Commemorative dis(re)membering: erasing heritage, spatializing disinheritance†

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Abstract. In this paper I develop an idea of commemorative ‘dis(re)membering’ as a tool for a critical, nonessentialist reconfiguration of memorial landscapes, heritage discourse, and dominant official narratives of the past. The notion of commemorative dis(re)membering is not limited to any one particular case but is a general approach which fundamentally questions taken-for-granted assumptions about memorialization as a social process. The empirical focus of the paper is on Swedish labor-company camps established by the military in the late 1930s. I present a historical background to the camps, and proceed to consider the discourse that framed and enabled the creation of them. In reference to Continental European social theory and philosophy, I address the position of the camps in relation to the constitution of the law and the social imaginary. I proceed to situate the argument in the context of recent attempts to address forms of ‘dissonant heritage’ and pave the ground for a critique of heritage logocentrism. This critique is then advanced through an elaboration of dis(re)membering in relation to overarching issues of democracy, subjectivity, identity, citizenship, and the role of the past in the present. Finally, I propose a permanent replacement of the imaginary lineage of heritage with a ‘rhizome history’ of ‘disinheritance’. In suggesting the erasure of heritage, I propose that objects of the past should be mobilized as disinheritance assemblages for critical and subversive purposes in order to make the past implode into the present and across spatial scales in ways that unsettle fundamental social imaginary significations.

1 Introduction
In this paper I develop an idea of ‘dis(re)membering’ the past as a tool for a critical, nonessentialist reconfiguration of memorial landscapes, heritage discourse, and dominant official narratives (Landzelius, 1999a). The notion of commemorative dis(re)membering is not limited to any one particular case but is a general approach which fundamentally questions taken-for-granted assumptions about memorialization as a social process. Based upon a ‘democratic thought experiment’, the argument suggests a permanent replacement of the historicist notion of ‘heritage’ with one of spatialized ‘disinheritance’. This idea has widespread and general implications for the construction and display of the past, as well as for the construction of (democratic) identities. The politicized reconceptualization of the past presented here has emerged in my research on the context of Swedish labor-company camps established by the military in the late 1930s. The polysemic and ambiguous context of the camps forms the empirical focus of the first part of the paper.

This paper is divided into eight sections, including the introduction and conclusion. In section 2, after the introduction, a historical background to the camps is given, and in section 3 the discourse that framed and enabled the creation of them is considered. In reference to Continental European social theory and philosophy, in section 4 I address the position of the camps in relation to the constitution of the

law and the social imaginary. In section 5 I situate the argument in the context of recent attempts to address forms of ‘dissonant heritage’ and pave the ground for a critique of heritage logocentrism. In section 6, this critique is advanced through an elaboration of dis(re)membering in relation to overarching issues of democracy, subjectivity, identity, citizenship, and the role of the past in the present. In this section, the normative position that is decisive for the final argument of this paper is outlined in conjunction with an integrative analysis of David Held’s ‘democratic thought experiment’, of Cornelius Castoriadis’s discussion of ‘autonomy’ and ‘heteronomy’, as well as of the implications of Mikhail Bachtin’s notion of ‘heteroglossia’. Based on the theorization of dis(re)membering and the articulation of an explicit normative standpoint, a permanent replacement of the imaginary lineage of heritage with spaces of ‘disinheritance’ is proposed in section 7. In this section, a writing of history is conceived of in terms of a ‘rhizome history’, a conceptualization that would disallow essentializing foreclosure. In suggesting the erasure of heritage, I finally propose that objects of the past, on all spatial scales, should be mobilized as disinheritance assemblages for critical and subversive purposes in order to make such a reconfigured past implode into the present in ways that unsettle fundamental social imaginary significations. In terms of theorization, the paper accordingly proceeds through three interrelated yet distinct moments, each drawing in particular upon certain concepts and arguments in order to: first, analyze the empirical case; second, establish a normative position from which to assess the relevance of the case in relation to present issues; and, third, reflect upon how this relevance can be transformed into provocative and unsettling spatialized interventions.

The labor-company camps were temporary constructions, erected for the detention of ‘subversive’ conscripts by the Swedish military in the late 1930s, with approval from the Social Democratic government and, during the war, from the broad-based coalition cabinet comprised of Social Democrats, Liberals, Conservatives, and members of the Agrarian Party (Molin, 1982). The camps were not explicitly intended to function as a way of encroaching on civilian citizens’ political rights, but were envisaged as a measure to safeguard the military against destabilizing, subversive activities. However, in the case of individuals imprisoned for their political affiliations, many of the draftees were either drafted directly from civilian life to a labor-company camp, or preemptively removed from their military units on the basis of allegations of being ‘Communists’—even though they had not engaged in any ‘subversive’ activities within the military, which was the legal justification for their incarceration (Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning [daily newspaper] 21 October 1941, page 11; Molin, 1982, pages 123 – 132, 206 – 211). In the case of incarcerated civilians, legal practice would have stipulated that they be prosecuted in civilian courts had they trespassed the law. Such legal checks and balances were disregarded, and democracy was undermined under the pretext of national security.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Swedish labor-company camps continue to be a sensitive topic in Sweden. Apart from one academic book-length study, a valuable but conventional historical account (Molin, 1982), and one account of the first camp to be organized (Kieri and Sundström, 1985), the labor-company camps have been displaced by a politics of institutionalized amnesia, nonrepresentation, and nondisplay. The camps do not feature in publications or exhibitions by local, regional, or national museums, and, on the whole, critical inquiries into the Swedish camps have been brushed aside by the Swedish governments of the day. For example, in April 2000,
in response to a query (Svensson Smith, 2000) from a member of the Left Party (previously the Communist Party), the Deputy Prime Minister of the Social Democratic Cabinet rejected further research into the camps on the basis that she “share[d] the view previously taken by Cabinet and Parliament” (Hjelm-Wallen, 2000). Three years earlier, the then defense minister of the Social Democratic Cabinet responded to a similar question (Hoffman, 1997) by quoting from a decade-old document in which a proposed further investigation of the camps was discarded on the grounds that they were established because of “prevailing opinions about what constituted a threat against the country” (von Sydow, 1997). However, it was admitted in this document that: “Attempts to keep Sweden out of the war were put before civil rights issues in a way that would not be tolerated in contemporary society” (1997). Although thus acknowledging that from a late-20th-century perspective the camps were unacceptable, the defense minister nevertheless concluded that there was nothing to be gained from a retrospective investigation. “It makes no sense”, he declared, “to scrutinize today the measures taken in the early 1940s in order to assess whether or not they were appropriate” (1997).

Despite the reluctance to address the specific issue of the camps in Sweden, I contend that a thorough examination of the camps is crucial. There is substantial proof, for example, that the consensus claimed by the defense minister in his description of ‘prevailing opinions’ is disingenuous. At the time of their construction there was vigorous opposition to the camps, expressed not only in the Communist press, but also by individual Social Democrats and on grounds of principle in one Liberal newspaper. Furthermore, in taking an examination of the camps further than a descriptive summary of archival material, an assessment of how such ‘prevailing opinions’ are socially constructed and come to affect certain kinds of dehumanizing and exclusionary practices has important implications in the present for the way we think about the past, its preservation and presentation. In short, a theoretically informed analysis of the experience of the Swedish military labor-company camps has much to teach us about the writing of history and the—always and unavoidably political and politicized—role of the past in the present.

2 The Swedish military labor-company camps
In 1930 the Stockholm Exhibition, created by avant-garde architects and supported by the government, politicians on both the left and right, as well as labor unions, leading entrepreneurs, and companies, staged a vision of the future of Sweden based on principles of rationality, social reform, industrial mass-production, and functionalist architecture (Pred, 1992; 1995). It was a vision shared by many. However, 1931 saw social disruptions culminate in open and violent confrontation, with the military gunning down demonstrating workers (see Lager, 1969; Norman, 1981). The 1930s continued to be fraught, with open class conflict alongside periods of reformist cooperation, and the implementation of a number of important social reforms (for a general account see Hirdman, 1990). In the 1940s, surrounded by occupied neighbors and with a rather weak military defense, the Swedish government pragmatically negotiated both domestic and foreign policies (Böhme, 1984; Carlgren, 1973; 1977; Molin, 1974; Stenlås, 1998) in a fashion condoned as well as condemned in the press (Nyborn, 1978). In terms of foreign policy, Sweden followed the slogan ‘neutrality in war as a continuation of freedom from alliances in peace’ (see Andreen, 1971; Carlgren, 1984), the actual contents of which were partly hidden from public scrutiny through a secretive handling of information—including a precensoring State Information Board, which included several influential newspaper editors as members (see Andolf, 1994; Zetterberg, 1993). In the officer corps, political sympathies clearly leaned towards the right and included quite extensive support for Nazism (see Nilsson, 1996;
Richardson, 1996; Wechselmann, 1995). During the war, national borders were opened to allow for the transport of 2.14 million German troops, including SS battalions, as well as arms through ‘sovereign’ Swedish territory on trains that also provisioned German military brothels in Norway and Finland with sex workers (see Boëthius, 1992; Carlgren, 1973; Gisby, 1999; Gyllenhaal and Gebhardt, 1999; Hellström, 1997). Finally, concessions by the Swedish government to German demands allowed for extensive and profitable exports of iron ore, high-quality steel, machinery, ball bearings, and the like (see Fritz, 1984). With regard to trade issues, it should be noted that Sweden, in accordance with international agreements, continued during the war to export goods to Germany as well as to the Allies, but also that figures and descriptive categories were manipulated in order to accommodate German interests (Boëthius, 1992; Carlgren, 1973; 1977; Fritz, 1984).

Given the war situation, management of social tensions and discontent was of utmost importance, and governmental suspicions were directed not only against extremists on the left and right, but also against radical Liberal Democrats and supporters of the Allies (see Drangel, 1976; Flyghed, 1992; Lööw, 1990). During the war, the Swedish military and the government as well as much of the press, were complicit not only in identifying threats but also in actually fabricating problems and dangers. In this context, some Liberal newspapers, but especially Communist newspapers, were suppressed. In February 1940, a nationwide police raid against the offices of the Communist Party disclosed nothing essential that was not already known through the public activities of the party. In March 1940, arson by police and military officers against one Communist newspaper resulted in the loss of five lives, including those of women and children (Oldberg, 1972). In the same year, reporting from a meeting of the State Information Board, a newspaper ran the headline: “Propaganda an important issue in times of crisis”. The article quoted a speaker of the board with approval as saying: “Perhaps the most important task today is the creation of a real spirit of Swedishness in the nation” (Norrlandska Socialdemokraten [daily newspaper] 1940a). Shortly later, the readers were informed that “The parliament passed the law on censorship”, and that the prime minister in this context had declared that “the Swedish press has mostly been loyal..., however, there are newspapers of different political orientations that are not sufficiently careful, or have not been fully loyal” (Norrlandska Socialdemokraten 1940b, pages 1, 3). Means were created to control this loyal Swedishness through an extensive politics of surveillance, involving police and military officers, as well as ordinary citizens who acted as informers. During the war itself, in a country with a population of 6.4 million in 1940, millions of telephone calls were tapped, 6000 individual telephones were tapped continuously, and more than 40 million letters and packages were opened (Lööw, 1990, pages 413–418). This institutionalized distrust in citizens, and suspension of civil rights and of privacy, indicates a fundamental destabilization of society. When understood in this context, the targeting of alleged ‘Communists’ and the creation of military internment camps for their detention can be read as confirmation that:

“practices of modern statecraft work not primarily by solving problems and dangers in the name of a domestic population already given, but by inscribing problems and dangers that can be taken to be exterior to sovereign man and whose exteriority serves to enframe the ‘domestic population’ in which the state can be recognized as a center and can secure its claims to legitimacy” (Richard Ashley, quoted in Ó Tuathail, 1990, page 172).

Having framed the population and targeted certain individuals through such practices of modern statecraft, the government developed a comprehensive strategy for detention that included detailed plans for the seizure of civilians by joint forces of
military and police personnel: “In each security region, a survey was made of the [countryside] palaces and larger mansions, prisons and military barracks that could potentially be utilized” (Lööw, 1990, page 430). Also, with regard to the use of prisons, “planning was made for the release of short-term convicts, in order to make place for politically untrustworthy elements” (page 430, original emphasis). With regard to the camps that were actually constructed, there were two broad categories. The first kind consisted of eight separate camps, dispersed throughout the country, for people on the political left, who were as a rule labeled ‘Communists’. Those incarcerated, however, further included Anarchists, Syndicalists, and Swedish volunteers from the civil war in Spain, as well as a few Social Democrats who were also erroneously identified as ‘Communists’. The second kind of camp comprised one single camp organized by the army to contain so-called ‘undisciplined elements’, a blanket term that encompassed people who had been found guilty of ‘antisocial’ behavior such as theft, drunkenness, maltreatment, and late returns from military leave. Concerning spatial solutions and in terms of ‘architecture’, the archival material is very scant and no drawings, site plans, or photographs seem to exist that can give a general picture of the spatial organization of the camps. Most of the camps were of a makeshift kind and consisted of regular army tents and a so-called ‘tent-cabin’ made from wood-board, with a semicircular roof continuing down to the ground. In addition, existing structures at the sites in question were sometimes used. To this should be added that the navy utilized two old ships for detention purposes, and that the camp for ‘undisciplined elements’ was an old military training ground. In the case of this training ground, archival material includes a primitive site plan and a sketch of the floor plan of the main building, both made by the commanding officer. The fact that next to nothing remains of these structures has, I contend, served as a convenient excuse for heritage bodies to ‘forget to remember’, yet it also makes the camps a particularly challenging case in rethinking the role of memorial landscapes.

In this paper both incarcerated groups of conscripts are referred to within inverted commas as ‘undisciplined elements’ and as ‘Communists’, respectively, as a core issue here concerns the legitimacy of those practices of marginalization and homogenization that led to this labeling, exclusion, and imprisonment of Swedish citizens. With regard to the ‘Communists’, it is imperative to ‘decollectivize’ the notion of threat and ‘otherness’. Rather than imagining the interns as an aggregate mass, they should be thought of as a collection of individuals. Indeed, it is crucial to bear in mind that the practices of exclusion took place in particular situated contexts of power and involved the interaction of individuals, not of some undifferentiated mass. Thus, individuals reported on other individuals, while individual personnel were responsible for processing the detainees through the system. Moreover, the categorization by the military of certain conscripts as ‘undisciplined elements’ also needs to be qualified. In the authoritarian society of Sweden before and during the war years—which, as we have seen, saw the suspension of many democratic rights—notions of ‘discipline’ and ‘undiscipline’ have a particular meaning: the ‘undisciplined elements’ were ‘undisciplined’ only in relation to a norm that was upheld and promoted by an intolerant military system, which was characterized by its rigid class distinctions and inflexible hierarchy (see Andolf, 1984; Böhme, 1995; Karlsson, 1939; Nilsson, 1996, pages 59–92).

The army commander deployed the term “undisciplined individuals”, and the commander in chief used the designation “constitutionally undisciplined”. Both terms were obviously well established within the military (see the Swedish Military Archive, Lantförsvarets kampkvarter, Neutralitetsvakter och arbetskompanierna: Arméchefen, H287/1942, 12 June 1942; Överbefälhavaren, H67:35/1942, 12 November 1942. Address: Krigsarkivet, Bänårgatan 64, SE-11588 Stockholm, http://www.ra.se/KRA/index.html).
In this context, it should be noted that, according to instructions given to the military security service in the 1930s, the documents that were produced as part of the process of identifying, selecting, removing, and finally transferring conscripts to the camps were to be destroyed. As a result of this practice the documents to be found in contemporary archives do not render possible an account of the full scale of measures that were considered and eventually taken. However, appeals and complaints by incarcerated conscripts, and other circumstances (like simple neglect of instructions), led to documents being spread throughout the bureaucracy. Thus, more documents than might have been expected have actually survived (Molin, 1982, pages 16–17). From preserved documents, it appears that the total number of alleged ‘Communists’ incarcerated in the Swedish military internment camps amounted to some 700 individuals, and the corresponding figure for the ‘undisciplined elements’ totaled some 120. The length of incarceration corresponded to the normal draft period, but several conscripts were incarcerated more than once. Significantly, not one single National Socialist was detained during the period when the camps were operative. In 1941 a proposal was drafted for 3500 ‘Communists’ to be dispatched to ten proposed labor camps pending a general mobilization. In the event, however, only two of these camps were ever set up (Molin, 1982, pages 122–123). In this context, it should be noted that the military security service and the secret police kept a so-called ‘Communist Register’, which contained the names of between 36 000 and 60 000 civilians (Molin, 1982, pages 121, 157; Lööw, 1990, page 419). With regard to the possible implications of the surveillance and detainment planning carried out, it should be noted that cooperation between the Swedish secret police and the German Gestapo has been disclosed with regard to exchange of information on Swedish volunteers from the civil war in Spain, on German anti-Nazi refugees in Sweden, as well as on Swedish dockworkers who were suspected, largely on the grounds of their political affiliations, of planning to sabotage cargo shipments to Germany (Dagens Eko [Swedish radio news], 1 January 2000; Flyghed, 1992, pages 322–333; Wechselmann, 1995, pages 70–73).

3 The camps and social hygienism

The 1930s in Sweden witnessed the implementation of a number of social reforms initiated by the workers’ movement, women’s rights activists, and the Social Democrats. These formed part of a modernizing process, which conventionalized key social practices [see, in general, Wagner (1994, pages 38–42, 73–88), Young (1990, pages 156–158), and on the particular case of Sweden see Frykman (1981; 1994), Hirdman (1989)]. Ultimately, this contributed to the imposition of a distinct sense of Swedish ‘normality’ in which each and everyone could participate in simple everyday life practices. This was evidenced, for example, in a mid-1930s advertising campaign organized by the Swedish Dairy Association. In full-page advertisements depicting a man carrying a pick across his shoulder—with doubled appeal by looking both like a rural farmer and an urban construction worker—the reader was invited to make a change through the consumption of milk, butter, and cheese. Rather than being entirely innocent, this campaign was saturated with nationalism, racial overtones, and notions of social purification—as proven by the heading “A healthier species is the goal—let us all become A-humans!” and the usage of phrases such as “sound A-humans, fit-for-life” (Göteborg Handels- och Sjöfartstidning 1 November 1937, page 9). In relation to this social construction of normality through everyday life practices, the particular conditions of governmentality in the war context brought about the victimization of a particular section of the population which under the circumstances was more likely to be perceived as a threat than other marginalized groups (on this process generally see Douglas, 1995; Sumner, 1994; Traub and Little, 1999).
It is important to note here that there was a fuzzy nonpolarization with regard to differences between the people incarcerated in the camps and the incarcerators. Neither the left-wing conscripts nor the ‘undisciplined elements’ comply with the markers of distinction often applied in the present within critical discourse on heritage, history, and memorial landscapes. Both the ‘Communists’ and the ‘undisciplined’ were different in that they were not different: they constituted an invisible otherness without bodily marks, except for what we can assume was a general working-class appearance in clothing and posture. However, this was a blunt criterion, not only because most workers were not ‘Communists’ but also because several ‘Communists’ were middle-class professionals rather than blue-collar workers. That is, it was not possible to identify and exclude the allegedly dangerous conscripts on the basis of a deviation from the norm of ‘white Swedish male’ in terms of skin color, language, ethnicity, religion, class, or gender. Hence, the threat represented a different kind of liminal case which was on the border of inclusion and exclusion, with features other than those of, for example, women and ethnic or racialized others whose otherness could be constructed in visible terms. Further, with regard to the fuzzy border between incarcerated and incarcerators, governmental power was not represented by a homogeneous category. On the contrary, there were tensions within the field of politics, within the military, as well as between some political leaders and leading military officers; the press was divided with regard to the legitimacy of self-censorship procedures; and the men who actually made decisions on detainment were amply assisted, not only by the police but also by other ordinary men and women who in everyday life practices spied and reported on all kinds of allegedly deviant behavior within the body politic, but without necessarily knowing how the information would be deployed.

Thus, with a healthy body and infused with a healthy dose of Lutheran work ethic the sinister ‘sameness’ of the alleged ‘Communist’ seems to have made him or her simultaneously particularly challenging to ostracize and peculiarly threatening. I contend that this ‘sameness’ became constitutive for the assessment of risk. In response to an inquiry on subversive activities, the commander of the Stockholm Navy Base in 1929 warned about the dangers of Communist infiltration:

“The cell-activities mentioned in the report are probably pursued not only within military organizations, but in many places, and even among women and children, that accordingly become imbued by doctrines that they do not understand the meaning of. This is a way of poisoning the whole nation, against which the strongest measures have to be taken” (quoted in Lööw, 1990, page 376).

In this imagery the military is the masculine defender of the female body politic and of feeble-minded women and children under threat by the hidden Communist poison. The quote indicates how the construction of the alleged ‘Communists’ as an ‘abject’ threat relied upon a conflation of political and medical discourses and served as a means for the self-affirmation of Swedes in general, as well as for giving legitimacy to the particular governmental practices adopted (Landzelius, 1996; 1999b). This psychomedicalization of the ‘social imaginary’ (Castoriadis, 1987, pages 115–164) and of governmental practices is further illustrated by the fact that, in 1931, one in every twenty people facing criminal charges was ordered to take a mental-health examination. By 1940 this figure had increased exponentially to one in five (Arbetet, daily newspaper 1941). The camps should thus not be seen simply in the context of military threats, national security issues, and the aggressive Stalinist rhetoric of the Swedish Communist Party [on the politics of the Communist Party see Hirdman (1974)]. Rather, the Swedish military internment camps of the war brought together
interdependent psychological, medical, political, and geographical factors that were complexly related to one another in 1930s Sweden.\(^{(2)}\)

In the tense wartime situation the drive for national unity was summed up in the jingoistic assertion: ‘a Swede keeps quiet’. However, the obsession in the contemporary press and in political debate with the ‘Communist threat’ shows how, in Mark Wigley’s words, “that which has no place in the space reenters it, takes an illegitimate place, but does so at the invitation of the police of the space, the representatives of its law”, and hence how “the illegal alien is recalled by the law, returning to cover over some kind of embarrassing deficiency in the space, to shore it up and articulate the very borders it violates” [1993, page 192; see also Anderson (1983) for an account of nationalist sentiments against which the ‘Communist threat’ could be constructed as alien internationalism]. In effect, what was involved was a purification ritual. Objectionable thoughts and deviant behavior were delegitimated and classified as ‘unnatural’. In promoting racialized and dehumanizing thinking, Swedish ‘scientific’ research and ‘medical’ practice laid claim to the ‘scientific’ frontline. In brief, Swedish politics were heavily influenced by this imagery and the Social Democrats in particular were decisive in turning such imagery into governmental practices in the shape of, for example, sterilization laws not much different from the ones adopted in Nazi Germany. The military labor-company camps cannot be understood outside of such measures and attempts by the Swedish government to impose a regime that would regulate the ‘hygiene’ of all citizens within the body politic.\(^{(3)}\)

There is direct evidence that biological and medical discourse, which underscored the need for hygiene, came to structure the camps. Inasmuch as this ‘hygienism’ was applied to, and prescribed the same treatment for, both types of incarcerated conscripts, it amounted to a metaphorical condensation of the two different categories. Both the ‘Communists’ and the ‘undisciplined elements’ were imagined as an indistinguishable aggregate of degenerates. Thus, while newspaper editors as well as police and military officers variously vilified the ‘Communists’ as “infectious hotbeds” (Lindström, 1940), “vermin” (Karlsson, 1940), “slimy animals” (Vougt, 1939), and “intellectually inferior” (County Police Commander, quoted in Lööw, 1990, page 378), the ‘undisciplined elements’ were labeled by a military medical doctor “infantile egocentrics” and “spineless psychopaths” suffering from “moral insanity”.\(^{(4)}\)

\(^{(2)}\) With regard to the targeting of Communists in Germany in the early 1930s, Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus (2001, page 5) have stated that: “The Communists were inimical to the Nazis and to many Germans because of their political behavior, not their social identity or genetic makeup. The Nazis, however, came to view political convictions, especially deeply rooted ones, in social and even in semibiological terms” (emphasis added).


\(^{(4)}\) The company commander of the 99 Company (the military name of the camp) for ‘undisciplined elements’ managed to have a doctor with psychiatric education assigned to the camp. The diagnoses made by this doctor complexly interweave medical and psychiatric knowledge with authoritarian views and class prejudice, and are further overdetermined by the social imaginary of hygienism addressed in this paper. In conclusion, this doctor found the camp to be “inhuman on the basis of present medical knowledge”, as well as an “infectious breeding ground of psychic pathology”. Nonetheless, he stated that “the medical treatment of psychopaths is not—as many laymen often believe—characterized by ‘pampering’. On the contrary a hard grip is needed” [see the Swedish Military Archive, Lantförsvarets kommandoexpedition, Neutralitetsvaktens och arbetskompanierna: E99/L17, PM (Memorandum), 7 November 1943; as well as Landzelius (1996) for a slightly more elaborated account].
In short, this ‘medicalization’ homogenized the incarcerated conscripts and facilitated an exclusionary politics of detainment, containment, and “spiritual and political cleansing” (Löfgren, 1939), to use the hygienistic terminology of an editorial on the Communist threat. In this conjuncture, it was claimed that the Swedish body politic—which although not occupied was nevertheless penetrated by the German war machine on trains to the northern fronts—retained its national sovereign virtue, while its ‘other’ citizens were abjected through incarceration. Thereby, the boundary distinctions between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’, ‘threat’ and ‘trust’, were made ambiguous as well as polysemic.

The alleged otherness of the detainees troubled the imagined integrity and purity of the Swedish body politic in much the same way that discarded elements of an individual’s body such as hair, nail clippings, or menstrual blood disturb and provoke. The threshold position of the abject is that of something which we cannot again assimilate, that which is emotionally disturbing, and which we do not allow to be an object of discourse other than in terms of awkward avoidance, disgust, and metaphorical displacements (see Kristeva, 1982; Sennett, 1970; Sibley, 1995). In this regard, the camps were sites of ambiguity, where prisoners were depersonalized as well as dehumanized in the attempts to police the boundary between inside and outside, between the healthy body politic and unhealthy sources of dangerous infection. The abuses of civil rights that took place in the camps were thus justified in a language that drew upon an imagery of degeneration, repellent bodily discharges, and infectious disease. In this perspective the camps demonstrate how, in the imaginary constitution as well as in the actual construction of modern Sweden, particularly during World War 2, the body politic was invested with an imaginary homogeneous identity through exclusionary practices legitimated in terms of dehumanized otherness.

4 The camps as a void of difféance
The labor-company camps were deeply entangled in governmental practices aimed at producing a compliant, domesticated population. The modern function of power should be “considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (Foucault, 1980, page 119). In the particular case of Sweden during the period discussed this notion of power is indicated, for example, by the previously mentioned fact that many ordinary citizens, presumably “sound A-humans, fit-for-life”, were prepared to become informers reporting on fellow neighbors to state authorities. In this way, citizens as informers came to engage actively in the execution of power and the particular process of modernization negotiated between capital, labor, and civil society in the Swedish 1930s and war years. Here, I contend that both categories of incarcerated conscripts pointed to crucial imaginary significations of Swedish society that challenged this state of affairs and thus threatened the modern function of power. Castoriadis makes a key distinction between significations that “correspond to the perceived, to the rational or to the imaginary”, and continues to state that “this signification, which is neither something perceived (real) nor something thought (rational), is an imaginary signification” (1987, pages 139, 140). These distinctions make it possible to elaborate how power understood as a productive network of broad participation is interdependent with socially pervasive imaginary significations.

Although such imaginary significations constitute “the operative condition for every subsequent representation” (1987, page 145), they should be understood neither in a reified fashion, nor as possible to derive from the individual psyche, but as existing only through situated practices. With regard to the Swedish labor-company camps, “this central signifying-signified, the source of that which presents itself in every
instance as an indisputable and undisputed meaning” becomes apparent only through the doing of the camps (page 147). This doing of the camps was, I contend, entangled in and included a discourse on the body politic characterized by psychomedicalization and hygienism. Admittedly, this discourse did include significations referring to the perceived and rational, yet it crucially also included imaginary significations with references impossible to “put one’s finger on”, that came to “denote nothing at all, and... connote just about everything” (page 143, original emphasis). This is the reason, I contend, that the perceived threat of the ‘Communists’ on many occasions came to refer to a void—that is, to an imaginary meaning and threat. This is exemplified in the earlier quotation where the commander of the Stockholm Navy Base speculated that “cell-activities” were “probably pursued not only within military organizations, but in many places”. It is also exemplified by an army captain who stated that “even if there is no direct evidence, it can be asserted that [X] engages in damaging propaganda inside and outside of the battery” (see the Swedish Military Archive, Arméstaben, Sektion III, Serie EII, 51Ö, 20 February 1942), as well as by the fact that, although the nationwide police raid against the Communist Party produced no evidence of treasonous activities, insinuations continued that “The communists are of course not such idiots that they have not tried to wipe out the traces of their doings” (Lindström, 1940).

When the Swedish military labor-company camps are understood in this context of social imaginary significations, they come to appear as a kind of state-grounding primordial architectural geography of repression. The camps appear to be a result of a politico-spatial inscription of a fundamental social order upon earth that enabled the productive network of power which ordinary Swedes joined under the slogan “A healthier species is the goal—let us all become A-humans!” Understood in this way, it is not the number of conscripts who were incarcerated but the very existence of the camps as a manifestation of a particular social imaginary that is of significance. To the extent that social imaginary significations denote nothing, there will be nothing with which to charge individuals removed from society on the basis of such significations. I argue that this is the site where a gap becomes apparent between the law and the social imaginary within which it exists. Giorgio Agamben contends that: “The particular ‘force’ of law consists in this capacity of law to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority” (1998, page 18), where this excluded exteriority can take the shape of life in “the camp... the hidden matrix and nomos of the political space in which we are still living” (page 166). In the context of the Swedish military labor-company camps, Agamben’s remark on the Prussian institution of Schutzhaft in the 1920s is suggestive. “The first concentration camps in Germany were the work not of the Nazi regime but of the Social-Democratic governments, which interned thousands of communist militants in 1923 on the basis of Schutzhaft and also created the Konzentrationslager für Ausländer... which housed mainly eastern European refugees and which may, therefore, be considered the first camp for Jews in this century” (1998, page 167).

The institution of Schutzhaft authorized the retention of citizens without formal charges, and there are manifest similarities between the juridical status of this institution and the conditions under which the labor-company camps were established by the Swedish military in terms of their relations to the social imaginary. The camps can be seen as built traces of a constitutive outside that made a specific ordered and orderly inside possible. Indeed, this reminds us of Jacques Derrida and his notion of ‘differance’. In his theorization, ‘the a of differance also recalls that spacing is temporization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation—in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a being—are always deferred... by referring to another past or future element
in an economy of traces” (1981, pages 28–29). This idea is immediately applied in Derrida's discussion of the foundation of states through the inauguration of a new law, where “this law to come will in return legitimate, retrospectively, the violence that may offend the sense of justice, its future anterior already justifies it” (1992, page 35). Not much sense of justice was left in the words of the leading Swedish Social Democrat Allan Vougt in the following editorial, written when the nonaggression pact between the Soviet Union and Germany had just been signed:

“It would be strange if democracy did not vomit and spit them out, disgusted by a human type so degraded, down to the level of the most despicable beast, a human variety of slimy animals that the world has never seen before—not even when the German regime orders its subjects to consider as good what yesterday was evil, as right what before was shamelessly unjust . . . [the Social Democrats], who have the Communists in their vicinity, must make use of a particularly big broom in order to sweep away this refuse, this dross—these ‘underhumans’, to use an expression used by the Nazi prophets up until yesterday, when they suddenly in their deep and utter cowardice fell into the arms of their former enemies” (Vougt, 1939).

I believe most people would agree that there were reasons one could call ‘rational’ for keeping an extra eye on the Swedish Communist Party, considering the aggressive and dehumanizing Stalinist rhetoric articulated in the party's press and propaganda. However, beyond the rational, social imaginary significations clearly appear in and saturate several sites of power, as well as gain support from ordinary civilians through discursive reiteration and participation. In this situation, governmental violence of a structural kind, which “contributes to the creation of that which it is used against” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 448), made it possible to produce effectively that abject Communist ‘slime’ and ‘poison’ upon which further violence was then wrought, and which led to the creation of the camps. I thus argue that the Swedish military labor-company camps can be seen as a trace of an outside void in the sense here indicated—that is, not as ‘difference’, but as the nonoriginary a of différence, in Derridean terms. This makes the camps embarrassingly situated in the center of the dominant social imaginary, and thereby entangled in the core of problems concerning the constitution and execution of power, control, and signification.

5 Dissonant heritage and multicultural logocentrism

Above, I have sketched a general social and political background to the Swedish labor-company camps and briefly explored some of the strategies that were mobilized to legitimate the detentions within the camps, as well as situated these strategies in the social imaginary. In recent debates on heritage issues a number of concepts have been introduced to come to terms with forms of heritage that in one way or another have been experienced as historico-politically sensitive. In the context of the Swedish camps, it is important to touch on these debates and their limitations in order to pave the ground for my simultaneously epistemological and political critique of what one could call ‘heritage logocentrism’ and my suggested alternative approach of ‘disinheritance’.

It has been observed that: “Politically, there is a reactionary vocabulary of both the identity politics of place and a spatialized politics of identity grounded in particular notions of space” (Keith and Pile, 1993, page 20; for a similar position see Massey, 1994, pages 169–71). With regard to such spatially embedded identity struggles, many critics have in recent years observed how preservation bodies, museums, and academic scholars participate as a “critical infrastructure” (Zukin, 1992, page 228), and—sometimes unwittingly—come to contribute to the establishment of particular social relations and cultural norms, thereby privileging certain groups while others are marginalized.
In addressing such problems, several scholars have in recent years explicitly debated objects and landscapes of the past that have been excluded or marginalized in official discourses. In their doing so, often within a framework of multiculturalism that incorporates issues of gender (Holcomb, 1998), ethnic and national conflict (Anterić, 1998; Graham, 1998; Heffernan, 1998; Tunbridge, 1998), as well as postcolonial conditions (Chivallon, 2001; Hall, 1999), terms such as “contested heritage” (Shaw and Jones, 1997), “dissonant heritage” (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996), and “hot interpretation” (Uzzell, 1989; 1998; Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998) have been coined and employed. However, the question and title “Whose heritage to preserve?” (Tunbridge, 1984) reflects an overarching problem repeatedly encountered in these debates: the ‘politically correct’ assumption that everyone should have a right to his or her ‘roots’ and ‘heritage’, as if these catchwords somehow directly referred to entities that existed in the past, compartmentalized and ready to be claimed, rather than being socially and culturally constructed in identity struggles of the present. An important discussion of how “the very act of memorialisation, of capturing memory so that we do not forget, can by its exclusivity push aside the claims of others for their own collective rights and identities” (Charlesworth, 1994, page 579), illustrates this appropriating approach to ‘roots’ and ‘heritage’, as well as the problem of competing interpretations of one and the same site. I argue that not only the cases discussed in these debates, but also the arguments made by scholars display how ‘History’ as an overarching metanarrative is being supplemented by a number of micronarratives, which, however, are often exclusively based on differences fashionable in present cultural politics and are firmly rooted in a heritage logocentrism that denies what I claim to be the constitutive polysemy of the past.

This leads to a number of problems, which I will illustrate in relation to the Swedish military labor-company camps. First, with regard to the camps, the most apparent problem if a multiculturalist approach was to be applied is that it is difficult to see how it would change or add to our understanding of the past. In an anthropological sense, notwithstanding their political and behavioral deviance, the alleged ‘undisciplined elements’ and ‘Communists’ shared common taken-for-granted elements of culture with their fellow Swedes and prosecutors. The conjuncture of the camps is thus not a straightforward case of a dominant cultural group rejecting marginalized cultural expressions, thereby producing limited and false accounts of the past. To the extent that such questions play a role in a reconfiguration of the camps, they cannot easily be framed in terms of cultural difference. Also, I contend that in the case of these labor-company camps, as in many other cases of dissonance and contestation, it becomes particularly clear how the past represents situations of irresolvable polysemy, where different scholarly principles and theories—irreducible to cultural difference and conflicting party politics—lead to radically different historical accounts.

Second, with regard to the metaphysics of presence characterizing present debates on dissonant heritage, some authors attempt to evade this issue by casting their argument in terms of ‘management’. John Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth (1996) define two key strategies for what they call ‘dissonance management’ in multicultural societies, namely ‘inclusivism’ and ‘minimalism’. The notion of management in their argument, however, is highly problematic as it implies a politico-normative as well as epistemological position outside of the conflicting factions, and thus a position from which such conflict can be neutrally mediated. In adopting a quasi-neutral position in discussing the pros and cons of these strategies, they evasively state that they “cannot prescribe which might be deemed wisest”, although they simultaneously observe that most societies in accordance with ideals of freedom of expression “will find themselves in an ‘inclusivist’ mode” (page 271). Tunbridge and Ashworth do find that
inclusivism has a “a basic flaw... in that everyone’s heritage is ultimately personal and the attempt to be comprehensive could in the extreme become anarchic” (page 219). I would argue that inclusivism as characterized here by Tunbridge and Ashworth amounts to a kind of liberal multiculturalism deeply entangled in ‘possessive individualism’, in which society is basically conceived of as relations between proprietors (Macpherson, 1962). Within a quasi-neutral management paradigm, which leaves politics to the world outside of academia, this conundrum of a liberal possessive ‘choose your own story’ type of multiculturalism cannot be resolved.

Third, other thorny problems emerge when we turn to questions of multiculturalism and identity politics in relation to the furthering of democracy. In the present, what Tunbridge and Ashworth call the ‘inclusivist mode’ of most Western societies shows how identity politics and multiculturalism have a more or less immediate impact also on heritage issues and questions of representation pertaining to memorial landscapes. This impact may well, in important ways, open up new possibilities and spaces for previously marginalized groups and individuals, but may not therefore necessarily further democracy. Empowering as they may be, self-affirmative politics of marginalized and/or oppressed groups might counter rather than further democratic principles. Regardless of most-often praiseworthy demands on equal rights, there is nothing which guarantees that, for example, particular claims based upon multiculturalism or identity politics are constructed on democratic values or have such effects (see Graham et al, 2000, page 124; Harvey, 1996, page 202; Young, 1990, pages 226 – 236). As Iris Marion Young concedes, in her discussion of the “effort of oppressed groups to reclaim their group identity”, such multicultural acknowledgment of both “variation and specificity” is not politically unproblematic. Hence, she inquires: “But does not such affirmation of group identity itself express an ideal of community, and is it not subject to exclusionary impulses?” (1990, page 236). I would argue that her interpellation is of key political importance also in discussions of interpretations and alleged meanings of memorial landscapes and heritage.

With regard to the evasiveness of a politically correct inclusivist management approach, I find it important to stress that there is no way in which we can avoid being affected by the way we as individuals are situated, or positioned, in relation to others [see, for a variety of important approaches to situatedness, Benhabib et al (1995), Bourdieu (1984; 1990), Connor (1992), Pred (1990), Rose (1993; 1997), Smith (1988), Young (1990)]. Gillian Rose has pointed out that “the aim of situating academic knowledge is to produce non-overgeneralizing knowledges that learn from other kinds of knowledges, and that remains the crucial goal” (1997, page 315). This is indeed important, yet there is still a need for articulating a position from which such overgeneralizing claims can be critiqued without making that very critique appear to be an overgeneralization. In relation to the issues I am tackling in this paper, I will in the following section propose that a ‘democratic thought experiment’ based on mutually recognized autonomy and accountability could serve to balance the limitations that such a reflexive stance might impose. In effect, I make a universal claim that to adhere continuously in practices to such an experiment is a necessary precondition for the possibility of democracy. It is the affirmation of this particular but universal normative subject position that enables the epistemological analysis of this paper, with its critique of overgeneralizing claims. From this position I propose the universal uprooting of the ‘imaginary lineage’ of the past as heritage and argue for a politicized deployment of the past along lines quite different from those of both heritage logoscentrism and multiculturalism, as conventionally understood. Both these positions, regardless of decisive differences in particular cases, regularly entail essentializing and
possessive claims on fragments of the past that are, I argue, unavoidably based upon overgeneralizing knowledge claims.

Accordingly, I argue that sectarian claims upon the past in terms of heritage and identity should be incisively critiqued and deconstructed with the aim to subvert and deny all claims of some kind of imagined unbroken linkage and right to the past. The objective should be actively to disinherit each and everyone. The interpretation and management of the past should not be left in the hands of quasi-neutral bodies, but should take place through what Henri Lefebvre characterizes as “the permanent participation of the ‘interested parties’, with their multiple, varied and even contradictory interests” (1991, page 422). The objective would be nothing less than to reconfigure the social imaginary and make us engage in the process of relating to the past in ways that make us aware of and positively affirm what I contend to be the unavoidable ontological human condition of distance and estrangement in relation to the past. In relation to what people continue to confront with regard to more or less violent processes of othering all over the world, and in relation to the ways in which landscapes, places, buildings, and objects of the past are invoked and implicated in such processes, I contend that it is a matter of life and death to disrupt the signifying chains of legitimacy built upon the notion of inheriting a heritage.

6 Democracy and decentering of subjectivity

In this context of reconfiguring issues of heritage and commemorative landscapes, I find it absolutely essential to address explicitly questions of autonomy, subjectivity, and identity, and I contend that these concepts refer to phenomena that should not only be seen as but that are fundamentally decentered, social, and spatial. In such a view it is nothing but absurd that various individuals as well as groups, organizations, nation-states, and other kinds of imagined communities—in their attempts to escape as well as to overcome their own constitutive nonidentity—violently claim complexly constituted fragments of the past to represent essential meanings and values in support of their own invented particularisms. James Young has made the general observation that “It is as if once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember” (2000, page 94). I would argue that this process includes a cleansing of the inherent polysemy of fragments of the past, and that the assignment of monumental form amounts to a transformation of the past into a site of petrified imaginary significations which will function as self-affirming circular evidence of particularized rights and truths, and thus also as political ammunition. To approach this conundrum, I would like to introduce Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘rhizome’. Rather than establishing roots ‘vertically’ across time, a rhizome should be seen as ceaselessly—and thus without the possibility of isolating a pure state—establishing connections ‘horizontally’ across space between diverse forms of social phenomena. The qualities of a rhizome therefore challenge notions of stable meanings, firm identities, and territorial boundaries, and subvert the idea that stability could be achieved through a historicizing strategy (1988, pages 3–25). Critical of any such idea of roots, Deleuze and Guattari have stated that:

“Values, morals, homelands, religions, and these private certitudes that our vanity and our complacency bestow generously on us, have as many deceptive sojourns as the world arranges for those who think they are standing straight and at ease, among stable things” (1983, page 341).

In order to elaborate a normative position from which the rights and claims emanating from such “private certitudes” can be questioned, I would here like to introduce Held’s theorizing of the ‘democratic thought experiment’ (1995, pages 160–172), Castoriadis’s discussion of ‘autonomy’ and ‘heteronomy’ (1987, pages 101–114), as well as Bachtin’s...
notions of ‘dialogism’ and ‘heteroglossia’ (see Bachtin, 1988; 1991; de Peuter, 1998; Folch-Serra, 1990; Shotter and Billig, 1998; Young, 1990, pages 229–232). In outlining his democratic thought experiment, Held is concerned with establishing “the conditions of an ideal autonomy, that is, the conditions, rights and obligations people would accept as necessary for their status to be met as equally free members of their political community” (1995, page 161). The key notion here is of course that the freedom of any one citizen presupposes that equal conditions, rights, and obligations apply to any other member of society. Castoriadis defines ‘autonomy’ as “self-legislation or self-regulation”, and ‘heteronomy’ as “legislation or regulation by another” (1987, page 102). Importantly, and in a language which comes close to an understanding of the subject as a rhizome, he emphasizes that the freedom of this “Ego of autonomy is not the absolute Self, the monad cleaning and polishing its external – internal surface in order to eliminate the impurities resulting from contact with others”, but rather the subject “traversed through and through by the world and by others” (page 106).

I contend that it is essential to address these issues of individual subjectivity and identity formation in the context of heritage issues and social processes of memorialization, as, despite a century of various forms of Freudian interpellations of the myth of the subject, the notion of subjectivity and identity present in discussions of the relationship between heritage and identity construction is one firmly anchored in ‘logocentrism’, or in a ‘metaphysics of presence’ (Derrida, 1973; 1974). Within such a metaphysics the subject is understood to be the very center, in full conscious control of the signifying process as “the zero-point of the subjective origin, the I, the here, the now” (1973, page 94). From such a position the relationship between thought, practice, and world appears to be transparent: “Between being and mind, things and feelings, there would be a relationship of translation or natural signification; between mind and logos, a relationship of conventional symbolization” (1974, page 11). If we relate this understanding of the subject in the world to heritage issues, questions of how and what the past signifies seem unproblematic and the function of the past as heritage in relation to a particular subject seems simply to be one of augmenting the subject’s centered identity—in terms of knowledge and enriching experiences—through establishing links with an equally unproblematic inheritance. I fully agree with Derrida’s ambition to deconstruct such ontological and epistemological notions, yet would here like to take this argument from textual analysis and in the direction of a politicized deconstruction of dominant assumptions about, and claims on, heritage and memorial landscapes. Departing from a notion of a socially constructed “position-practice system”, Roy Bhaskar has stressed the need for a “reconstruction of the concept of a person (as a decentred disunity)” (1979, pages 51, 144). Similarly addressing the relation between self and other in social terms, Castoriadis has in his discussion of autonomy addressed the mythical self-presence of the subject:

“If by this term [autonomy] we no longer mean the inalienable freedom of an abstract subject or the domination of a pure consciousness over an undifferentiated material...; if the problem of autonomy is that the subject meets in itself a sense that is not its own and that it must transform this sense in using it; if autonomy is the relation in which others are always present as the otherness and as the self-ness of the subject, then autonomy can be conceived of, even in philosophical terms, only as a social problem and as a social relation” (1987, pages 107–108).

This notion of autonomy as socially constituted points to a constitutive decentered and destabilized identity of the subject, which I believe is essential for how we conceive of the role of the past in relation to identity construction. To supplement my argument, I will introduce Bachtin’s concept ‘heteroglossia’, which, I suggest, in a certain sense is situated in-between Derrida and Castoriadis in its focus on language as saturated by
the social other. Bachtin writes that, “Every individual receives the word from a foreign voice, and the word is filled by this foreign voice”, and adds, “The word comes into his context from another context which is saturated by foreign meanings” (1991, page 215). This notion subverts the core assumption of logocentrism—that is, that there is a centered subject with individual control and instrumental mastery of language. On the contrary, an individual’s “consciousness must move in and occupy a position for itself within heteroglossia” (Folch-Serra, 1990, page 268), and within the social world of dialogical possibilities, meanings, and values continuously negotiated there. Importantly, then, heteroglossia is something that not only characterizes the social use of language, but which also inscribes itself as noncentered multiple language use by and within the individual subject. In relation to Castoriadis’s concept of ‘the social imaginary’, one could argue that it is in and through this social use of language that those “imaginary social significations...that are the conditions for the representability of everything” (1987, page 143) become established as collective taken-for-granted. In this dialogical sense, and thus in a sense quite different from the psychoanalytic depth model, the subject cannot but be an alien; it cannot but be its own social other—see Tzvetan Todorov (1984, pages 31–34) for an account of Bachtin’s critique of Freudianism. In that Bachtin’s ideas directly concern language as dialogical practice, his understanding can be seen as profoundly spatial. The heteroglossia of the subject can thus be taken to mean that each and every acting and interpreting subject is involved in a world of polysemy and resemanticization in which only temporary and place-dependent identity-effects emerge in constantly changing situated practices (Landzelius, 1999a, pages 80–93; 2001).

In such a view there is nothing rhizomatic about the claims regularly made in the names of multiculturalism or identity politics. Such claims are, on the contrary, often implicitly based upon a conventional metaphysics of presence and rootedness of the kind that Deleuze and Guattari attempt to uproot in their nomadology—and not only on the level of consciously, and maybe ‘strategically’, essentialized claims by any one individual or group, but also on the level of unconscious libidinal investment (on the latter see Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, pages 103–105). I argue that in such an uprooting the lineage of heritage has to be replaced by the rhizome of disinheritance. If we acknowledge the segregative effects of particular forms of libidinal investments and channeling of desire, possessive individualism and exclusionary spatialized claims on linear historical links with a place cannot but appear to be undemocratic, “reactionary”, or even “fascist”, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, page 105). The purified historical simulacra that result from such a possessive identity logic—represented by, for example, national heritage bodies as well as by local citizens groups ranging from neighborhood organizations to paramilitary bands—often either emerge through, or become sites of, contestation. Castoriadis reminds us that:

“Beyond the ‘discourse of the other’ lies that which gives it its unshiftable weight, limiting and rendering almost futile all individual autonomy... And along with this, what henceforth represents the other is no longer a discourse: it is a machine gun, a call to arms, a pay check and high-priced essential goods, a court decision and a prison” (1987, page 109).

It is in this context, I contend, that the simultaneously scholarly and political urgency of dis(re)membering becomes clear. It is thus imperative that accounts of the

(5) See Landzelius (2001), where I reconceptualize Jean Baudrillard’s notion of ‘simulacra’ in relation to objects of the past as they exist in the present, and elaborate this mode of existence as a fusion of first-order and third-order simulacra, designated ‘historical simulacra’. See also Landzelius (1999a, pages 485–506).
past based upon possessive individualism and logocentrism be dis(re)membered. In practice, the democratic notion of autonomy has always been displaced by heteronomy through “a mass of conditions of privation and oppression” (page 109), and I hold that to such conditions should be added the key importance of logocentric and possessive accounts of the past. To achieve autonomy, in Held’s words, necessitates that “the articulation of political institutions with key groups, agencies, associations and organizations of the economy and civil society, national and international, be re-formed so that the latter become part of the democratic process—adopting a structure of rules and principles compatible with those of democracy” (1995, page 268). In building upon this idea of dis(re)membering as a commemorative strategy and practice, it seems clear that the remains of the past have for too long been given over to homogenizing and legitimating strategies. For example, the notion of a homogeneous ‘Swedishness’ is no more justified or democratic today than when imposed through governmental practices upon a heterogeneous population during the 1930s and the war years. In fully interrogating the process of othering that imposed a particular kind of heteronomy in Sweden during the 1930s and the war, one should thus also articulate the role and interests of the different political parties, of the medical establishment, of the press, of labor unions, of businesses making profits from the war economy, and so forth. Claims upon the past and constructions of heritage and memorial landscapes are, when the very writing of this paper takes place, not only part of racialized politics “even in Sweden” (see Pred, 2000), but also deeply implicated in the injustices of globalization and, for example, in ongoing conflicts on the killing fields of ethnic, racial, ideological, and religious sectarianism in Afghanistan and India, in Israel and Palestine.

In this situation, a progressive politics of dis(re)membering as a tool for democratic development should, on the one hand, explicitly acknowledge the complexity of the past and highlight the continuous and open-ended process of struggle around political rights as well as around cultural identities. On the other hand, it should contribute to uprooting the logocentrism and metaphysics of presence that seem to be much more widespread and evil phenomena than the commonly used prefixal adjective ‘Western’ make them seem. In short, the politics of dis(re)membering I propose suggests a reconfiguration of the past and of heritage through: (1) the application of a democratic thought experiment to all claims and interpretations; (2) an interrelated heteroglossic othering of both the identities of subjects and the meanings of objects; (3) a rethinking of imaginary authenticity in terms of nonidentitary polysemy; and (4) an erasure of heritage and its replacement with disinheritance and an understanding of the past as rhizome history. This is, I hope, provocative in a time when each and everyone claims to have a particular identity as well as a particular right to a particular meaning of a particular fragment of the thus particularized past—most often at the expense of others’ overlapping but equally exclusionary claims.

7 Dis(re)membering the past and spatializing disinheritance

History cannot but be an imagined reconstruction of past events according to certain rules of narration (see Ankersmit, 1994; Foucault, 1970; 1972; Kellner, 1989; Koselleck, 1985; Lowenthal, 1985; Nora, 1989; Osborne, 1995; White, 1973; 1978; 1987). Yet, the idea of the past as a construction or reconstruction needs to be radicalized and politicized through an engagement with the democratic thought experiment and the understanding of individual subjectivity as heteroglossic and deeply social. In my definition of ‘dis(re)membering’ I consciously draw on its immediate spatial implications as well as on its capacity to refer to both the subject and the world, to both discourse and practice. Dis(re)membering should thus be taken literally as well as metaphorically. I depart from the term ‘member’ with its material denotation, rather than the
compound term ‘remember’ with its mental and discursive references. These two terms distinctly differ from one another, and the serious wordplay I am engaging in here is only made possible by the spatiotemporal transformation of the Latin word ‘rememorare’ to the modern English term ‘remember’. Although the term ‘remember’ obviously refers to the mind, and to the joining of mental fragments to a compound memory, the bracketing of ‘re’ and the introduction of ‘dis’ opens up ‘member’ to its multiple references to the body, to body parts, to machine parts, and to parts of a building, as well as to social members and membership. I contend that it is with regard to all these aspects that logocentrism and its effects upon how the past and heritage is theorized and claimed have to be dis(re)membered. I further hold that the only legitimate democratic relation to the past in a time of globalization—and in order to affect this process of globalization progressively—is to strive for, in Held’s words, ‘conditions of an ideal autonomy’. Accordingly, we should not imagine ourselves inheriting a ‘heritage’, but disinheriting a ‘disinheritance’.

The ambiguous and polysemic character of the Swedish military labor-company camps make them particularly appropriate to discuss as an exemplary case of such a disinheritance approach. First, the camps were foundational elements of the state and were thus located on the border between legal and illegal procedures, between justice and the rule of law and what to the incarcerated citizens appeared to be arbitrary injustice. Second, although the camps were minor events on the margins of the Swedish body politic, they were entangled in core issues of governmentality and were part of an extensive invisible geography of surveillance and detainment planning. Thus, as archival evidence indicates, they would under slightly different circumstances have turned into major sites of abusive power. Third, the border location between the legal and the illegal in an uncanny fashion concerned both perpetrators and victims. Indeed, these very distinctions become ambiguous in consideration of the deeply political question of which one of the two groups constituted the most serious threat to democracy. Fourth, and related to the aforementioned, the cultural and ethnic sameness between incarcerated and incarcerators is important to study for a thorough understanding of processes of othering and exclusion. Fifth, the fact that the camps have been addressed by scholars but are again forgotten and abjected makes them even more challenging with regard to rethinking their significance and possible reconstruction as memorial landscapes.

Understood in this fashion, the camps represent a recalcitrant past not immediately possible to ‘domesticate’ and purge of all ambiguity. However, this recalcitrance should not make us fall victim to the quantitative, ‘choose your own story’ approach of liberalism. Instead, the aim should surely be to achieve an unsettling experience, in which immediate closure is forestalled and which would encourage us to engage in the creative act of thinking the social differently—of realizing the possibility of a different ‘constitutive social imaginary’, in the words of Castoriadis (1987, pages 135–156). As I have just outlined, the camps represent a number of essential possibilities for achieving such an unsettling experience. Rather than accepting sectarian heritage claims, the disinherance politics I conceive of here would intervene with provocative (de)constructions of a sufficiently complex nature to, on the one hand, affirm our inevitable

(6) Here, it is important to stress that this is not a matter of a speculative or conjectural history, but simply a reference to evidence of the past and about this past. From the ontological position of this paper this archival evidence is not less ‘real’ only because the most invasive measures of which it speaks remained as plans on the mental level and as expressed in discourse. Although these plans were only realized on a limited scale in terms of actual incarceration, the planning for extensive measures was in itself indeed real and included, as I have mentioned, detailed preparatory arrangements for deploying certain spaces for containment.
estrangement from the past, and, on the other, make impossible the appropriation of
the past by any one particular group for any one particular purpose—except for the
furthering of autonomy and democracy. The idea of such an affirmative politics of
estrangement and disinheritance runs contrary to not only multiculturalist identity
politics and museum-based notions of ‘living history’ but also the position taken by
critics such as Tunbridge and Ashworth, who conceptualize disinheritance as a
dilemma when they state that:

“The problem of disinheritance is not simple, therefore it admits of no simple
solution. The attempted creation of a universal heritage which provides an equal
but full inheritance for all is not only essentially illogical but the attempt to
approach it rapidly creates its own problems” (1996, page 21).

In contrast to this reasoning, I argue that disinheritance, to paraphrase Tunbridge
and Ashworth, is not a problem but on the contrary it is simply the universal demo-
cratic solution. This is not to say that it will be simple in terms of implementation. As
a radical critique of the inherently ‘historicizing’ notion of heritage, disinheritance
should be thought of as a matter of ‘spatializing’ the past. The decentered and hetero-
glossic nonidentity of the subject should thus be understood, in a parallel fashion, as
entangled in a rhizomatic nonidentity of the object. In this regard, the distinctive
difference between heritage and disinheritance can again be illustrated with reference
to Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of rhizome, which they stress should be
understood as “a map and not a tracing” (1988, page 12, original emphasis). I propose
that the past must be understood and constructed as a ‘rhizome history’, which, in its
dis(re)membering mobilization of discourses, spaces, and practices, corresponds to the
notion that a rhizome “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains,
organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social
struggles” (page 7). It should thus be clear that an essential aspect of conceptualizing
disinheritance is an interdisciplinary engagement with spatiality, which brings together
approaches developed across fields—from politics, art, architecture, geography,
heritage, and preservation. In this context, important inspiration can be gained from
recent discussions of ‘countermonuments’. The notion of the counter monument refers
to “attempts to visually complement or change the appearance of earlier monuments”
(Michalski, 1998, page 205) in order to “register protest or disagreement with an untenable
prime object and to set a process of reflection in motion” (page 207). With regard to recent
attempts to memorialize the experiences of European Jewry during the reign of Nazism,
it has been stated that “One of the most compelling results of Germany’s memorial
conundrum has been the advent of its ‘counter-monuments’: brazen painfully self-conscious
memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being” (Young,
2000, page 7). Although the notion of the counter monument is important in its quest
for a disturbing rather than distracting relationship to the past, the particular role and
possibilities of spatiality have remained unarticulated in these discussions.

In order to mobilize spatiality explicitly in the construction of sites of memorial
interrogation, I suggest that the idea argued here of a ‘rhizome history’ of disinherit-
ance as bound up with an explicitly spatial strategy can draw some initial inspiration
from recent critiques of historicism. In his quest for a “spatialization” of social theory,
Edward Soja “identifies historicism with the creation of a critical silence, an implicit
subordination of space to time that obscures geographical interpretations of the
changeability of the social world and intrudes upon every level of theoretical discourse,
from the most abstract ontological concepts of being to the most detailed explanations
of empirical events” (1989, page 15). In likewise stating that “the grammar of social
theory has been avowedly historicist”, Neil Smith has noted the absence of debate
“over the categories and politics of spatial differentiation” (1993, page 96). I suggest
that this critique could and should extend beyond concerns about the effects of historicism on our understanding of the present, towards a spatialized critique of the writing of the past. In that regard the discussion herein of the Swedish military labor-company camps should not be seen as yet another case in the annals of historical geography but as an attempt to configure a politicized ‘geographical history’. In a recent paper, Mike Crang and Penny Travlou have addressed issues of memory as well as what they see as problems with both “historicist” and “spatialized accounts of the city” (2001, page 161). They find the French philosopher Henri Bergson and his work on temporality particularly instructive, and conclude by arguing that “the breakdown of intervals in time and distance in space produces not only synchronicity but the virtual presence of the past through particular sites in a pluritemporal landscape—not in the sense of a continuous historical narrative but as discordant moments sustained through a mosaic of sites where qualitatively different times interrupt spatialized juxtastructures” (page 173).

This is a truism expressed in a somewhat convoluted language, and one with which I cannot but agree. However, this truism has severe limitations because “discordant moments” are simply understood as a “mosaic of sites” in which “qualitatively different times interrupt spatialized juxtastructures”. Thus, Crang and Travlou seem to come close to a purely historical understanding, something confirmed in a statement such as that “the urban fabric is seen as an arena where different historical eras converge” (page 163). There is indeed such a temporal convergence in built space. However, I suggest that when the complementary epistemological step is taken to understand built space as traces of practices the focus must shift to how any ‘mosaic of sites’ is the result of qualitatively different aspirations of different groups and individuals confronting one another in practices at the very same moment in time. This should be another truism, as, to use Lefebvre’s (1991) terminology, the spaces of representation and the representations of space through which built space comes into being cannot be homogenized but have to be understood as heterogeneous across time as well as between subjects differentially located in space. It is only if this argument is accepted that the strategy proposed in this paper makes sense.

The impact of the past upon the present is through the ways in which built spaces enable and constrain present practices in particular ways as a result of how they have been solidified in terms of particular spatial structures of (dis)placement and (dis)location, as forms of disruptions and connections across and between spatial scales, and in the shape of volumes and areas assigned to certain functions, and so on, and so forth. Elsewhere, I have shown how this impact concerns both denotative and connotative functions of space (Landzelius, 2001). And it is because of this that the strategy of dis(re)membering and the creation of disinheritance assemblages should have a critical and liberatory potential, as it would disrupt present solidifications and reconnect the present to past/passed struggles in practices over spatial opportunities and contestations. In the case of the Swedish camps, dehumanizing social abjection was entangled in spatial dispersal: the camps were located far away from the sites of power where they were conceived, and were invisible to most Swedish citizens. In this fashion, spatial interdependencies between social phenomena were hidden by powerful textualizations that purified centres of power through dislocation of its actual effects. The “discordant moments sustained through a mosaic of sites”, to again quote Crang and Travlou, were in this case not the traces of “qualitatively different times” but the effects of power struggles as they were solidified in one historical moment. Related to such ‘spatial fixations’—to intentionally invoke both David Harvey and Sigmund Freud—one can argue that “it is space not time that hides consequences from us” (Soja, 1989, page 24, see also page 63). The politics of dis(re)membering I propose here would
counter such spatial displacement and disjunction by a serious engagement with the issues of spatial layering, spatial scales, and power as related to the different spatial reach of different kinds of situated practices (see Agnew, 1989; 1993; Paasi, 1991; Pred, 1989; Smith, 1993). To the extent that “The construction of scale is not simply a spatial solidification or materialization of contested social forces and processes”, but also and reciprocally “an active progenitor of specific social processes” (Smith, 1993, page 101), disinheritance assemblages could serve to address practices of the past and of the present simultaneously by making the particular and power-laden effects of spatial solidifications the very issue of interrogation.

To spatialize our understanding of the past thus entails a reinscription, into any particular moment of the past, of the spatially dependent, undetermined, open-ended, and thus deeply political character of that moment understood as a past/passed present constantly under stress and reconfiguration in situated practices. In the context of my overarching argument herein, recent discussions of, for example, “spaces of resistance” (Pile, 1997), as well as of “geographies of exclusion” (Sibley, 1995, in this context particularly pages 5–11, 100–112) should in this regard be seen not only as ways of approaching the present, but also as possible roads into the spatiality of the past. Approaching the past in a simultaneously spatialized and politicized fashion through a stress on practices would make it possible to disclose further the constitutive ways in which heteronomy and processes of othering, such as displacement, exclusion, and detainment, have been related to physical measures and have been dependent upon spatial and juridical differentiation of scales. In practice, the strategy of dis(re)membering that I propose would include temporary critical interventions in the form of disinheritance assemblages, which would contribute to a spatial implosion of the past into the present. In short, the dominant approach in preservation uncritically accepts fragmented and dispersed heritage sites on the basis of authenticity. This approach might well be of importance, particularly when such sites of remains in their authentic place can be progressively employed for the disruption of further demolition of the past in the restless spatial restructuring of capitalism. Nonetheless, I contend that such sites of in situ preservation need to be, not only discursively reconfigured as disinheritance but also accompanied by the creation of reconstructed and relocated disinheritance assemblages. A primary aspect of employing such disinheritance assemblages as part of a conscious spatialized strategy of commemoration would be to articulate how abjective practices as well as power asymmetries are spatially interdependent. However, the objective should not be simply to invert meanings or in other ways freeze signification. Deleuze, in commenting on Walt Whitman’s writing, remarks suggestively that “…a kind of whole must be constructed, a whole that is all the more paradoxical in that it only comes after the fragments and leaves them intact, making no attempt to totalize them” (1998, page 58). I suggest that the ‘kind of whole’ to be constructed should be disinheritance assemblages, facilitating simultaneous implosion of the past into the present, and implosion across spatial scales, thus uprooting what has become a taken-for-granted order of things in both time and space. Reconstructed and relocated disinheritance assemblages would thus be actual spatial—rather than textual—elements of the deconstruction of purified and petrified sites and meanings and would serve to (re)inscribe into space, in previously unimagined ways, ruptures and tensions which could provoke and enable critical politicized significations.

8 Opening/Conclusion

In suggesting the erasure of heritage, I propose that objects of the past, on all spatial scales, should be mobilized as disinheritance for critical and subversive purposes in order to make the past implode into the present in ways that unsettle fundamental
social imaginary significations. Spatial relocation of abjected, erased, and forgotten fragments of the past would enable their imaginary yet real (re)appearance as disinheritance assemblages in key sites whence abjective textualizations emerged and were enforced. It should be noted here that, although no one individual or group would be immune to the suggested strategy of dis(re)membering, the major effects of this strategy would certainly—but not exclusively—be to undermine claims and positions of privileged groups within the present global order. In applying this theorization to, for example, the specific case of the Swedish military labor-company camps, I suggest that one such disinheritance assemblage, in the form of a reconstructed camp, be erected in the courtyard of the Royal Palace in Stockholm, where the Nazi sympathizer King Gustav V (1858–1950) resided during the war. In this way the marginalized past would be critically relocated to the center, and the silencing authority behind the exhortation ‘a Swede keeps quiet’ would be crucially decentered. Although one can imagine extensive ‘NIMBY(7) reactions’, such disinheritance assemblages could, as part of a politico-spatial struggle for the advancement of democratic principles and accountability, be made into ‘touring exhibitions’, resituated into centers of power and abjection. The very fact that the provocative appearance of disinheritance assemblages would most probably lead to discontent and conflicts indicates the importance of making issues of memorialization the objective of open and public political deliberation. In thus attempting to reach beyond both that which is and has been made socially explicit, as well as that which has been spatially silenced through dispersed and fragmented semipermanent textualizations, the strategy of dis(re)membering would fundamentally question the politico-libidinal investments in the past that make possessive and partial interests and positions of groups and individuals seem legitimate. Thus could the ‘normal flow of things’ be subverted and disrupted, and the social imaginary denaturalized, with the aim to open up the past as well as the present critically and to promote much-needed principles of autonomy, cosmopolitan democracy, and citizenship.

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(7) NIMBY—not in my backyard.


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