the welfare state of the 1950s. This was an era when politics tended to be an outspoken biopolitics, a politics directed towards the condition of the population at large<sup>3</sup>—Sweden had, for instance, in 1955 as the first country ever, introduced obligatory sex education in schools (Lennerhed 2002, p. 141).

The idea and project of the “people’s home” was not originally Social Democratic, but instead conservative and nationalistic. In taking over the slogan, Social Democrats emphasized that society must be grounded in democratic principles and equal rights for all citizens. The slogan of the “people’s home” was a way of calming those worried that Social Democracy meant radical socialism—the Social

<sup>1</sup> This was a wide-spread self-image, as noted by the editors of (Burman and Holmqvist 2019, p. 7).

<sup>2</sup> (Lennerhed 2017)—All translations from Swedish texts in this essay are mine.

<sup>3</sup> I am alluding to the concept of “biopolitics” as elaborated on by Michel Foucault, see for instance his (Foucault 2008).

Democratic use of the term “people’s home” referred instead to the nation as a home for all classes, not only the working classes. Evolving into concrete reform programs, the “people’s home” became the welfare state, a society that guaranteed its citizens basic standards of health care, child care, schools, unemployment insurance, etc., while trying to make capitalism more humanly responsible.<sup>4</sup> One could, however, ask if there was any place for the body in pain, or in misery, in this ideal world. By comparing two texts from the late 1950s, I will try to show that modernity, as realized in the Swedish society of the time, could have very different and even radically opposed meanings.

If one reads the scholar that could perhaps be called the leading philosopher of the welfare state, Ingemar Hedenius, professor of what in Swedish universities is called Practical Philosophy (and safely anchored in analytical philosophy), one can recognize the vision of the shining surface of the welfare state, then called “rationalism.” In his central essay “Välfärdsstaten och dess ideal” (“The Welfare State and Its Ideals”), published in the collection *Liv och nytta* (“Life and Utility”; [Hedenius 1961a](#)), Hedenius emphasizes a “consequently applied moral of utility” related to “rationalism” as the ideal and foundation of the Welfare State ([Hedenius 1961b](#), p. 15). This was a society, as Hedenius pointed out, that had catered to “the financial safety of the large masses,” and it had at the same time “entailed an immense increase of freedom for the common man” ([Hedenius 1961b](#), p. 17). So far, so good.

Ingemar Hedenius (1908–1982) was an important voice in the public sphere of this time. Besides his work for the university, he wrote essays, review articles, and was a leading, even dominant, voice in public debates, often criticizing religion in general, and the Swedish Protestant church specifically. His most important work was *Tro och vetande*, (“Belief and Knowledge,” 1949), and as the title suggests, the study is a rigorous critique of Christianity’s claims to truth, based on a strict division between scientific knowledge and religious belief.

Hedenius worked within a heritage that must be called “modernist.” The philosophical tradition that he worked in was not only analytical, utilitarian, and rational, but also contemporaneous with the modernization of Swedish society. Without taking any direct political stands, his philosophy mirrored Social Democratic politics and its systematic formation of a rational, well-organized “people’s home” that in the fifties turned into the “Welfare State.”<sup>5</sup> Theologian Ola Sigurdson claims that “Hedenius’s philosophy fits in well with the emerging welfare society, and it is hardly unfair to Hedenius to depict his role as the philosophical moralist in the service of common sense” ([Sigurdson 2000](#), p. 183). One can also understand Hedenius’s emphasis on rationality as a philosophical counterpart to the art of social engineering, so important in the transition of the “people’s home” to the welfare state.<sup>6</sup> Johan Strang distinguishes what he calls a “modernistic and progressive cultural and political atmosphere” surrounding the Uppsala school of philosophy, to which Hedenius belonged ([Strang 2010](#), p. 58). Philosophy was not alone: architectural functionalism in particular played a central role in this formation of rational society, a society that would balance the needs of capital with social reforms. This modernism can perhaps, with Strang, be summarized as “the idea that political and social problems could be solved by rational and scientific solutions rather than by ideological confrontation and class struggle” ([Strang 2010](#), p. 27).

However, what would happen if something seemed to deflect from the rational society, if something or someone threatened this safety, if someone scratched that shiny surface? Could the consensus surrounding the welfare state be challenged? The welfare state would of course be attacked a couple of centuries later as the “Nanny state” by neo-liberal and conservative politicians. But one does not have to move into, say, Thatcherism, to find voices expressing concerns. Michel Foucault worked at

<sup>4</sup> On the history of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, see ([Karlsson 2001](#)).

<sup>5</sup> See ([Strang 2010](#), pp. 25–28).

<sup>6</sup> The traditional, and probably best, example of “social engineering” in Swedish politics, is Gunnar and Alva Myrdal’s *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, 1934, in which they argue that in order to secure the standard of living in the nation, its population must increase. The couple were both active Social Democrats—on their views on “social engineering,” see ([Sigurdson 2000](#), pp. 113–52).

Uppsala University a few years in the fifties, and asked about his experiences and his view of Swedish society, he answered: “In its calm, Sweden reveals an almost perfect world where one discovers that the human being is no longer necessary.”<sup>7</sup>

Hedenius was not insensitive to such criticisms and questions, although today it might feel somewhat peculiar that he singled out religion as the foremost threat to the utilitarianism of the welfare society. Hedenius argues in a biopolitical vision that society must balance material and spiritual needs in order to cultivate the health of the population, and then refract “the too-large contentment of the people’s home.” He argues for:

a conversion of all the consumption, which is now directed towards foolish objects, to what can bring a richer life. This must happen, not only so that our society’s artists will have better conditions, but also so that the people of the welfare state will reach an existence that truly is humanly worthy. (Hedenius 1961b, p. 24)

This vision is, one could say, the conclusion of what in another essay of *Life and Utility* is a furious attack on Samuel Beckett and especially his play *All That Fall*, 1956. In a ten-page summary, Hedenius—who was a known lover of the arts<sup>8</sup>—engages in an almost parodically prejudiced discussion of the play, which he ultimately condemns as “naïve cruelty.”<sup>9</sup> Hedenius’s biographer, Svante Nordin, as well as every other commentator on Hedenius’s work, emphasizes how “religious pessimism” especially “aroused his fury” (Nordin 2004, p. 280). But Beckett is no religious pessimist, so Hedenius’s attack on Beckett makes obvious that it might be not only religion that was the target of Hedenius’s enlightened fury. Beckett’s characters were scarcely rational nor tidy, and if Beckett was not available, then for instance Swedish writer Birgitta Trotzig could serve as the object for his enlightened fury. In the works of Hedenius, a vision of the fifties is formed—but a very different vision is formed in Trotzig’s *Ett landskap* (“A Landscape”; Trotzig 1959). The collision between these two visions reveals aspects of both the welfare state, and the aesthetics of modern literature that still resonate today—in this conflict we see two very different forms of Modernism at war with each other.

Swedish writer Birgitta Trotzig (1929–2011) slowly became one of the leading and most important writers and critics in Sweden, and she was also a member of the Swedish Academy from 1993 to her death. She was a stubborn defender of modernist literature and art, constantly emphasizing aesthetic autonomy as the foundation for art’s relevance in today’s society, refusing to have art submit to ideological or religious demands.

*Ett landskap* was Trotzig’s fourth book, published 1959, and it had the subtitle *Dagbok—fragment 54–58* (“Diary-fragments 54–58”).<sup>10</sup> Her first three books garnered favorable reviews, and led to a growing attention to her work, with literary critics finding a rare talent at work in them. Ingemar Hedenius reviewed *Ett landskap* in the most important daily paper in Sweden, *Dagens Nyheter*, and he recognized in Trotzig someone who put the basic rationality of the welfare state at risk. This threat was apparently serious enough for Hedenius to call it “evil” (“ondska”), and he further included his review article among the essays of *Life and Utility*, in which we also find his programmatic essay on the welfare state. That the two texts belong together is emphasized by Hedenius, who in a short foreword to his book points out that it “contains (as I see it) a coherent vision,” and that he has collected the different essays “in order to elaborate on a certain theme” (Hedenius 1961b, p. 5).

*Ett landskap* is more fragments than conventional diary. Texts vary in length between just a couple of lines and a few pages. It sometimes takes on aspects of the conventional diary form, when a passage is labeled with a date—“December 54”—and a place—“Paris.” But the fragmentary form

<sup>7</sup> (Lindung 2001, p. 679)—The interview was originally published as (Lindung 1968, pp. 203–11). The quote there, on p. 204, goes: “Sverige uppenbarar i sitt lugn en nästan fulländad värld där man upptäcker att människan inte längre är nödvändig.”

<sup>8</sup> On Hedenius’s love for literature and his friendship with different writers, as well as on his own poetic works, see (Nordin 2004). Thure Stenström has devoted a study to three central figures of Hedenius’s Parnassus: (Stenström 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Hedenius, “Mörk humor,” in (Hedenius 1961a, p. 71).

<sup>10</sup> (Trotzig 1959) is quoted with page references in brackets after the quote. All translations from it are mine.

is more dominant; it is difficult to sense any chronological order, and three review articles are also included: on the Dogon sculptures of present-day Mali, on a retrospective exhibition of the paintings of Nicolas de Staël, and a reading of Swedish poet Östen Sjöstrand's collection *Dikter* ["Poems"] 1949–1955. Trotzig's work then contains both aesthetic deliberations as well as spiritual reflections.<sup>11</sup> The resulting whole poses a deeply disturbing and provocative challenge to what Hans Ruin has called Hedenius's "philosophically somewhat unsuspecting pathos of enlightenment."<sup>12</sup>

This was not really unexpected, and perhaps the paper's cultural editors were hoping for an eruption of fury from Hedenius: a few years earlier, Hedenius had written a couple of articles attacking what he called "the religious terror of anguish" and its appreciation of "spiritual woes."<sup>13</sup> His review of *Ett landskap* was entitled "Religious Self Hatred."<sup>14</sup>

Hedenius both opened and ended his discussion of Trotzig's work by contrasting it with what he called a "religion of well-being," exemplified by Händel's oratories and Haydn's masses: Trotzig's religion was for him "a nightmare, so powerful and so evil that the most trivial and habitual Christianity in comparison could appear as unadulterated health and wisdom" (Hedenius 1961c, p. 59). *Ett landskap* was, for Hedenius, filled with "human misery, egocentrism and vulnerability." Even though Hedenius's evaluation of *Ett landskap* was so derogatory, he also sensed in the book, which had "not one smile" in it, an expressive power, fueled by Biblical and mystical sources, but that power was dispelled when Trotzig discussed art and aesthetics. There the "weaknesses of the partly modernist prose becomes more obvious, its preciousness, linguistic intoxication, and factual arbitrariness" (Hedenius 1961c, p. 57).

In her book, Trotzig elaborates on the problematic of identity: one can describe it as a kind of dialectic, where self and non-self confront one another in a desire for a third position, a "You." This struggle has language as its medium: "Dare to have a language. Dare to enter into a relation with reality. To give oneself up to be a victim: and always" (p. 8). The extradition of the self to become a victim is for Trotzig something that takes place in both religious and aesthetic practices: for her these two practices are not identical, but are related to each other in their respective giving up of the self to "the other." As Carin Franzén has pointed out, one finds in *A Landscape* "a description of artistic work as 'letters, attempts at relations, closeness. Message. Means of entering a relation to something else than the self', precisely because it means this sacrifice of the self: 'Means to lose one's self'."<sup>15</sup> Anders Olsson has further directed our attention to what he calls "the experience of the other's face" as the center of *A Landscape*, but to that, in itself an important characterization, one must also add the significance of the *body* (Olsson 2000, p. 389).

Here one must here emphasize the active nature of what Trotzig proposes: having a language, artistic or religious, is to relate to, and become part of, reality. Carin Franzén comments upon the different views of science and art, respectively: "While rational thinking tries to determine its object, the artistic representation is characterized by the inability to express what reality—the 'object'—is."<sup>16</sup> Which is why art remains a never-ending search.

*Ett landskap* describes a conversion to Catholicism, but not through any consistent theological discourse; instead it is represented through bodily figurations. In the text, a body comes forward as opened, pained, wounded, a body that is at the mercy of both world and reader—a body in direct and absolute contrast to the rationality of the surface that Hedenius's vision of the welfare state presents.

<sup>11</sup> (Olsson 2000, p. 396), about *Ett landskap* as a "meditative collection of fragments," but to my mind "meditative" does not really capture the energy of Trotzig's book.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Ruin reviewed a new edition of Hedenius's classic study *Tro och vetande* in *Dagens Nyheter* 25 January 2010 (Ruin 2010).

<sup>13</sup> On this terror of anguish, see (Nordin 2004, p. 249ff; Stenström 2011, pp. 53–60).

<sup>14</sup> Originally published in *Dagens Nyheter* on 11 May 1959, included in *Liv och nytta* (Hedenius 1961c), pp. 54–59—Next to Hedenius's article in the newspaper, there was an ad, in which the publisher, Bonniers, quotes a review of *Ett landskap* written by Göran O. Eriksson in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*: "It contains not a page, hardly a line, that isn't worth the effort of the reader."

<sup>15</sup> Carin Franzén, "det annorlunda, det andra, den andre' Om Birgitta Trotzigs poetik," (Franzén 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Franzén, "det annorlunda, det andra, den andre," (Franzén 2007, p. 109).

This body is both collective, as the body of a multitude, and individual, singular, but these two aspects of the body presuppose and depend on each other. This double body, both collective and individual, is a *female* body, regardless of its sex: it is the child-bearing body, a body that brings forth and nourishes, but at the same time a dying body. This is the grotesque body, as Eva Adolfsson has pointed out, “that does not observe the borders of the individual, that bursts and opens up to mutual landscapes” (Adolfsson 1991, p. 137).

Hedenius, in his review, maintains that “there is not much talk of biological life, but we catch a glimpse of a grimace of disgust” (Hedenius 1961c, p. 56). Whether Hedenius with “biology” refers to sexuality or simply the living, it is a radical misinterpretation, or rather, an active erasure of the female body. At first glance, it might seem that *Ett landskap* actually acknowledges Hedenius’s view: “In hatred and contempt, turning against my body. [ . . . ] Disowns my sex as the birth giving and creative in me.” But the point is to affirm the body, affirm birth giving and creativity, and “the constant naked cry of need that rises out of everything she is, the cry that is her foundation and reality” (p. 9). Trotzig, in *Ett landskap*, represents the body opening to the world, a body that is both individual and collective—and all the time physical, material.

The novel *De utsatta* (“The Destitute”; Trotzig 1957), published a couple of years before *Ett landskap* in 1957, helps us understand the significance of the body. Here, Trotzig describes a collective body, “tiggardjuret,” or “the beggaranimal,” made up of society’s poorest and lowest that form a bodily compound.<sup>17</sup> We find a similar vision of the mass of people in *Ett landskap*, where the collective body is Parisian and contemporary:

a raw block of human multitude emitting a smell of grief, a dirty enduring worn grief; a smell of old stained lack; a smell of impotence, heavy confused anguish; a large lost exhausted body, being driven through pathways, channeled through iron doors, transported, moved. (p. 61)

This body is a body that the welfare state imagines it has done away with, that it does not want to recognize or acknowledge. It is as if Trotzig shares Foucault’s notion of the expendable human being, she sees how modern forms of production and work makes the individual superfluous. Out of the collective body, Trotzig distinguishes singular faces: “the face of an unfree being, the gaze of the slave, movements of the slave” (p. 63). It is “the gaze of one betrayed” (p. 64). The one seeing with this gaze, however, is not exempt from the multitude, but part of it, part of the human as described by Trotzig: “the whole human is just a disjointed doll in the embrace of the driving darkness” (p. 102).

This creature looks back, and her gaze is poignant:

But the gaze.

The sclera somewhat inflamed with its enlarged dark red lacrimal gland. The gaze stands open and dusky, a wide-open depth of dusky pain, more naked than skin can ever be laid bare. Through this receding depth without surface for a moment the image of my face slides; is noticed; captured; transformed in strange rays of light, re-melted in the wanderings of an alien blood, an alien breath’s warmth. (p. 62)

The physical concreteness is palpable in both the representation of the multitude, and the representation of the individuals forming part of the mass—if one does not discern this materiality, one also misses how Trotzig’s modernist naturalism can be qualified as “grotesque.” In it, the observer is struck by the gaze from the observed: noticed, captured, transformed. It is modernist in its experimental attitude, its use of language without obeying laws of grammar or syntax, and in its ignorance of narrative conventions. This modernism is however always communicating with reality; its gaze remains open to those dimensions of reality that political discourse (and social engineering) could not

<sup>17</sup> On this collective body, made up of beggars, (Olsson 1988, pp. 133–40).



encompass, most of all the body of the oppressed and exploited, the body in transformation, giving birth or dying—it is a literary attitude that does not allow itself to turn away: it has to see. This strand of modernism, then, does maintain the realism of the Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian literature, but shapes it as a radical form of naturalism, immerses in it and explores how literary form must be exploded for the experience of ultimate vulnerability to be expressed.<sup>18</sup>

Being seen is “to turn oneself into material for someone else’s life” (p. 95)—this is the ethical center of what Hedenius in his review calls “this debasement of the human being.” His talk of “debasement” is another misinterpretation. A more reasonable, less diagnostic, understanding has been put forward by Lisbeth Larsson in a discussion of the early writings of Trotzig and Sara Lidman: Larsson suggests that they write “the culturally repressed and untold” (Larsson 2004, p. 52). When this repressed body is called to life by art, representation entails pain. It is therefore Hedenius who should be accused of contempt for and debasement of the human being. His diagnostic of the inhabitants of the welfare state talks patronizingly about the “too-large contentment of the people’s home, the satisfaction with the small toys, the satisfaction with the barren, with the apathy of the body and the senses” (Hedenius 1961b, p. 23f). In comparison, Trotzig seems to place herself there, among the despised and debased, a body among bodies.

As the editors of the anthology *Hotad idyll* (“Threatened Idyll”)—Kim Salomon, Lisbeth Larsson, Håkan Arvidsson—write, every war demands “mobilization. People must as far as possible be recruited to the values and ideals that war and battle *allege* to be about.”<sup>19</sup> It is against this backdrop of mobilization one can read Hedenius’s fury—and Trotzig’s conscientious objection.

The question of how it is possible to write the “culturally repressed” must then be put forward. It cannot simply be a question only of a specific form of observation, nor of individual talent, nor of personal properties as such, nor about goodness or evil. It has, at least in *Ett landskap*, to do with the arts; literature, music, painting . . . *Ett landskap* is formed into an intense plea for art, and for the artist’s rights to the “incisive, dissonant” (p. 29).<sup>20</sup> Only by way of breaking with “the in general agreed upon attitudes, points of view, conventions” can art make itself heard and become important. For Trotzig, this implies a rejection of ethical and ideological demands on art, also religious demands: “the more ideologically oriented an environment’s life attitude is, the sharper the artist’s opposition to it will be” (p. 34). An intense plea, then, for the autonomy of art, for its negativity, and maybe it is also exemplary: Lisbeth Larsson talks about what is for literature “an intense and marked unwillingness not only to be part of established, ideological narratives, but against the wholesome narratives as such.” Apparently, this does not mean that Trotzig would have anything against “decisive stances and engagement,” as Larsson pointed out as a tabooed area for the young Swedish writers of the fifties (Larsson 2004, p. 37). Swedish literature of the 1950s has often been criticized for being provincial and conventional. For instance, writer, critic, and communist activist Jan Myrdal looked upon it as “an aesthetic and ideological catastrophe” precisely because of its provincialism (Myrdal [1972] 1988, p. 11). This kind of criticism, however, is hardly applicable to Trotzig, whose works of the late fifties have a radical political dimension; she was, in her own way, an engaged writer making a “decisive stance.” One can then also wonder about the significance of voluntary exile—Trotzig lived with her family outside Paris at the time of writing *Ett landskap*—for the formulation of her opposition to complacent rationalism. And as Trotzig has stressed, the fifties to her meant not only catholic faith but also a growing, left wing political interest (Trotzig 1977, p. 104).

Trotzig’s idea of making oneself into “material for someone else’s life” has a both religious-identificatory as well as a political-solidary meaning. Most of all, however, it is material bodily:

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of different forms of Modernism in Scandinavian literature, see (Brantly 2018).

<sup>19</sup> “Förord,” in (Salomon et al. 2004, p. 7).

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of “language dissonance” as an artistic foundation in Trotzig’s works, see (Olsson 2010, pp. 35–45).

Surfaces can close, harden—like the kind of incurable kind of skin disease that slowly suffocates the person in her own skin, which is transformed into a relentless impenetrable dead shell. (p. 114)

Under this hardened surface (the description probably refers to scleroderma) there is however another life, “his hidden life in the depths.” As Mattias Pirholt has pointed out in his phenomenological study of Trotzig, the body is “the location of contact and contiguity.”<sup>21</sup> The hardened surface is broken up, “visible and invisible wounds” are disclosed: another life, that of the sacrificed Christ, is sensed. Through the actions of faith—like the bending down to kiss the mouth of the leprous (p. 114)—the covenant becomes part of Christ’s suffering, part of his com-passion. Trotzig time and again refers to a kind of mysticism of the wound (although not of the sentimental kind), which goes back to the crucified: “He who has made himself vulnerable. He who has received all the wounds possible. He who has become a wound” (p. 84).

Turning oneself into material for someone else’s life means, then, to affirm “the deadly wound out of which my life slowly bleeds to death” (p. 116). Living inexorably produces wounds on the body, but the believer affirms them as openings to something else, to “this singular, strange, beaten human face” (p. 133): the face of Christ.

Artistic actions too, the activity of art, ultimately aim at breaking open the hardened surface. In that work, art reaches for something else, art is a *relation*—the emphasis is Trotzig’s (p. 54). At the same time, however, that art forms this relation to something outside of itself, to “the landscape of movements, faces, nearnesses that he lives in,” as Trotzig writes about the French painter Nicolas de Staël, it also expresses a “life relationship.” Ultimately, she writes, the aim of de Staël was “not to produce beautiful paintings, but to form his life” (p. 45).

Poetry is for Trotzig the “human word,” it is in poetry mankind formulates the “deepest meaning” of being human (p. 52). Art and poetry can formulate its relationship to life and the living life only through creating a relation to the “non-human.” Trotzig writes about the sculptures of Dogon: “in the constant departure from the palpable, from the human, the Dogon sculpture’s sublimity comes forward: departure, transformation, becoming out of the tension between the human, which is the starting point, and the non-human that is the goal” (p. 51).

Waiting is a central (non-)activity with Trotzig.<sup>22</sup> The one waiting opens herself up to the presence of God, but waiting can also be “the work of giving birth” (p. 169), and for instance in *De utsatta*, this waiting has a double character of expectation and apocalypse: it is the waiting for the child to be born, the concrete physical child that Jakobine is carrying. But it is also the child that the world is anxiously waiting for—as in *Ett landskap*: “The world is there to give birth to one figure, one only. That only one is the crucified” (p. 110). Perhaps waiting can be connected to the fragmentary form, with the fragments “waiting” to be put together, to become a whole: Anders Olsson gives the fragment a suggestive definition as not “traces from the past, but a mobile order belonging to the future” (Olsson 2006, p. 9). The movement towards the future, the as-of-yet-not-denominated-or-determined, can with Anders Olsson be seen as dependent on the fragment’s, the intentional fragment’s, appearance as the effect of “a battle between the known and the unknown, and in this battle, the border between genre and non-genre is also transgressed” (Olsson 2006, p. 13).

This whole aesthetic, or, if one prefers, this combination of aesthetic and religion, which forms into an ethics, is based on the body: it is as a body that we enter the world, and it is as a body we leave it, it is as bodies that we create our relation to the world. However, the body can only exist within this tension between a hardened, suffocating skin, and the open, bleeding wound, or, as Mattias Pirholt states it, as “a promise and a threat [ . . . ] both alluring and appalling” (Pirholt 2005, p. 83). The task of

<sup>21</sup> (Pirholt 2005, p. 81)—In his book, Pirholt devotes a chapter, pp. 51–105 (“Signs of the Body”) to a discussion of the role of the body in Trotzig’s works.

<sup>22</sup> (Olsson 2000, p. 405ff), where he also relates “waiting” to the works of Simone Weil, and especially *Attente de Dieu*, 1950—Trotzig was a careful reader of Weil.

art is to give expression to this relation to the world and the non-human: “The image is there to hurl us towards what itself is not; to that whose absence its being suggests” (p. 24).

This way, Trotzig is formulating a point of view that ultimately provokes Hedenius. She claims that poetry, as “giver of knowledge,” is the most “complete” since it can touch on “areas of life that are not accessible any other way” (p. 24). Hedenius, on the other hand, claims that the welfare state cannot “approve any other sources of knowledge than scientific research and common sense” (Hedenius 1961b, p. 15). Trotzig instead points to art and poetry, and her concept of truth seems situated far from that of the sciences: “Truth: not a formula, but a creature. A composite, shifting, inexhaustible. Alive” (124). This conception of art as true, and a concept of truth that refers not only to sensory data, but to being and existence, and which therefore must be flexible and transformative, must for enlightened philosophy have meant that Trotzig was giving in to the dark forces of irrationality, to the debasement of the human. Since this attraction of Trotzig to evil and self-accusations was “meant as an inescapable truth about human life,” it must be opposed. Hedenius also states how this resistance should be performed: “The solution to the problem is to think it through and then resolutely turn one’s back on it” (Hedenius 1961c, p. 59).

Birgitta Trotzig did not turn her back on the problem. At the time, she did not, to my knowledge, answer Hedenius’s attack on her book. But she did return to the significance of the fifties for her in a text, “Det sekulariserade Sverige: det sakralas hemligheter” (“Secularized Sweden: The Secrets of the Sacred”), written almost three decades later. Interestingly, the anthology *Lycksalighetens halvö* (the title alludes to an important Romantic drama by P.D.A. Atterbom) in which this essay was included has a kind of semi-official status. It was produced by “Sekretariatet för Framtidsstudier,” today the “Institute for Futures Studies,” a state financed but independent organ devoted to research on questions of the future “important for society,” as the back cover of the volume has it. Included was also, for instance, an essay on the history and future of the Swedish welfare state, written by Marxist sociologist Göran Therborn.<sup>23</sup> The volume was one outcome of a research project on “Sweden and Europe,” and the subtitle of the anthology also ran “The Swedish Welfare Model and Europe.” Here left-wing writers and scholars had been given the opportunity to discuss the problems of “the rational people’s home.”

In her essay, Trotzig points out the idea of “soulless welfare” as one of several aspects of a “persistent fairytale about modern Sweden” (Trotzig 1987, p. 79). Her argument is formed into an intense defense of lived experience, beyond and below the myths of the welfare state, a defense for hybridity and difference. She also talks about a situation that must have Hedenius’s attack on her as one experience behind her text:

And over my/the population’s head, decade after decade, different authorities, politicians, official church investigators and bizarre ministers of the church, professors of philosophy and bishops, sociologists, psychologists of religion, culture editors and Permanent Secretaries, this whole class that [ . . . ] has commented on me/the population and my/its condition. My artistic, religious, personal self feels indefinitely violated—as if something in the question was too off the mark to be grasped at all. (Trotzig 1987, p. 79f)

Violated—it is a stern accusation, but easy to sympathize with, if one, as Trotzig does, emphasizes how “authentic confusion and lack of answers” are confronted by an authoritarian but “entertaining pseudo-world of ideas.” She also includes Hedenius’s critique of Christianity in this entertainment industry—since completely missing its target, it turns into a pseudo-critique.

This later essay by Trotzig makes clear, I think, the meaning of Hedenius’s attack on “religious self-hate.” Hedenius emphasizes that the welfare state is based on a “consistently employed moral of utility,” where tolerance of other expressions—he uses religion as one example but also “philosophy, ethics, and more general conceptions of life,” as well as different forms of “doctrinal socialism”—most

<sup>23</sup> See Göran Therborn, “Den svenska välfärdsstatens särart och framtid,” in (Therborn 1987, pp. 13–44).



of all “resembles indifference” (Hedenius 1961b, p. 15). Trotzig picks up that idea, but emphasizes that the image of Sweden as the “homeland of indifference and freedom of values/value nihilism” is ultimately wrong. She states also that this “Manichean simplification satisfies [ . . . ] the intense needs of complaint among a small group of cultural quibblers” when confronting “the displaced, rootless Swedish population’s confusion, discomfort, and disorientation.” (Trotzig 1987, p. 80). According to Trotzig, these simplifications were turned into “dogma” during the “Hedenius debates of the fifties.”<sup>24</sup> It is as if Hedenius were able to see only the surface, and hear only the official rhetoric—but behind and below the slogans and the self-image, another life is lived, which both literature and religion are trying to get in touch with. As Svante Nordin says in his biography of Hedenius, the review article on *Ett landskap* seems written in an “ideological rather than aesthetic mission.”<sup>25</sup> Nordin also explains that Hedenius normally wrote reviews of works he felt befriended with, but “religious pessimism aroused his fury.”

However, since any kind of “religious pessimism” is hard to discern in the imagery of Trotzig’s landscape, Hedenius’s fury might be understood differently. Two opposite standpoints confront each other, two completely different ideas of knowledge and how knowledge is produced. Hedenius relies on science and “common sense,” while Trotzig emphasizes art and religion as more basic or genuine forms of knowledge. If Trotzig therefore disapproves of the privileged position of science and common sense, she also disapproves of the view of the welfare state as one and uniform. The rational surface is undermined, it is about to crackle, the body is bleeding, it is about to give birth, while the face is battered . . . and the official philosophy of the welfare state answers this challenge with authoritarian power language. For Trotzig, the “incisive, dissonant” instead includes “the main point of a necessary counterweight” (p. 29).

Trotzig’s essay on secular Sweden makes for painful reading even today. In it, she points to the migration of that era, what was called “the problem of guest workers,” and to the masses of people in Europe who “live and work [ . . . ] transnationally and trans-linguistically,” and her hope is that out of this situation, Europe will develop “an ongoing softening and relativization of the *imagined* national borders, a removal of the national identity to a secondary sphere” in favor of a “relativized, varied, and multicultural Europe” (Trotzig 1987, p. 84). That thought is today more important than ever—and its origin is the open body, as it is formulated in *Ett landskap*, the body opening up, breaking through the surfaces, in order for the Other to be born and live.

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<sup>24</sup> Trotzig, “Det sekulariserade Sverige,” p. 82—The widespread debates on the role of religion and church, often started by Hedenius, are mapped out and discussed by (Lundborg 2002).

<sup>25</sup> (Nordin 2004, p. 277).

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