

The haunted people's home

Fear and sorrow in the Swedish welfare state

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It has been said that no self-respecting ghosts would haunt the middle class.¹ Ghosts haunt mansions, not townhouses. The mundanity of middle-class life lacks both the glamour of the aristocracy and the urgency of the working class. Ghosts may not haunt middle-class homes, but serial killer stalks their youth. At least in American movies. When the youths babysit during Halloween or attend summer camp, seemingly senseless violence plagues them. Since the middle-class relies on credentials for their privileges, their future is never secure. Unlike other forms of capital, credentials are non-transferable. So, their children do not necessarily inherit these privileges.² During times of social instability, popular culture tends to reflect the middle class's insecurities. For example, the interest in movies where middle-class teenagers got killed grew during the economic turmoil of the 1980s and the mid-2000s.³

The conditional comforts of the American middle-class and the life of the citizens of a welfare state share some characteristics. Since the welfare state did not fundamentally change the power dynamics in the capitalist economy—it merely offsets its most destructive tendencies—its citizens were vulnerable to structural changes within capitalism.⁴ Unlike the suburban middle-class of the slasher movies, the welfare state had universal ambitions. The suburb promised to be a refuge for the middle-class in a dangerous world. Inversely, the promises of the welfare state—the People's Home—were to build a democratic and egalitarian society for all. Masked killers did not stalk it, but the People's Home was haunted. The inequalities it could not undo haunted the People's Home, as did the inequalities it created. In addition, invasive practices research that made private life a political concern haunted the homes of the People's Home.

This article uses the gothic to investigate the relationship between negative emotions and politics. Scholars of literature and film mainly use the

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term gothic, but it has been used in other contexts to analyse dark and gloomy subjects.⁵ The gothic is associated with a somewhat limited set of tropes (i.e. castles, ruins, vampires, zombies, ghosts), but an emotional core of fear and sorrow defines the gothic.⁶ This article uses the term welfare gothic to discuss the negative emotions toward the welfare state that it argues were present in Swedish political writing in the late 1980s.

This article analyses texts written as parts of the public investigation *Demokrati och makt i Sverige* (SOU 1990:44) or *Maktutredningen* for short. The investigation was launched in 1985 to investigate the power relations of Swedish society and the effects those relations had on Sweden's democracy. The investigation involved numerous social scientists and other experts, and apart from its final report, nineteen volumes were published covering different aspects of Swedish society.⁷

In the late 1980s, Sweden was going through significant structural changes. A financial crisis followed rapid inflation in the 1970s. The economic troubles culminated in the economic recession of the 1990s that marked the end of the expansive era of the Swedish welfare state.⁸ Structural changes were underway in much of the industrialised world and are broadly understood to coincide with the rise of neoliberalism.⁹ Dramatic events like the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 created a dramatic backdrop to the changing world order. Still, the neoliberal shift had been underway since the 1970s. A key concept in neoliberalism is that self-regulating markets are the most efficient way to organise human interactions. Markets also guarantee individual autonomy since success and failure depend on how well they serve personal preferences.¹⁰ Proponents of this worldview extended these ideas to the government in general and the production of welfare services in particular.¹¹ As those ideals of government organisation after a business template became prominent, the consumer replaced the citizen as the ideal subject.¹²

There is a long tradition to use gothic tropes to discuss economics. Neoliberal economics, in particular, have been analysed with the help of ghosts and ghouls.¹³ Furthermore, some scholars explicitly study neoliberal aspects of gothic fiction.¹⁴ This article uses the term welfare gothic rather than neoliberal gothic because the emotions of fear and sorrow it investigates were particular to the welfare state. It is not wrong to describe the structural changes that led to the reorganisation of the welfare state as neoliberal, but the object of the emotions this article analyses was the welfare state and not neoliberalism.

Within the history of emotions, there is strong support for the claim that emotions are historically, geographically, and socially determined. Since emotions are both physical and cultural reactions, there is also substantial

literature on the medical responses to negative emotions.¹⁵ This article investigates political emotions, and numerous works of political science deal with emotions in politics in various ways.¹⁶ For example, there is a long tradition to investigate nationalism and national identities through emotions.¹⁷ This article explores how political writing articulates feelings towards society rather than the use of those emotions to achieve political goals. Therefore, the methodology draws more from aesthetics and political history than the traditional history of emotions.¹⁸

A particularly relevant study of emotions and politics is Jens Ljunggren's *Den uppskjutna vreden* (2015). It analyses how the Swedish Social Democrats used rage, anger, and other negative emotions in political campaigns.¹⁹ Ljunggren does not investigate specific individuals' political emotions. Instead, he focuses on how politicians mobilise emotions to gain political influence. Ljunggren uses William Reddy's theory of emotional navigation, which describes the negotiation of appropriate emotional responses: how one is supposed to feel about a specific phenomenon and what actions should come from those emotions.²⁰ Ljunggren argues that emotions should be understood as a political resource mobilised and directed for particular ends. For example, he justifies his interest in rage with Peter Sloterdijk's argument that the socialist political movements' success depended on their ability to mobilise rage.²¹ While Ljunggren studies the mobilisation of emotions for political ends, this article examines emotions as part of political writing. It argues that emotions are present even when the text in question is supposed to be disinterested, which will be discussed further in the next section.

This article analyses Yvonne Hirdman's monograph *Att lägga livet till rätta* (1989), written as part of *Maktutredningen*.²² It was the most influential of the nineteen volumes published by the investigation. Unlike the other volumes, *Att lägga livet till rätta* is still in print, with a fourth revised edition published in 2018. However, this article only analyses the first edition.

Hirdman's volume was a historical account of Swedish welfare policies and late-nineteenth-century utopian thinking. She described her work as that of a historian of woe who wanted to complicate what she believed to be an overly favourable treatment of the Swedish welfare state.²³ In her book, she used the term social engineer to designate the historical actors she studied. Hirdman did not coin the term, but she redefined it to reflect Swedish conditions better.²⁴ It signified the ambitious political reforms of the welfare state and its reliance on scientific expertise. The social engineers in Hirdman's study tended to be social scientists or architects who were either active social democrats or sympathetic to their politics. The actors did not use the term social engineer themselves, and Hirdman does

not provide a robust definition to distinguish social engineers from other experts.²⁵ However, the enduring popularity of the term and Hirdman's work suggest that it is useful.²⁶ This article proposes that it is useful because it expresses an emotional judgement of the welfare state.²⁷

To summarise my argument: I propose that the social engineer should be understood as an aesthetic rather than an empirical category and that it should be interpreted as an expression of a gothic mood. I understand aesthetics as an emotional judgement and argue that the emotions expressed through the social engineer are fear and sorrow. I refer to this specific aesthetic as welfare gothic. Political writing utilised the social engineer to give form to anxieties that were specific to the welfare state. The fear of state overreach, sorrow over the egalitarian society that never materialised, and anxiety about what social order would replace it together create a welfare gothic mood.

Public investigations and counter-readings

Scholars mainly use the gothic to analyse fiction. Public investigations are not fiction; they are a genre of political writing that strives to be as factual as possible. However, policymakers use the knowledge produced in them, which places them in a political context. Public investigations are a discrete genre because they produce state-sanctioned knowledge. As a result, the investigations have the authority of an official state document, even if they do not result in concrete reforms.²⁸ Of course, that does not guarantee consensus around their findings, but it does give them credibility as part of the state's administrative infrastructure. Thus, regardless of particular circumstances, ministers assign public investigations to solve political problems. Those problems may be technical or ideological, but they nevertheless need to be solved. Thus, public investigations are vital for the state's ability to articulate political problems and formulate political solutions.²⁹

The mandate of *Maktutredningen* was to investigate the power relations in Swedish society and how they impacted Sweden's democracy. It was effectively a referendum on how democratic Sweden was.³⁰ The investigation's main focus was to articulate political problems and not to provide solutions to them. Still, the articulation of problems determines what solutions are possible and desirable. *Maktutredningen* was part of a re-evaluation of the universal welfare state, and it articulated some of the issues that would occupy the political reform efforts for the coming decades.

Returning to Ljunggren's study on rage and the Swedish Social Democrats, his primary materials are speeches by social democratic politicians.

Like public investigations and research related to them, speeches are a distinct genre of political writing. Even though both genres are undeniably political, their authority is very different. The politician speaks as a representative of their party, and their speech is partisan by definition. That does not mean that there is consensus within the party who should speak for it. Ljunggren shows quite convincingly how different factions within the Swedish Social Democrats mobilised emotions to outmanoeuvre each other.³¹ By contrast, the speech of a scientific expert is supposed to be disinterested. Where the politician can draw credibility from passion and conviction, the expert draws power from being dispassionate. This disparity—this article argues—does not make emotions less important for experts involved in a political process. The expressions of emotions are different, but they are crucial for making politically valuable observations about the world. Accordingly, this article disagrees with some of the conclusions in Ljunggren's study. He maintains that emotional politics is a discrete political field relatively autonomous from other political fields.³² This article argues that political emotions are integral to all political processes and that it is more fruitful to investigate the emotional aspects in conjunction with other political processes than to demarcate an autonomous emotional political zone.

Counter-readings

In order to analyse *Att lägga livet till rätta*, I make a counter-reading, i.e., a reading that does not follow the intent of the text. One could argue that unintended readings of texts are commonplace. Hirdman herself commented on how *Att lägga livet till rätta* had been misunderstood when first published.³³ A counter-reading is, however, an intentional misreading. I take inspiration from Per Faxneld's *Satanic Feminism* (2017), in which he makes counter-readings of various nineteenth-century texts about Lucifer and women to analyse the emancipatory potential of Lucifer.³⁴ This article makes a counter-reading of *Att lägga livet till rätta* to examine the emotional potential of the social engineer.

This reading uses the difference between plot and narrative that Terry Eagleton, among others, have made. Public investigations ideally only have a plot, but it is virtually impossible to write a text without a narrative—even if it is a public investigation. The plot is the things that happen in a novel, and the narrative is the description of those things. A plot without a narrative is a list of events, and even though scientific texts tend to avoid stylistic embellishments, they still use narratives to give meaning to the presented facts.³⁵ In this study, the plot—the historical events—are taken at face value while the narrative—the interpretation—will be read

as emotional judgements. Hirdman investigates the relationship between utopian thinking and the welfare state. Instead of following her narrative, I construct a counter-narrative about the emotions she used to create the social engineer as an aesthetic category. For the social engineer to become an aesthetic category, it has to be associated with an emotional judgement, and the core of that emotional judgement was fear and sorrow.

The haunted people's home

Ghosts haunt castles and not townhouses, but something haunted the post-war apartment complexes in Hirdman's world. In the foreword to *Att lägga livet till rätta* she recalled her childhood in a newly built residential area. She remembered it with mixed emotions. As a child, she was happy. She lived close to her friends, and there was plenty of spaces to play near the houses. As an adult, however, she realised that she had been the victim of social engineering. An architect had planned the area, the buildings, and the playgrounds to create her happy childhood. Furthermore, she realised that the unpaid labour of the women who cooked and cleaned in those modern houses was key to the architect's plans.³⁶ She framed this reinterpretation of her childhood as the unearthing of a dark secret. Hirdman's parents were active social democrats, and she was herself considered a social democratic intellectual.³⁷ So when she uncovered the utopian past of welfare reforms, it was also a reinterpretation of her personal history.

The dark secret is a common gothic trope, and the haunting victims often resolve it by unearthing them. Hirdman did not allude to a literal ghost but instead a historical crime that was not officially acknowledged, which was a quality shared with the American genre of Southern Gothic. The conventional understanding of Southern gothic, as derived from readings of William Faulkner and others, hinges on the repression of dark social undercurrents. The southern gentry tried to uphold an air of sophistication after the defeat in the civil war. However, when the plantation economy could no longer compete with the north's industrial economy, the wealth that funded those ambitions disappeared. Left were dilapidated mansions and memories of past grandeur, which a slave economy had supported. Southern Gothic explores the legacy of the racism and hypocrisy of a society that prides itself on its refinement and civility while being ruthlessly exploitative.³⁸

The crimes of the welfare state were less severe than those of the American slaveowners, but Hirdman insists that there was a need to uncover them. The declining southern gentry mirrored the aristocracy in the traditional European gothic tradition. Since its inception, the gothic had been a self-consciously historical genre. Many influential works were

eighteenth-century depictions of an imagined medieval Europe.³⁹ Hirdman's reimagining of the Swedish welfare state as the implementation of nineteenth-century utopian ideas fits neatly into such a narrative. However, instead of aristocrats or plantation owners, she wrote about social engineers.

Social engineers

Hirdman adopted the term social engineer from Karl Popper's works *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1966) and *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957).⁴⁰ Popper's philosophy was fundamental to *Maktutredningen*. Its authors argued that democracy, like critical rationalism, was a method for identifying, evaluating, and solving problems. Critical rationalism, the report claimed, was democracy.⁴¹

When Hirdman applied Popper's categories, she found them lacking. According to Popper, there were two kinds of social engineers. The first—"bad"—social engineer was utopian and had a teleological view of history. The second—"good"—social engineer was pragmatic and had a step-by-step approach to changing society. If Hirdman used this definition on the historical actors she investigated, they would all fall into the second category. Hence she used the two types of social engineers as different poles on a spectrum. That made it possible to interpret the practical and step-by-step actions of the historical actors as expressions of teleological reasoning. The object of Hirdman's study thus became to identify how utopian thinking contaminated the Swedish welfare state.⁴²

The distinction between pure and impure has been a critical component of how horror scholars understand monsters.⁴³ It is a distinction inspired by Mary Douglas' famous discussion of the pure and impure. Something in the wrong place is monstrous; it has crossed a boundary and become impure.⁴⁴ In Hirdman's narrative, the social engineers became monstrous by being polluted by utopian thinking.⁴⁵ That was the boundary between "good" and "bad" social engineers in Hirdman's narrative. The social engineers used their influence to spread their utopian infection through their roles as experts. Hirdman elaborates on how scientific studies collected data on how people lived and how those investigations led to even more far-reaching investigations.⁴⁶ A never-ending circle of knowledge creation shifted the authority over the home from the women—who had traditionally done the housework—to scientific experts.⁴⁷ The higher standards of living that the welfare state provided came with normative prescriptions on the correct way to live. It was, as Hirdman puts it, the forked tongue of the welfare state.⁴⁸

Haunted homes and cancelled futures

Much of Hirdman's investigation deals with houses. The prying gaze and intrusive requests of social engineers disturbed the homes of the citizens. The social engineers redrew the boundaries between public and private as they made everyday life an arena for political reforms.⁴⁹ She presents the modernist architecture and the experimental "collective houses" that Alva Myrdal was involved in planning as evidence of the coercive ambitions of the social engineers.⁵⁰ Just as black mould had been growing in working-class homes during the nineteenth century, utopian thinking was festering in the modernist dwellings of the twentieth century. The plans for the good life that people would live in the modern houses still relied on women's unpaid labour. Additionally, bread-winner wages had been a central demand for parts of the Swedish labour movement, and the social-democratic party embraced the nuclear family as the ideal social unit.⁵¹ Thus, in effect, women had been excluded from many of the working-class men's benefits.

In Robert Marasco's haunted house novel *Burnt Offerings* (1973), a family leaves the city for a secluded mansion, which is typically far too expensive for them. Still, they are allowed to live there if they do some of the upkeep in return. The family eventually realises that ghosts haunt the house. However, slightly before that realisation happens, the mother has an epiphany while cleaning one of the mansions many rooms. She realises that she is not the master of the house, as she had initially thought, but rather the house is the master of her. She toils away endlessly, cleaning and fixing it, thinking she is making a home for her family, but the house belongs to the ghosts, and she merely serves as their servant.⁵²

After 2008 readings of the book have placed it in the context of the crashed housing market. Through buying houses they could not afford, many people briefly believed that they were the masters of homes that belonged to the bank, and when the bubble burst, the make-believe house owners paid dearly for their hubris.⁵³ One could also use *Burnt Offerings* to illustrate the domestic anxieties of housing in welfare gothic. By accepting the conveniences offered by the welfare state, one stepped into a world of a standardised good life. The kitchen was made according to uniform standards, as was the neighbourhood, and behind those standards were experts who had used a scientific method to determine what a generalised good life should be. An ancient ghost did not haunt the modern apartment buildings. It was the secular ghost of the all-knowing expert that haunted them. The women of the welfare state did not clean for ghosts in a haunted mansion. Instead, they performed unpaid labour to reproduce the welfare state.

The egalitarian ideals that were never fully realised received an additional shade of darkness in the 1990s when the universal welfare state lost its importance as a political project. The values were abandoned and no longer “not realised”. In 1992 the last volume of *Maktutredningen* was published—almost two years after its final report. Its theme was gender and the welfare state. One of the chapters—written by the economic historian Ulla Wikander—was a historical essay on gendered work in Sweden. It concluded with a short story of how a reduced welfare state would affect working-class women’s lives. There was an overrepresentation of women in the public sector, which meant they would be hit by unemployment more than other groups in society. The public sector also cared for children, the elderly, and the sick. If the welfare state no longer performed such care work, women would do it as unpaid labour.⁵⁴ Not only did the unpaid labour of women make it possible to create a welfare state, but it would also facilitate the deconstruction of that very societal regime.

Mark Fisher has described such mourning of a vanished future as “hauntology”. Hauntology refers to that which is no longer and that which has not yet happened. The term comes from Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1994), and Fisher uses it to analyse British popular culture. He argues that the dismantling of the British welfare state undid the existing egalitarian ambitions and the dreams of a more egalitarian future. Thus, the welfare state is that which is no longer, and the lost future is that which has not yet happened. As a result, with the disappearance of the future, the popular imagination lost its ability to imagine a radically different world. That was the emotional core of hauntology. Also, by situating hauntology in the specific context of New Labour’s Britain, Fisher gives the concept a concrete form, which makes it possible to apply it to other cultural contexts that recently cancelled futures also haunts.⁵⁵ The difference between Fisher’s hauntology and welfare gothic is that the latter mourns both the cancellation of the future and the failure of the present. The women who gave up their free time to cook and clean in the people’s home were already being failed by the welfare state when its future was cancelled.

The utopian infection

“The little life”—as Hirdman called the home and the family—had become an object of educational efforts to make women better mothers and homemakers. On the first page of *Att lägga livet till rätta*, she summarised it as: “it is the social democratic order—the regulation—of the little life of a society: the families’, the mother’s, the children’s life.”⁵⁶ Other researchers have interpreted the unchallenged institution of the nuclear family in

welfare policies as a concern for the reproduction of labour.⁵⁷ Hirdman interpreted the interest in the family as an expression of the utopian desire to prescribe the “good life.” If Hirdman had accepted the premise that the family was doing reproductive labour, the focus of her study would have shifted towards the relationship between social democracy and capitalism instead of social democracy and utopian thinking. That, in turn, would have placed her in the Marxist tradition she was explicitly criticising.⁵⁸

It was the desire to prescribe how things should be that betrayed the utopian thinking that contaminated the motives of the social engineers.⁵⁹ However, Hirdman did not provide examples of political reforms that did not propose how things should be. Though, from the context of *Maktutredningarna*, one can assume that the positive counterexample was the market.⁶⁰ Ideally, the market has no central authority. Instead, the consumers’ choices shape the market, thus making it an expression of the general desire of its participants. An objection to that interpretation is Hirdman’s critique of Gunnar Myrdal’s economic reasoning when talking about the family.⁶¹

If the social engineer were an empirical category, there would have to be a discussion on how much utopian thinking the “good” step-by-step social engineer was allowed to indulge in before becoming too utopian. However, Hirdman proposes a continuity between the theoretical discussions of the 1930s and the concrete reforms of the 1940s. Thus, suggesting that the social engineers were moving towards the “good” side of the scale.⁶² Her critique of the later reforms did nonetheless imply that utopian thinking still polluted them. However, if all ideas about how the world should be are utopian, all political actions are inherently utopian. Believing that society should change would be just as utopian as believing that society should not change. This article proposes that this tension is why Hirdman’s social engineer should be understood as an emotional judgement—an aesthetic category—and not an empirical one.

In sum, a social engineer is an expert whose political activities make one feel uneasy. The investigations into home and family life felt intrusive, and the rational modernist architecture implied that not only did the architects know the individual family’s needs better than they did themselves, but also that those needs were general enough to be mass-produced. The social engineer gave form to the feeling that the state is overstepping its boundaries when it claims authority over how people live their lives.

Like pornography, it is hard to define what it is, but one knows it when one sees it. The lack of a definition made it applicable to any political fears and anxieties. One could blame the social engineer for the self-importance of low-level bureaucrats, the unrestricted power of social scientists, and corrupt political elites. Because the social engineer was the avatar of the

excesses of the welfare state, both supporters and critics could blame the social engineer for its failings. The social engineer embodied both fears of lost individual autonomy and the mourning of an egalitarian society that was never fully realised.

Welfare gothic

This article has proposed that the social engineer—as interpreted by Hirdman—is an aesthetic, not an empirical category. It is used to make emotional judgements of the welfare state. The article argues that the specific emotions that the social engineer evokes can be described as welfare gothic. Welfare gothic is a mood dominated by fear and sorrow. Andrea Suchelli argues that feelings are directed towards an object, but moods are affective states that influence how something is interpreted. However, moods do not simply colour an impression. They also direct attention and aids categorisation. Moods are a cognitive framework that helps us understand specific contexts. They are preparatory states that orient us towards a specific emotion that makes, for example, a work of art understandable. Sauchelli distinguishes between expressing and evoking a mood or an emotion. The meaning of a work, what it expresses, is not necessarily what it evokes. For example, a work of art can express the horrors of war but evoke outrage rather than fear in its viewers. In Sauchelli's understanding, there can be a correlation between what is expressed and evoked, but they are separate analytical categories.⁶³ *Att lägga livet till rätta* is a work of political history, but it evoked welfare gothic. The events analysed in the book was narrated as the contamination of the political project of the welfare state by utopian thinking, and the hosts of this infection were the social engineers.

The sorrow over the failure of the social scientific experts—who claimed to have the blueprints of the good-life—accompanied the fear of state overreach those same experts embodied. The failure of the social engineers validated the fears. If their project had been successful, their hubris had instead been an accurate estimation of their extraordinary abilities. These complementary emotions made the social engineer a handy category. For the critics of the welfare state, they were the avatars of the oppressive state. For supporters of the welfare state, their utopian contamination was responsible for its shortcomings. Regardless, a narrative that includes the social engineer is inevitably about the failure of the welfare state because the mood of welfare gothic does not allow for positive interpretations.

Knowledge production—state-sanctioned or otherwise—relies on emotional judgements to be meaningful, which makes aesthetics crucial to political history. Furthermore, using emotions in analysing political

texts—rather than placing them in a separate political sphere—makes it possible to make novel readings of familiar texts.

Notes

1. David Punter: *The literature of terror. A history of gothic fictions from 1765 to the present day* (London, 1980), 55.

2. Allan Liu: *The laws of cool. Knowledge work and the culture of information* (Chicago IL, 2004).

3. Kara M. Kvaran: “‘You’re all doomed!’ A socioeconomic analysis of slasher films” in *Journal of American Studies* 50:4 (2016), 953–970.

4. Ian Gough: *The political economy of the welfare state* (London, 1979); Gøsta Esping-Andersen: *The three worlds of welfare capitalism* (Cambridge, 1990); Klas Åmark: *Hundra år av välfärdspolitik. Välfärdsstatens framväxt i Norge och Sverige* (Umeå, 2005).

5. E.g. Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.): *The Cambridge companion to gothic fiction* (Cambridge, 2002); Bernard Perron (ed.): *Horror video games. Essays on the fusion of fear and play* (Jefferson NC, 2009); Emma McEnvoy: *Gothic tourism. Constructing haunted England* (London, 2015); Päivi Mehtonen & Matti Savolainen: *Gothic topographies. Language, nation building and ‘race’* (Burlington, 2016); Xavier Aldana Reyes: *Spanish Gothic. National identity, collaboration and cultural adaptation* (London, 2017); Lorna Piatti-Farnell: *Consuming gothic. Food and horror in film* (London, 2017); Leila Taylor: *Darkly. Black history and America’s gothic soul* (London, 2019).

6. Mattias Fyhr: *De mörka labyrinterna. Gotiken i litteratur, film, music och rollspel* (Lund, 2017), 18–32.

7. *Demokrati och makt i Sverige* (SOU 1990:44).

8. For an overview of this period, see Lennart Schön: *An economic history of modern Sweden* (London, 2012), 277–333.

9. E.g. David Harvey: *A brief history of neoliberalism* (New York, 2007); Simon Springer, Kean Birch & Julie MacLeavy: “An introduction to neoliberalism” in Simon Springer, Kean Birch & Julie MacLeavy (eds.): *The handbook of neoliberalism* (New York, 2016), 1–15.

10. For a thorough discussion on the theoretical development of this understanding of the market, see Quinn Slobodian: *Globalists. The end of empire and the birth of neoliberalism* (Cambridge, 2018).

11. E.g. Peter Self: *Government by the market? The politics of public choice* (London, 1993); Neil Gilbert: *Transformation of the welfare state. The silent surrender of public responsibility* (New York, 2002); Rüdiger Graf: “Human behaviour as a limit to and a means of state intervention. Günter Schmölders and behavioural economics” in Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian & Philip Mirowski (eds.): *Nine lives of neoliberalism* (London, 2020), 143–166.

12. Wendy Brown: *Undoing demos. Neoliberalism’s stealth revolution* (New York, 2015); Niklas Olsen: *The sovereign consumer. A new intellectual history of neoliberalism* (Cham, 2019).

13. John Quiggin: *Zombie economics. How dead ideas still walk among us* (Princeton NJ, 2010); Collin Crouch: *The strange non-death of neoliberalism* (Cambridge, 2011); David McNally: *Monsters of the market. Zombies, vampires, and global capitalism* (Chicago IL, 2012); Henry A. Giroux: *Zombie politics and culture in the age of casino capitalism* (New

York, 2014); Mark Fisher: "How to kill a zombie. Strategizing the end of neoliberalism" in Mark Fisher & Darren Ambrose (eds.): *K-punk. The collected and unpublished writings of Mark Fisher* (2004–2016) (London, 2018), 539–544.

14. E.g. Martin Parker: "Organisational Gothic" in *Culture and Organization* 11:3 (2005), 153–166; Mark Featherstone: "'Hoodie horror'. The capitalist other in post-modern society" in *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 35:3 (2013), 178–196; Emily Johansen: "The Neoliberal Gothic. Gone girl, Broken harbour, and the terror of everyday life" in *Contemporary Literature* 57:1 (2016), 30–55; Japhy Wilson: "Neoliberal Gothic" in Springer, Birch & MacLeavy (eds.): *The handbook of neoliberalism*, 592–602; Linnie Blake: "Neoliberal Gothic" in Masha Wester & Xavier Aldana Reyes (eds): *Twenty-first-century gothic* (Edinburgh, 2018), 61–71.

15. Jan Plamper: *The history of emotions. An introduction* (Oxford, 2012); Barbra H. Rosenwein & Riccardo Cristiani: *What is the history of emotions?* (Cambridge, 2018); Katie Barclay: *The history of emotions. A student guide to methods and sources* (London, 2020).

16. E.g. Joanna Bourke: *Fear. A cultural history* (London, 2005); Drew Westen: *The political brain. The role of emotion in deciding the fate of the nation* (New York, 2007); Deborah B. Gould: *Moving politics. Emotions and ACT UP's fight against AIDS* (Chicago IL, 2009); Elisabeth R. Anker: *Orgies of feeling. Melodrama and the politics of freedom* (Durham, 2014); Sarah Birch, Nicholas J. Allen & Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt: "Anger, anxiety and corruption perceptions. Evidence from France" in *Political Studies* 65:4 (2017), 893–911; Brian E. Weeks: "Emotions, partisanship and misperceptions. How anger and anxiety moderate the effect of partisan bias on susceptibility to political misinformation" in *Journal of Communication* 65:4 (2015), 699–719; Todd H. Hall: *Emotional diplomacy. Official emotions on the international stage* (London, 2015); Heather Elaine Yates: *The politics of emotions, candidates and choices* (New York, 2016); Michelle Pace & Ali Bilgic: "Studying emotions in security and diplomacy. Where we are now and challenges ahead" in *Political Psychology* 40:6 (2019); Jonathan Moss, Emily Robinson & Jake Watts: "Brexit and the everyday politics of emotion. Methodological lessons from history" in *Political Studies* 68:4 (2020), 837–856.

17. Benedict Anderson's influential study on imagined communities have spawned a fruitful research tradition. Benedict Anderson: *Imagined communities. Reflections in the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 2016).

18. For a broad overview of contemporary approaches to aesthetics, politics, and affect, see Marie-Luise Angerer, Bernad Bösel & Michaela Ott (eds.): *Timing of affect. Epistemologies, aesthetics, politics* (Zürich, 2014).

19. Jens Ljunggren: *Den uppskjutna vreden. Socialdemokratisk känslopolitik från 1880-till 1980-talet* (Lund, 2015).

20. For an introduction to Reddy's theory, see Plamper: *The history of emotions*, 251–265.

21. Peter Sloterdijk: *Rage and time. A psychopolitical investigation* (New York, 2010).

22. Yvonne Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta. Studier i svensk folkhemsolitik* (Stockholm, 1989); 4th rev. ed. Stockholm, 2018).

23. Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta*, 23.

24. *Ibid.*, 11–15.

25. Henrik Björck: *Folkhemsbyggare* (Stockholm, 2008), 53–90.

26. In a recent book about Swedish public administration the term social engineer is used in a playful way to illustrate a person who uses the state bureaucracy to get

their way. Not only have the term survived, it has been institutionalised to the point where it can be used ironically. Irene Wennmo: *Politik på riktigt. Handbok för sociala ingenjörer* (Stockholm, 2020).

27. In my understanding of aesthetics, I follow Sianne Ngai and her studies of the zany, the cute, and the interesting. While she mainly analyse popular culture, I argue that her approach to aesthetics as a central component of late capitalism is instructive to studies of political writing as well. Sianne Ngai: *Our aesthetic categories. Zany, cute, interesting* (Cambridge, 2012).

28. Sara Edenheim: *Begärets lagar. Moderna statliga utredningar och heteronormativitetens genealogi* (Stockholm, 2005).

29. Linn Spross: *Ett välfärdsstatligt dilemma. Statens formuleringar av en arbetstidsfråga 1919–2002* (Uppsala, 2017), 20–21, 27–31.

30. SOU 1990:44, 411–419.

31. This was particularly clear in the early history of the party when anarchists and libertarian socialists were marginalised and during the inter war period when the communists were forced out of the party. Ljunggren: *Den uppskjutna vreden*, 75–129.

32. *Ibid.*, 27–75.

33. Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta* (2018), 4–6.

34. Per Faxneld: *Satanic feminism. Lucifer as the liberator of women in nineteenth century culture* (New York, 2017), 18–22.

35. Terry Eagleton: *How to read literature* (New Haven CT, 2013), 80–116.

36. Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta*, 7–8.

37. Hirdman have written both about her parents and her own academic career in her autobiography. Yvonne Hirdman: *Medan jag var ung. Ego-historia från 1900-talet* (Stockholm, 2015).

38. Elizabeth Rodrigueuz Fielder: “Faulkner’s death ways. The race and space of mourning” in Eric Gary Anderson, Taylor Hagood & Daniel Cross Turner (eds.): *Undead south. The Gothic and beyond in southern literature and culture* (Baton Rouge LA, 2015), 100–111; Elsa Charléty: “Of flesh and bones. Incarnations of the silenced past in William Faulkner’s and Erskine Caldwell’s early Southern Gothic short stories” in Anderson, Hagood & Turner (eds.): *Undead south*; Richard Gray: “Inside the dark house. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* and Southern Gothic” in Susan P. Castello & Charles L. Crow (eds.): *The Palgrave handbook of the Southern Gothic* (London, 2016), 21–40.

39. Dale Townshend: “Introduction. Gothic in the nineteenth century, 1800–1900” in Angela Wright & Dale Townshend (eds.): *The Cambridge history of the Gothic* (Cambridge, 2020), 1–18.

40. Karl Popper: *The open society and its enemies. Vol. 1. The spell of Plato* (London, 1966); Karl Popper: *The open society and its enemies. Vol 2. The high tide of prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the aftermath* (London, 1966); Karl Popper: *The poverty of historicism* (London, 1957).

41. This was most likely an assertion made by the political scientist Olof Petersson since he was the chair of the investigation and he had also published a monograph that discusses power from a Popperian perspective. SOU 1990:44, 43–44; Olof Petersson: *Metaforernas makt* (Stockholm, 1988).

42. Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta*, 12–13.

43. One of the most influential theories of horror, Noël Carroll’s *Philosophy of horror*, relies heavily on monsters to distinguish it from other genres. Carroll developed his

philosophy of horror based on horror films and made a distinction between art-horror, such as horror films, and natural horror, which are the actual real life horrors. Art-horror is the object of his study. Art-horror is simultaneously attractive and repulsive and it is in the interplay between the two that pleasure is created. Art-horror, according to Carroll, need to include a monster that cannot be explained by science. The reason being that there are films and books that are readily recognisable as horror that does not elicit fear or fascination, yet they are still horror. Noël Carroll: *The philosophy of horror. Or paradoxes of the heart* (New York, 1990).

44. Mary Douglas: *Purity and danger. An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (London, 2002).

45. Hirdman described the continued influence of the liberal feminist Ellen Key within the social democratic family policy as “[t]he Keysian idea contagion.” Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta*, 87.

46. *Ibid.*, 225.

47. *Ibid.*, 211.

48. *Ibid.*, 131.

49. *Ibid.*, 222.

50. *Ibid.*, 92–128.

51. *Ibid.*, 148–158.

52. Robert Marasco: *Burnt offerings* (Richmond VA, 2015).

53. Grady Hendrix: *Paperbacks from hell. The twisted history of ‘70s and ‘80s horror fiction* (Philadelphia PA, 2017), 105–111.

54. Ulla Wikander: “Delat arbete, delad makt. Om kvinnors underordning i och genom arbete” in Gertrud Åström & Yvonne Hirdman (eds.): *Kontrakt i kris* (Stockholm, 1992), 65–66.

55. Mark Fisher: “What is hauntology?” in *Film Quarterly* 66:1 (2012), 16–24.

56. Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta*, 9.

57. For a recent example, see Spross: *Ett välfärdsstatligt dilemma*, 135–155.

58. Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta*, 10.

59. *Ibid.*, 216.

60. SOU 1990: 44, 118–121.

61. Hirdman: *Att lägga livet till rätta*, 131, 140.

62. *Ibid.*, 211.

63. Andrea Sauchelli: “Horror and mood” in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 51:1 (2004), 39–47.

Abstract

The haunted people's home. Fear and sorrow in the Swedish welfare state. Pär Wikman, PhD in Economic History, Department of Economic History, Uppsala University, Sweden, Par.Wikman@ekhist.uu.se

This article uses the gothic to analyse the historical and political evaluation of the Swedish welfare state in the early 1990s. To this effect, the article makes a counter reading of Yvonne Hirdman's influential study *Att lägga livet till rätta* (1989) by interpreting it as a work of welfare gothic. Welfare gothic, this article argues, is a mood defined by a fear of state overreach and sorrow over the welfare state's failure to create an egalitarian society. The social engineer is the central actor in Hirdman's account,

and this article understands it as an aesthetic rather than an empirical category. Aesthetics is an emotional judgement, and the social engineer is used to express feelings of fear and sorrow about the welfare state. Detractors of the welfare state use the social engineer to articulate anxieties over the state's intrusions into the private sphere of its citizens. Supporters of the welfare state use it to express sorrow over how a small group of experts hijacked the welfare state project. The social engineer—as an aesthetic category—articulates fear and sorrow, depending on the narrative in which it is used. However, it always expresses a negative emotional judgement. Hence a historical narrative that employs the social engineer will inevitably be one of failure.

Keywords: social engineer, welfare state, Sweden, welfare gothic, maktutredningen, counter reading