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Geopolitics, City Life, and Contested Places in Eyvind Johnson's European Journalism, 1921–1925

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Han har skrevet om dansk litteraturhistorie og har publiceret en lang række arbejder om skandinavisk litteratur i det 19. og 20. århundrede med særligt henblik på emner indenfor litterær geografi. For indeværende arbejder han på et projekt om Eyvind Johnsons tidlige forfatterskab. Hans seneste publikationer indbefatter: "Shining a Light on Eyvind Johnson's Sidelined Novel, *Nittonhundrasjutton: Wartime and Modernism on the Margins*," *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, 52, no. 1 (2022): 81–102 og "Outreach, Invasion, Displacement: Denmark's Disputed Southern Borderland as Negotiated through Strategic and Affective Aspects of Space in Novels by Andersen and Bang," i *Nineteenth-Century Nationalisms and Emotions in the Baltic Sea Region: The Production of Loss*, red. Anna Bohlin, Tiina Kinnunen og Heidi Grönstrand (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 164–91.

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Abstract

The article contributes to the understanding of thematic and stylistic patterns displayed in, and publication practices associated with, foreign-reportage journalism focused on European geopolitics, economy, and urban life in the interwar period. This is done by exploring a selection of Swedish modernist writer Eyvind Johnson's journalistic correspondence articles from Germany and France for domestic newspapers and magazines, published between November 1921 and November 1925.

Keywords

journalism, interwar, geopolitics, critical futurity, city, Eyvind Johnson

Foreign journalistic correspondence for domestic newspapers and other periodicals, including contributions by "literary" authors, constitute a fertile habitat for the exploration and expression of turbulent times and places. Journalism from the interwar period covering its fractured geopolitical, socioeconomic, and ideological conditions is a strong case in point. Reflecting an increasingly mobile and uprooted society, the travelling writer and the émigré became popular authorial roles in the interwar years. Many authors chose to incorporate their travels and encounters with new environments into not only fictional but also factual forms of writing (see Carr 2002, 74). As argued by Carl Thompson, travel writing – including, it could be added, travel letters and foreign reportage in newspapers and magazines – "seemed to enable a more direct engagement with worldly affairs and with politics than was possible in the traditional literary genres" (2011, 58). Furthermore, in addition to their functions as political and cultural commentary and as accounts of other places and people, these "factual" modes of writing could be employed productively to illuminate the travelling reporter's personal adventures and subjective responses.

The early work of Swedish modernist writer Eyvind Johnson (1900–1976; recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1974) offers a rewarding illustration of the efficacy of journalistic reporting to address burning issues in the interwar period. Johnson spent the periods from October 1921 to September 1923 and from June 1925 to February 1930 in Continental Europe (see Munkhammar and Bergh 2018, 1442–43). Key to Johnson’s writerly *modus operandi* during these years, especially pronounced early on, is the utilisation of his meetings with internationally emblematic urban modernities – Berlin and Paris in particular – in a high volume of foreign-reportage articles aimed at various Swedish newspapers and magazines. His most prolific years in this regard were 1922 and 1923, with no fewer than 50 and 54 journalistic articles published in these respective years. The sporadic remunerations generated by this publication activity constituted a fragile but essential pecuniary lifeline for the aspiring author abroad.

In the following, this article will investigate a selection of Eyvind Johnson’s European journalism within a timeframe spanning from November 1921 to November 1925. The endpoint of 1925 reflects what is arguably a degree of shift in Johnson’s journalistic style and publication practice in the mid-1920s. The investigation will be divided into four sections. The first section will focus on Johnson’s 1921 and 1922 journalistic depictions of European environments in their early post-war configuration, with the impact of war visible and readable everywhere: from landscapes and cityscapes, via economies and social conditions, to human bodies. The second section will centre on the innovative representation in Johnson’s journalism of the intense sensory stimulation experienced within modern metropolitan hotspots, especially Berlin, and of changes in urban aesthetics between 1922 and 1925. The third section will examine counter-perspectives in Johnson’s journalism to touristic and ideologically confining conceptualisations of urban geographies, with particular attention to Paris. The fourth section, finally, will trace the subjective turn in Johnson’s journalism in the mid-1920s, while also touching on the increasing emphasis on prose fiction in his publication practice in periodicals in the years ahead.

Afterlife of war and critical futurity

In *Tense Future*, an illuminating exploration of war, critical futurities, and modernism, Paul K. Saint-Amour disputes the view that the notion of the “interwar” period is a predominantly retrospective formation conceived from the vantage point of the Second World War and beyond. The period was, he contends, “understood by many from its midst, even from its inception, as an interval between the First World War and its likely sequel” (2015, 34). Consequently, the condition of living in the 1920s and 1930s could for many mean that the memory of one war was connected to the spectre of a future war, linking post-traumatic stress to what Saint-Amour terms pre-traumatic stress. He challenges, furthermore, the myth of a punctual end to war, arguing that wartime practices and powers tend to drift into apparent peacetime. In this connection, Saint-Amour discusses the role of interwar modernism (including modernism in factual forms of writing) in registering “the ostensibly peacetime vibrations of war in the metropolis” (2015, 12) as well as conveying, but also critiquing, an apparent war-dominated foreclosure of the future.

In this section it will be argued that these perspectives on the durability of war, on “interwar” as an understanding or atmosphere pertaining to the period itself, and on pre-traumatic stress vis-à-vis a critical future are all strikingly relevant to Eyvind Johnson’s European journalism from the post-First World War period. The section offers a consideration of aspects of these themes as treated in a selection of Johnson’s earliest correspondence arti-

cles, dating from November 1921 to July 1922. The articles transport their readership by railway first eastward and then westward through Germany, before continuing through Belgium and into France. They report, moreover, from an extended stay in Berlin and a visit to Cologne. In the articles depicting train travel, the journalist employs bidirectional observation: of topographies still scarred by the impact of war as they appear in motion outside the train window, and of human bodies, behaviour, and interaction within the compartment or carriage. When operating “on the ground” in specific locations, the journalist can assess geopolitical, social, and “mentality” conditions in the aftermath of war. All of Johnson’s European reportage articles utilise what Carl Thompson terms travel writing’s autoptic principle, which serves to verify and legitimise the content of a travel account by recourse to the narrator’s eyewitness status (2011, 64–65), but none more so than the type of journalistic prose explored below.

The durability of the effects of war are made clear in the very first instance of Johnson’s European journalism, characteristically entitled “Funderinger på en resa” and published in the anarchistic weekly magazine *Brand* in November 1921.¹ The brief article records a train journey from Kiel to Hamburg (for onward travel to Berlin) and offers a succinct yet striking motion picture of the state of the German nation: “ett krossat och erövat land susar förbi i natten” (2006f, 33). Furthermore, the article asserts, in the somewhat hyperbolic and abrasive language that features in Johnson’s contributions to *Brand*, an extended continuity between wartime and “peacetime”, foreclosing the prospect of a settled future: “6-7 års vansinne, som håller på att följas av mångårig idioti” (2006f, 34). This sense of prospective crisis is exacerbated by a class schism, concretised as a socially stratified “body language”, which the journalist has observed during his initial encounter with Germany: on the one hand, the well-nourished middle-class bodies of fellow travellers on the train; on the other hand, the starved bodies of children – “krigsförstörda av umbäranden” (2006f, 33) – he saw in the streets of Kiel.

Only a few weeks after having reached Berlin, Johnson is able to assess the economic and social climate in the city and the country, and on both macro and human-interest-story levels. In December 1921, in an article entitled “Berlin i glädjens – och i hopplöshetens tecken”, he communicates to the readers of *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*² an impressively precise foreknowledge of the macro-political consequences of the monumental war reparation payments imposed on the German state: “det blir helt enkelt embryot till ett nytt sammanbrott, ett ‘sammanbrottets sammanbrott’” (1921a, 1). Johnson’s acute analysis and articulation posit that belligerence informs the fragile peace and furthers a future war: “man spelar ut med en pansrad näve [...] – ‘fredstraktaten’! Som endast blev en krigsförklaring” (1921a, 1). In a piece for *Morgonbris*, the magazine of the Swedish Association of Socialdemocratic Women, the focus is on social and affective aspects of post-war society. The reporter records critical conditions such as starvation and registers in a poignant language the pre-traumatic stress that has penetrated the mentality of the people: “denna mörka, dova ångest som så bitit sig in i det arbetande folkets sinne; man frågar sig *hur* det skall ända” (2006a,

1. *Brand* was the second-most popular publication channel for Johnson’s early foreign correspondence, featuring 14 articles in 1922 and 10 articles in 1923.

2. *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* was of particular importance to Johnson’s European journalism and the most popular destination for his early correspondence, featuring 23 articles in 1922 and 28 articles in 1923. The daily newspaper was established in Johnson’s hometown of Boden in the north of Sweden in 1918 following a split in the Swedish Social Democratic party in the wake of the Russian revolution, with *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* supporting the more moderate wing of the movement. Not long after the 21-year-old Johnson’s arrival in Berlin, he appeared for the first time in the paper, in its issue of 1st December 1921, with an article entitled “Den tyngsta vägen”. Interestingly, he was presented as “en f. d. Bodensbo, som i många år vistats i Berlin”. During the period considered in this article, *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* continually referred to Johnson as its German or foreign correspondent. From the beginning, Johnson’s articles were typically placed on the paper’s front page.

43). In this article, the reporter discovers another indicator of the afterlife of war in the ostensibly post-war period in the form of the destructive imprint left on human bodies, as documented by the harrowing ubiquity in the cityscape of “krigets mest synliga frukter: invaliderna” (2006a, 44).

The topic of the bodily afterlife of war is personalised in a further December piece for *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* entitled “Vykort o. tändstickor...”, which gestures astutely from its Berlin environment towards the location of its primary readership in northern Sweden. The railway motif, metropolitan and “marginal”, is key in achieving this connection. The article charts a chance encounter between the reporter and a war-disabled man who has lost a leg and an arm fighting against the Russians on the eastern front. The encounter takes place on Berlin’s underground railway, which provides an atmospheric and, for the core readership, exotic and futuristic setting: “Vid stationerna hör man den väldiga staden dåna, bullra, rassla över sig. Så rullar tåget vidare...” (1921c, 1). Through conversation, or “interviewing” as the reporter suggests, it transpires that the man was captured, and treated, by the Russians and subsequently took part in an “exchange of invalids”, one of several, that transported him by railway through Finland and Sweden back to Germany. In the north, he passed through the Swedish border town of Haparanda, where he was given flowers by a girl, and through the railway nexus of Boden, Johnson’s hometown. This was important in the article’s publication context, as Boden constituted the heartland of *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* (see note 2), as reflected in the newspaper’s frontpage banner: “Tidning för Bodens stad och övre Norrland.” After the war, the disabled man makes a modest living from selling postcards and matches in the streets of Berlin, hence the title of the article.

After around six months in Berlin, Johnson embarks in April 1922 on an extended westward railway journey that will eventually take him to Paris, his next longer-term destination. In an energetic style with short punchy sentences, the travel account “Västöver Tyskland”, also published in *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*, maps the first leg leading to the Ruhr area in the Rhineland region. The article immediately immerses its reader in the overcrowded, hot, and notably cosmopolitan train environment, before elegantly developing the railway motif to introduce a further, this time geopolitical, instance of the afterlife of war as manifested in the region the reporter is approaching. A train travelling in the opposite direction functions as a message board of sorts for the “post”-war occupation by the Allied powers of parts of the German Rhineland to enforce the payment of war reparations. In his typical role of eyewitness – “Ögat stannar vid en vagn” (2006l, 58) – the reporter notices signage (in three languages) on the train to the effect that it is reserved for the occupying forces. This represents, he informs the reader, “en förkänning om tillståndet neråt Rhenlandet” (2006l, 58).

In a follow-up piece for *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* depicting a visit to Cologne, Johnson proceeds to concretise this situation. The article “En dag i Köln”, published in May 1922, offers one of the finest and most substantial examples of Johnson’s early factual prose. It captures a complex city condition, with post-war Cologne constituting at the same time a militarised zone and a tourist magnet. The reporter observes how both dimensions of this duality feed into the transnationalisation of the place: “Sedan fredsslutet har staden blivit mer kontinental än den någonsin varit” (1922b, 4). The journalistic style of the piece reflects the dual condition of the city, intertwining a seriously voiced critique of militarism with light-touch musings on Cologne as a tourist attraction, centred on its famous cathedral past and present. The piece is half ideological inquiry, half guided tour. The article notes how the city is teeming with military personnel, especially British, rendering it a hybrid location – “Överallt är det engelska ‘Clubs’, ‘Boardinghouse[s]’” (1922b, 1) – and analyses this in terms of a trans-European opposition between the soldier and the worker, valorising

the latter: “det är den tyska arbetaren som får *betala* den engelska militarismen för att den ‘håller vakt’ vid Rhen” (1922b, 1).³ The occupation is viewed as a violation of the poverty-stricken German people. As for the touristic culture and its sightseeing objects, these are more positively valorised in this article than is the case generally in Johnson’s European journalism (see section below on “contesting touristic conceptions”), which, too, may have an ideological basis. The reporter observes the mores of modern motorised tourism – “Stora autobussar [...] hålla framför domen” (1922b, 4) – but without ironic distancing. He employs tropes of travel writing, including wonderment, in his exploration of the cathedral, terming his ascent to the top of the gigantic tower “resan” (1922b, 1). Importantly, Cologne’s cathedral is conceptualised as a force of resistance towards the contemporary condition: “Som en sällsam protest mot den nya tiden reser den sig” (1922b, 1). This connects with the conclusion of the piece which contrasts the positive force of cultural heritage that Cologne encapsulates with military aggression in the ostensibly post-war period: “Skönhet och kultur ha sällan eller aldrig med [...] fanatisk militarism att göra” (1922b, 4).

The final train-travel text considered in this section, “Genom Belgien och Nordfrankrike”, was appropriately published in *Signalen*, the weekly newspaper of the Swedish Union of Rail Workers,⁴ in July 1922. This is a key and semi-concluding article in the development of the theme of the afterlife of war insofar as, on the one hand, the registration of the longer-term effects of war destruction reaches a culmination point, while on the other the reporter observes how the actuality of war begins to mentally recede, or be pushed, into the past. The article now posits war as both proximate and distant. War is no longer as newsworthy as it used to be, the journalist reflects. Leaving Germany behind and as he travels deeper into Belgium, the reporter nevertheless realises the true scale of damage to the built and natural environment that war has caused: “verkligheten var dock värre än ens fantasi” (2006g, 83). In an arresting continuation of the article, the reporter contrasts his impression of an utterly destroyed northern France with that of the unaffected atmosphere in Paris, his endpoint. Notwithstanding the apparent mental climate in the capital, the following concluding passage, however, leaves the reader with an uneasy sense that the metropolitan nonchalance and “historical” attitude to the war may also be read as a suppression of the very real threat of future conflict:

Ända fram mot Paris är landet ödelagt. Blott en tre kvarts järnvägsresa innan man anländer till “världens huvudstad” syns ruiner [...]. Det är bra nära!

Men Seine rinner lugn och blank som om intet hänt, och kriget blir ett avlägset, fasansfullt *något* då man stiger av vid Nordstationen och blandar sig i folkvimlet.

Det är ju så länge sedan. (2006g, 85)

This encapsulates Johnson’s complex journalistic meditation on war effects in the early 1920s as a phenomenon that extends from the past through the present and into the future.⁵

3. The quoted passage makes an ironic reference to the German patriotic anthem “Die Wacht am Rhein”, popular during the First World War.

4. After *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* and *Brand*, *Signalen* was the third-most popular outlet for Johnson’s early European journalism, featuring 10 articles in 1922 and 11 in 1923.

5. An illuminating retrospective perspective on Johnson’s existence as a foreign reporter in the early 1920s can be found in his article “Vår utländske korrespondent”. This was his contribution to a special issue of *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* marking the 20th anniversary of the newspaper in 1938. In a typically self-deprecating style, Johnson offers insights into the dual motivation that led him to establish himself as a newspaper correspondent despite a lack of journalistic training and media contacts: a desire to express himself in writing and a hope of securing a decent level of sustenance. In both regards the results were modest, he suggests. Interestingly, Johnson observes how his navigation between cultural and political areas of interest resulted in correspondence pieces whose hybrid style combined literary and journalistic features: “jag så att säga betraktade det tyska eländet med Dostojevskijs ögon men under ansträngningar att verka saklig och välinformerad” (1938, 9). This hybrid style will be explored further in the next section of this study.

Taking the pulse of the metropolitan environment

An illustrative portion of Johnson's European journalism is centred on collective city life, on urban "systems" and aesthetics, on mass movement, coordination and rhythm in metropolitan space, and on the affective atmospheres and the intense sensory stimulation generated within the city. Berlin – where Johnson, as mentioned, experienced his first extended encounter with large-scale Continental urbanity – offered him a particularly fertile environment for this kind of journalistic enquiry, and shall form the focal point of this section.

From the earliest stages of Johnson's practice as a European reporter, elements of "literary" style and imagery are found in his "factual" writing, facilitating a form of urban impressionism. This "crossover" style seems to have increasingly become a hallmark of Johnson's journalistic prose, as discussed further in the final section. Björn Gustavsson contends that Johnson's journalistic texts "blev till övningar i berättarkonst – med efterhand allt starkare inslag av skönlitterär gestaltning" (2006, XI). When Johnson as early as March 1922 in the article "Berlin i vårsolen" conveys to his domestic readership the overwhelming impact, visual and acoustic, of witnessing massive city crowds interacting with multiple transport systems, signs of his emerging impressionistic style are already in evidence. The journalist dynamises his account stylistically through rhythm, simile, and onomatopoeia: "det myllrar människor, som i en myrstack, det bölar bilar, det dundrar omnibus[s]ar, skramlar spårvagnar, rullar tåg och gnolar vackra flickor" (1922a, 1). Furthermore, this type of style and subject matter arguably anticipates Johnson's 1928 modernist metropolitan novel *Stad i ljus*, acclaimed for its literary innovation, set in Paris, and featuring the city itself as a protagonist of sorts (see Thomsen 2015, 81–86). In another newspaper article, "Små anteckningar ur en främlings dagbok", published approximately one year after "Berlin i vårsolen", Johnson's well-equipped writerly toolbox has developed further. He now draws on the monstrous, personifies a whole continent, uses fresh figurative language – the societal dance or high-stake card game – and employs emphatic ellipsis to capture the commercial, cosmopolitan, and class-divided whirlpool that is Berlin: "affärshusen utefter Potsdamer- och Leipzigerstrasse spyr ut sina tusen obekanta öden, så som de slukar dem" (2006h, 110) – "På Café Josty rör sig herr och fru Europa" (2006h, 110) – "Utanför blandas ödena som bladen i en kortlek. Hasard..." (2006h, 111) – "Så går dansen. Blott det fattiga folket kan inte vara med på balen. Det är nämligen utan skor" (2006h, 112).

The metropolitan environment that Johnson portrays in his journalism is a stage on which questions of economy are constantly played out. Article topics range from the reporter's humorous suffering of micro-economic price hikes to the macro-economic drama of hyperinflation. Johnson's skills in familiarising the foreign economies to his domestic audience through known entities, but at the same time defamiliarising the economic topics to entertaining effect, are exhibited in two pieces, one set in Berlin, the other in Paris, and both published in *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*. Among other more serious themes, the articles share the motif of the inflated price of Christmas trees, caused by demand outstripping supply, a scenario that would have amused Johnson's northern Swedish audience. The reporter relays how, in Paris, the Christmas tree trader demands "femton francs för ett botaniskt missfoster som kallades för 'l'arbre de Noël', det vill säga julgran" (2006e, 98). Similar arboreal anomalies are traded in Berlin – "t. o. m. talltoppar hade fått äran att bli julträd" (1921a, 1) – leading the reporter to paint a comic picture, couched in appropriate economic nomenclature, of Christmas-tree investors, middlemen and profiteering, and of an overheated marketplace that easily prices the reporter out, despite his best efforts to obtain a tree.

As for the larger-scale drama of hyperinflation, which culminated in Germany in 1923, Johnson's journalism captures this in scenes – at times containing explicit elements of "per-

formance” – set in shops, the bank, or the street. These scenes are keenly observed, occasionally featuring the reporter himself as an actor, frequently narrated in a humorous-ironic voice, but never losing sight of the devastating social and political consequences of the drama. Centred on a department store, the reporter recounts – through an illustrative scene involving two women buying the same item 15 minutes apart, but with the second woman paying substantially more for it – how the fixed pricing of goods has been abandoned in favour of a frantic and ongoing catch-up race with the spiralling value of the American dollar. Through a shift in tone and a poignant politicisation of a hitherto more light-hearted subject matter – devices that are recurrent in Johnson’s European journalism – the reporter goes on to identify the gigantic gap between prices and wages, thrice accentuated, that inflation causes and the critical futurity this entails: “Ja – dollarn går på höjden, snart är den rent av astronomisk. Men lönerna, lönerna, lönerna. Om de blott steg hälften så snabbt... [/] Vad månne bliva av detta?” (2006b, 106).

This monetary and social “class conflict” between strong currencies, the dollar in particular, and the nosediving mark permeates as a leitmotif a body of articles written during the first half of 1923 that build incrementally Johnson’s portrayal of Berlin’s febrile economic atmosphere and the urban “theatre” that goes with it. In January, the reporter designates the dollar as “värdemätare och barometer för stämningen” (2006b, 105-06) in the city, while also pointing to the correlation between the escalation of the dollar price and malnourishment in Germany. In February, he compares visiting a bank teeming with foreigners exchanging their hard currencies for mountains of mark notes to a scene from the industry of imagination: “Att gå på en bank är som att gå på teater” (2006h, 112). The article in question, the aforementioned “Små anteckningar ur en främlings dagbok”, is in an overarching sense informed by an interest in the mediated or “faked” modern reality, rendering it prescient of current conditions and debates. The article is commentary about sensationalism when it observes how a scene involving a starving mother and her children despairing outside a butcher shop’s display of prohibitive prices is not only captured by international news media in still and moving images but also arranged to create maximum effect: “Det hör till pjäsen” (2006h, 109) – “Det är propaganda” (2006h, 109). In June, finally, in an article aptly named “Dollarsommar” and published in *Signalen*, everything, even the seasons, seems to have come under the sway of powerful currencies. Expressed in an elliptical and staccato discourse, perhaps aimed at reflecting the desperate and absurd state of affairs, the article addresses the total dominance in city life of those who are “valutabenådade” (2006d, 122) as well as the barriers encountered by the less fortunate, exemplified by the reporter. Having failed to buy a decent pair of shoes for 100,000 marks, the reporter exits the shop and concludes on a resigned but poetical note: “Då går man ut i den regniga dollarsommaren...” (2006d, 124).

When Johnson, after a period spent in Sweden, revisits the atmosphere and aesthetics of Berlin’s metropolitan environment in July 1925, the changes he observes are pronounced. He registers, moreover, a general inclination to consign the inflationary period to a past distinct from the present. Johnson’s key method in the article entitled “Hur ter sig världsstaden Berlin just nu?” is to compare and contrast the cityscapes then and now in terms of darkness and light, thereby anticipating the polarity of motifs that would inform his important literary pairing, the novels *Stad i mörker* and *Stad i ljus*, published, respectively, two and three years after the article. Whereas in the inflationary period the streets were dark and frequently risky at night, the 1925 version of the city presents a nocturnal picture bathed in electric and gas light. This new urban luminousness is not, however, conceived purely or even primarily as positive in the article, as this statement, expressed in elegantly indignant

prose, shows: “Nu är det ljus, ljus och åter ljus [...]. Fasansfulla ljusreklamer kläda husfasaderna med en färgprakt, som är för bländande grann att vara vackra” (1925, 1). The new urban aesthetic is considered problematic especially because it serves as a vehicle for a growing commodification of societal culture and a broader capitalist advance – topics that would occupy Johnson in several of his subsequent novels with Swedish settings such as *Kommentar till ett stjärnfall* (1929) and *Bobinack* (1932) (see Thomsen 2018, 34–39).

Contesting touristic and confining conceptions of famous topographies

It is frequently observed in the theory of travel writing that modern travel writers tend to put a distance between themselves and mass tourism. They display an intention to seek out “byways” and lesser-known places instead of the canonical sights, and they conceive travel in terms of a unique individual experience in contrast to tourism’s group experience (see Carr 2002, 79, and Thompson 2011, 54–55, 124). This analysis seems in part very relevant to Johnson’s European journalism as well, although, as this section will aim to substantiate, the dissociation from conventional displays of city culture and narrow topography in Johnson’s travel correspondence is primarily motivated by social and political critique rather than founded on a quest for individualism.

Recurring in Johnson’s European journalism is its resistance against customary or ideologically distorted notions of urban topographies. Superficial and cemented understandings are rejected in favour of alternative ideological coordinates. The signalled ambition is to go beyond not only the beaten track of tourism but also, importantly, the organisation of space dictated by power structures. Monumental historic locations and sightseeing attractions such as Versailles evoke a mixed affective response and are ultimately dismissed as bastions of nationalism: “Alla sådana här ‘historiska minnen’ verkar pinsamt på en, även om de är vackra” (2006c, 96). Instead, Johnson’s journalism proposes a horizontal extension of the urban vision to include, in particular, working-class and industrial districts and their significance. Similarly, but on a vertical metaphorical axis, competing notions of remaining on or penetrating below the surface of the recorded environments are in play. Johnson’s journalism explicitly or implicitly distances itself from the practice of moving “på ytan, som nog de flesta resenärer gör” (2006a, 41). Several of the early articles sent from Berlin (and other German towns and cities) employ a contrastive compositional principle (as flagged up in some of their headings). According to this, an initial “sunnier” picture of the city is juxtaposed with a much darker urban substratum or underbelly. The articles posit an investigative journalistic gaze that can demask the city or drill down to demonstrate its double life: “Berlin firar sin jul i en falsk glädjes tecken. Ty *under* ligger förbittringen och fräter” (1921a, 1) – “Under denna mask av glad tillförsikt” (2006a, 42) – “Berlin lever två liv, dagens och nattens” (2006a, 43).

With an emphasis on France, the following provides a fuller index of the inclination of Johnson’s journalism to contest socio-economically and ideologically confining conceptions of the city space. Two Paris-focused articles from the second half of 1925 constitute the primary material. “Vandringar i parisiska förstäder”, published in October 1925 in *Arbetaren*, the daily newspaper founded by the Swedish syndicalist organisation just three years previously, is a study in political economy as articulated in urban topography. At the same time, it showcases a growing use of “literary” techniques in Johnson’s factual prose. The article reads as a development and substantiation of a slightly earlier piece, “Tanernas Paris”, published in *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* in August 1925.

The precursor piece, notwithstanding certain misogynistic elements of its discourse, is noteworthy as an overt critique of blinkered travel writing and tourism as well as blinkered journalism: “Tanernas Paris, det är resehandböckernas och de borgerliga journalisternas. Det är den del av staden, som man bereser i turistbil” (2006i, 141). The article aims to debunk a hardwired misconception of the French metropolis as an Elysian dream destination. What is presented as a narrow and ill-informed notion of the city’s touristy “high” centre as its proper face – “denna sjudagarsdröm” (2006i, 138) – is replaced with the reality of a much bigger social geography and its rough conditions of class hierarchy and class conflict. On this understanding, the entire city becomes a political centre and battlefield. If the earlier piece thus substitutes one concept of city centre with another, the subsequent piece can be described as a decentring journey of discovery into urban income generation.

“Vandringar i parisiska förstäder” conflates tourism with centrism and its distortions and, ultimately, with bourgeois ideology and capitalist power. The article sets out to solve an economic conundrum that can puzzle the traveller when encountering the splendours of Paris: “plötsligt en dag inställer sig tanken: Men var i herrans namn kommer då allt detta ifrån?” (2006k, 152). In order to locate the city’s economic engine, the journalist offers the reader a defamiliarising urban travel account. This finds that the industrial and proletarian *suburbs* house the motor of society on which everybody depends. In a striking socio-geographic role reversal, the elevated metropolitan centre dominated by the consuming elite is rendered parasitic upon the productivity of the unappreciated suburbs. However, alongside its revaluation of the economic and social periphery, the article de-romanticises industrialism in a polemic with tendencies towards factory and machine worship in contemporary bourgeois culture. The article’s travel account thus also serves to lay bare the destructive social and environmental effects of industrialism. A web of motifs and tropes that would not be out of place in fictional writing create a palpable sense of transformation – “Här växer fabriksskorstenarna ur jorden” (2006k, 152) – and couch the journey as a passage into a metropolitan realm of darkness and deprivation: the heavy smoke dominates “likt ett dok av elände” (2006k, 153), the built environment displays “ett stänk av tillvarons sot och fattigdom” (2006k, 153), while “Husen mörknar” (2006k, 153) and “Allt är sotigt” (2006k, 154). Aspects of the hellscape are associated with the subjugated existence in the suburbs. In a similar vein but on a cosmic scale, the conclusion of the article observes that even the sun shows the impoverished a darkened demeanour: “när den stiger fram för den fattiges blick har den alltid vänt den sotiga sidan till” (2006k, 154). Overall, the article constitutes a powerful reading and critique of the social stratification of the urban environment. It combines pedestrian travel experience, vivid imagery, and systemic analysis.

Travel for leisure, (the problem of) subjectivity, and journalistic changes

This concluding section provides a reflection on an instance of Eyvind Johnson’s European journalism that records travel by train yet again. However, the article in question, “Tysk söndag...” from June 1925 and published in *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*, observes an altered societal atmosphere and social behaviour and employs a more subjective register than found in the earlier articles. In the social picture painted in “Tysk söndag...” the destructive effects of the First World War have evidently receded further into the background, but without disappearing altogether from the narrative’s frame of reference. The change in atmosphere is mirrored in the article’s tone which is largely humorous and leisurely, dominated by irony (including self-irony), hyperbole, casual critical commentary,

and surprise elements. The tone seems fitting since the subject matter of the piece is centred on mid-1920s travel for leisure (although the narrator's own travel motifs are not revealed), reflecting the continued growth of European mobility and tourism during the decade.

The article charts the trials and tribulations of the narrator's third-class train (and ferry) journey from southern Sweden via Sassnitz to Berlin. The improved living conditions, compared with the reality recorded in the articles published in the beginning of the 1920s, are registered – in the tongue-in-cheek voice that informs the piece – through their effect on the travellers' body mass: "Magarna ger en något att tänka på: man ser i dem symbolen för förbättrade levnadsförhållanden, eller i varje fall, för starkare öl" (2006j, 133). "Tysk söndag..." shares the tendency discussed above towards displaying distance to touristic or leisurely travel and "superficial" engagement with new surroundings. With humorous reservation, the narrator observes the throng of German Sunday travellers heading for the countryside who board and overcrowd the train. Interestingly, a remnant of the topic of the afterlife of war is identifiable in the simile used to characterise the long line of leisure travellers: "Det ser ut som ett tåg av krigsflyktingar när de stormar in i kupéerna" (2006j, 133). Moreover, the article ironises stereotypical touristic "sightseeing" and the conventional tropes of train travel for leisure: "åka tåg, se fjärran vyer, låta främmande länders landskap susa förbi mer eller mindre solbelysta" (2006j, 135). Generic topographical ideals such as these are juxtaposed with the narrator's own observation of a more mundane and less affectively-charged natural reality outside the compartment: "Det är inte fult, men trist ändå. Hela landet ser ut att vara vattensjukt" (2006j, 135).

The narrator himself, however, whose subjectivity occupies a conspicuously more central position in this piece than is generally the case in Johnson's earlier European journalism, is not exempt from the problem of preconditioned or flawed perception. The article showcases the self-deprecating narrator persona that became a hallmark of interwar travel writing in contrast to the more heroic traveller often projected in more traditional forms of the genre (see Thompson 2011, 59). At the lowest point in his travel woes, the narrator rants in his mind against the entire German nation, only to abruptly realise the true complexion of the expansive and boisterous fellow travellers who have provoked his reaction:

[Jag] kände mig [...] som en martyr för stora och ädla saker. Och jag tyckte att tyskarna var förfärliga att vara tillsammans med och beklagade i själ och hjärta alla resande svenskar, som råkat ut för mitt tragiska öde.

Då började två herrar tala skånska. Två damer också. Och nu talade hela kupéavdelningen skånska – alla utom jag. Och jag ber härmed tyska nationen om ursäkt, hänvisande till vad som tänkts om den av undertecknad [...]. (2006j, 134)

The real point here is not the substitution of one national target of the narrator's quixotic wrath for another, but the underlying subversion of national stereotypes. In this episode, the article playfully but purposefully destabilises the belief in the truthfulness of personal visual observation that undergirds much travel writing. This is done in order to express a transnational ethos.

The reason for concluding this exploration of Eyvind Johnson's European journalism published between 1921 and 1925 with a focus on "Tysk söndag..." is that the article encapsulates the direction in which Johnson's foreign correspondence develops during the time span in question and into the second half of the decade. Helen Carr emphasises that twentieth-century travel writing displays "a move [...] to a more impressionistic style with the interest focused as much on the travellers' responses or consciousness as their travels" (2002, 74). This move is well illustrated by "Tysk söndag..." and seems, furthermore, to be

borne out by the changes in the tone and themes of Johnson's travel texts after 1924 identified by Björn Gustavsson. He contends that "resebrevet blir hädanefter mer utpräglat subjektiva [...] samtidigt som berättarjagets närvaro i texten blir allt tydligare" (2006, XII). Gustavsson argues further that, following a rupture in 1924 in Johnson's relationship with the anarcho-syndicalist movement, the radical political dimension of his journalism is toned down somewhat, while the publication outlets become more diverse, with *Brand* now largely excluded. To add to Gustavsson's analysis, it is noticeable that Johnson from the mid-1920s onwards favours larger and politically more mainstream publication channels, typically Social Democratic or socially liberal. This broader reach of his journalism reflects, moreover, his growing status as a commentator and new literary voice in the national cultural landscape. In 1925, Johnson publishes journalistic prose for the first time in *Konsumentbladet*, the influential weekly magazine of the Swedish Cooperative Association, and in 1926 his journalism appears for the first time in the daily newspapers *Stockholms-Tidningen*, Sweden's largest morning paper at the time, and the Gothenburg-based *Ny Tid*, both of which would figure prominently among his journalistic outlets in the following years.

However, the increasing incorporation of literary features into Johnson's factual writing style may at the same time be viewed as a stepping stone to a stronger prioritisation on Johnson's part of the fully literary side of his output. This can be evidenced by comparing his publication practice in newspapers and other periodicals in the early 1920s with that of the late 1920s. The changes in the relative volumes of journalistic publications and prose-fiction publications are revealing: in 1922, which was, as pointed out in the introduction, one of the most prolific years of Johnson's European journalism with an output of 50 articles, he does not publish a single prose-fiction piece in periodicals, while in 1929 the figures are four journalistic articles and 15 prose-fiction publications. Despite this journalistic "downsizing" towards the end of the 1920s, Johnson's writing would maintain a significant journalistic strand also after the decade that saw the remarkable flourishing of his incisive and innovative European reportage.

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