

DOCTORAL THESIS

Bookonomy: The Consumption Practice and Value of Book Reading

Pamela Schultz Nybacka





# Bookonomy

The Consumption Practice and Value of Book Reading

Pamela Schultz Nybacka

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Cover image: Jan Lavies, Golden Fiction (Laurens)/BUS 2011

ISBN 978-91-7447-278-3

Printed in Sweden by US-AB, Stockholm 2011

*To my beloved Björn Reiland and  
our darling sons Elias and Erik  
You are the light and wave of my life*

# Acknowledgements

To venture a research project is to embark on a polar expedition. Beautiful discoveries, lonely broodings and painful frostbites are part of the journey. As John Donne once wrote, *No man is an island, entire of itself*. Hence I want to show my appreciation to all the wonderful people who have partaken in my expedition.

The journey would not have been at all possible without my beloved Björn Reiland, whose loving warmth has kept me safe and sane through thick and thin. Apart from our two beautiful, intelligent and caring sons Elias and Erik, Björn is also the father of the word “*Bookonomy*”, which he suggested one late evening when I was pondering over a name for my research project. Little did we know then the magnitude and value this name would have as a concept in my further research... I will always be grateful to Björn; my heart is his to keep for life!

In the academic world, I want to thank my supervisors, *Pierre Guillet de Monthoux* and *Thomas Bay* for letting me set sail; your openness to thought has been an excessive source of inspiration; *Jacob Östberg* and *Torkild Thanem* for maintaining the highest academic standards at my final seminar. Special thanks to Jacob for being my supportive colleague, trusted reader and considerate friend over the years. Other colleagues have contributed to the scrutiny of my thesis: *Marianne Nilsson* with positive feedback and keen interest at my midway seminar; *Janet Borgerson* with firm but warm support at my thesis proposal seminar. All the remaining lacks and weaknesses of my thesis are my responsibility alone.

Many thanks to my present and former colleagues at Stockholm University School of Business: *Uhrika Sjödin*, my nearest colleague and a dear friend with whom I sense the power to do and to let be; *Lasse Albert*, who unknowingly inspired me to follow this calling; *Martin Svendsen* for our co-creative fellowship at The Market Academy, including our committed students. For your unwavering patience and confidence, I would like to thank *Per-Olof Berg*, *Hans Rämö*, *Thomas Hartman*, *Eva Wittbom*, *Ali Yakblef*, *Olle Högberg*, *Magnus Gustavsson*, *Fredrik Sjöstrand*, *Joakim Persson*, *Mikael Holmgren*, *Henrik Ferdelt*, *Dick Forslund*, *Robert Ibrfors*, *Boel Wikland*, *Clara Gustafsson*, *Susanna Molander*, *Anna Fyrberg*, *Carl Yngfalk*, *Ragnar Lund*, *Emmanuel Parasiris*, *Håkan Preibolt*, *Kjell Ljungbo*, *Maria Frostling-Henningsson*, *Marja Soila Wadman*, *Inger Gravesen*, and *Bo Green*, who kindly opened his Dalarö network for me. A new generation of marketing scholars and Ph.D. students bring much energy and fun: *Anders Parment*, *Natalia Tolstikova*, and *Danilo Brozovic* with whom I share many literary interests, *Michael Andén*, *Andrea Lucarelli* and *Emma Gustafsson*. No scholar or teacher would ever manage without administrative support: *Kicki Wennersten*, *Kajsa Vähä*, *Helena Flinck*, *Toivo Lepp*, *Linnéa Shore*; *Pia Vallgård* for helping me out with the pictures; *Katarina Carlén*, *Gunilla Danngård*, *Michael Cederberg*, *Luis Ortis*; *Marina Kotchkour* for setting up the Bookonomy web page; *Lars Jonsson* and *Fernando Cordero* for giving helping hands when needed.

A special thank you to my second home in academia: the Department of History at Stockholm University. First and foremost to *Lennart Palmqvist* for the invitation to share responsibility in the Publishing Studies programme. A special thought goes to *Therése Andersson*, my dear Miss T, along with *Andreas Bloch* and *Orsi Husz*. Not to forget the managers: *Bo Persson*, for ‘management by care’, *Pär Frobnert*, *Ragnar Ohlsson* and *Ulla Brück*, for inexhaustible encouragement throughout the years. *Tom Silvennoinen* for Mac support and publishing conversations, *Annika Brofelth*, *Eva Eggeby*, *Kjell Lundgren* and *Oskar Schelin* for administrative know-how. All the lecturers at the Publishing Studies course; and importantly, my students whose devoted curiosity turned teaching into sheer delight. *Anna Winberg*, *Erik Larsson*, *Niklas Gårdfeldt*, *Ulrika Caperius* to name but a few.

In the wider circles of academia I would like to thank *Anette Hallin* at The Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) and with whom I share many fun and close-to-heart projects at the intersection of books and organization theory; *Eva Hemmungs Wirtén* and *Annika Olsson* whose companionship and mentoring at the 2005 SHARP conference in Canada was the start of a loyal friendship; *Petra Söderlund* for scrutinizing the chapter on book circles at an early stage, and for much appreciated conversations around life and literature; *Ann Steiner* for our luxury lunches and shared interests in the literary market; *Charlotte Glassér* with whom I have hiked in Hawaii and in the jungle of Swedish academia; *Urban Bergsten* and *Jan Seger* for inviting me to partake in wonderfully led reflexive forums over the years.

I want to express my deep gratitude to all the members and representatives of the Book Price Commission for your support and interest during the empirical phase of my project. I particularly recall your inspiring participation in the idea seminar that I held at The School of Business, Stockholm University on 22 October 2004. I extend special gratitude to *Lars-Erik Linder*, who was kind enough to invite me to a round table talk that led to this project. Lars-Erik, I am forever grateful for your good memory! Many thanks to *Hans Sand*, my eminent contact person in the Commission, and Chairman *Ingegerd Sablström*; publishing representatives *Kristina Ablinder*, *Jonas Modig*, and *David Stansvik*, for all the good talks and events following the BPC; *Ulrika Ingelsson* for your clarity of thought and overall friendliness. I also want to thank my virtual reference group, consisting of *Inger Gravesen*, *Petra Söderlund*, *Bo Green*, *Ulla Carlsson*, *Lennart Weibull* and *Lennart Palmqvist*, for guidance at the early stages of the project.

A great many thanks to *Stefan Skog*, *Eva Högberg*, *Christina Andersson*, *Ludvig von Bahr* for interesting interviews on publishing matters, and to the companies that helped me get into contact with groups and individuals: *Ia Kindblom* and Förlaget Harlequin AB; *Jesper Monthán*, then CEO of Bonnier Audio/Lyssnarklubben; *Lovisa Sandberg* (née Boberg), then from E-Pan, and *Py Söderström* (née Sandell) at E-Lib. Thank you all for interesting angles on the book market and for your confidence in my engaging with your readers and listeners.

An enormous thank you to all the participant respondents in the study, for being so curious and brave to turn up for interviews and sessions. It has been incredibly rewarding to meet you! Hopefully you all got something from this experience too.

I also want to direct thanks to you who helped put me in contact with respondents: *Susanne Mandrén* who invited me to meet with the Monday Gang; *Joakim Persson* who recommended participants to the pilot study; *Ann Wallberg* who guided me to the book circle in Lund; *Karolina Jonsson*, *Johan* and *Pernilla Schuber* for leading ways to the book circles in Stockholm. Thank you *Kjersti Bosdotter* who kindly set up contact with *Åke*

*Dansk* and the Metal department 135 in Sandviken. Good luck with your reading projects in the future! I also want to thank the persons who made all the events possible: the hospitable *Mr. and Mrs. Mandrén* in Dalsjöfors; *Nina Ask* at Örebro City Library. The coffee was delicious! I am also very grateful to *Karolina Jonsson* for documenting the idea seminar and translating a small but important part of the material; *Barbara Harris* and *Sandra Brunsberg* for quick and thorough English language check-up of parts of my extensive manuscript at different stages.

The Adam Helms Lecture reference group has been a resourceful forum for creating fruitful encounters between academia and book professionals: *Eva Bonnier* for sensibility and every bit of literary glamour, *Stephen Farran-Lee* for perceptive clarity and good humour. *Bodil Edvardsson*, for swift and sweet alliance in book matters, along with *Camilla Smith*, *Ann Zachrisson*, *Leif Friberg*, and once again, *Lennart Palmqvist* and *Petra Söderlund*. New members are *Susanna Romanus* and *Richard Herold* and I look forward to all our future events!

Now we are approaching the inner circle of friends and family who have been very patient with my absent-mindedness the last couple of years and who never cease to amaze me with their generosity and inner strength: *Karolina Jonsson*; *Hanna Lambert*, *Sofia French*, *Matilda McCarthy*, *Lotta Mossum*, and *Ulrika Flock* (aka Ullis Gullis) in my extended family. *Inger Gustavsson* and *Miriam*; *Sigrid Barnekow*, *Charlotta Bay*, and *Madeleine Lawass* are dear friends I hope to see more of now that the thesis is finally finished. That goes for *Åsa Agemalm Reiland*, *Karin Reiland*, *Sven Reiland* too, along with my brother *Max Schultz* and darling sister *Marika Schultz* and her children Sophia and Hubert. Finally, I want to thank my beloved mother, *Ritva Nybacka*, whose artistic creativity and intellectual wilfulness knows no boundaries, nor end.

My thoughts also go to those close who cannot join me today: my father *Lars Schultz*, who lived his life among books and passed away just after I embarked on this venture; my aunt *Birgitta Schultz*, who combined interest for business and the arts with dreams of opening a Swedish bookshop in Paris. Thinking also of my dear friends *Ola Pebrson* and *Lena Gustavsson* and their children who all hold a special place in my heart. Last but not least, *Liten*, *Rasmus* and *Miffi*, our purring little fellows who were wonderfully oblivious to research problems and puzzles.

As for my other friends, all the books and reading matter that helped me navigate on my expedition, you will find a list of participants at the very end of this book. They form a very special collective that all belong together. There are no land-locked lakes, says Arnold Bennett (1909), in the sea of literature.

Pamela Schultz Nybacka,

Bromma, March 25, 2011



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## Back Story

Some time ago I went down into the cellar in search of a book that would interest my ten-year-old son. Several cardboard boxes, filled to the brim with books read and unread, bought or received as gifts, lined the wall. Finally I found what I was looking for: *Huset Ardens gåta* (1908) by Edith Nesbit (original title: *The House of Arden*), one of my childhood favourites. When I opened the cover I saw there in my rounded lettering, “This book belongs to Paméla Nybacka. It cost 12<sup>50</sup>.”<sup>1</sup> Imagine! I had not scribbled in any youthful assessment of how much I had enjoyed the book; I had just jotted down my name and the purchase price. And how low that price seemed. At most I could have bought two ice creams for that amount of money – never a book.

As I was standing there in the basement in the middle of the summer, book in hand, it suddenly became clear to me that even as a library-loving child I knew or at least sensed that books were usually quite expensive. I cannot recall one instance when I had been able to buy a book on my own. The reason Nesbit’s book had cost so little also occurred to me; it was part of a sugar-coated offering from a children’s book club. Following the breakdown of the commissionary system between publishers and booksellers and the introduction of free market pricing in 1970, commercial book clubs were booming in the early 1980s, and even children’s book clubs had seen the light of day. And as I recall, the book club membership leaflet had tantalized me with a thorough account of their latest selection. A continuing puzzle to me, however, is my early awareness of the value of books, both literary and economic. As this book will illustrate, this consciousness has become critical in my journey to becoming a researcher. This thesis is a culmination of my life-long interest in the value and economy of reading and the book.



In late autumn 2002, I was starting up my doctoral studies at Stockholm University School of Business after a time of parental leave, when I received a phone call from Lars-Erik Linder, a senior executive among booksellers. I had met him in the springtime on the rooftop of the Stockholm University Library in connection with the annual Adam Helms Lecture and I had told him of my double interest in literature and economy. Linder had been appointed a book

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<sup>1</sup> This price would be equivalent to around 1 pound sterling.

trade representative for the Book Price Commission (BPC), formed just after the reduction of the general value-added tax (VAT) on books and magazines which had taken effect the preceding January 1. Linder explained that in the aftermath of the VAT reduction the commission had discussed the need for complementary research on the topic of reading. Their interest was whether or not there is a relationship between lower prices of books and reading.

In May 2003 the BPC and The Stockholm University School of Business agreed to support my research project *Bookonomy*, for which I was the Project Manager.<sup>2</sup> According to our agreement, I was to investigate whether and to what extent the reduction of the VAT on books has had any consequences for reading. In order to complement the statistical findings provided by SCB and its partners, I would use different methodology and apply an interdisciplinary approach. Importantly, the project was to retain full scholarly integrity during the research process. I would then report the findings of my empirical study to the BPC in time for their final report to the government in February 2005. What you are reading is the extended result of this examination.

Once I had completed my empirical study, my research took a turn. In the beginning, *Bookonomy* had just been a label for my project, one that I immediately and intuitively took to; in due time, however, I began to realize that bookonomy was more than just a convenient name...

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<sup>2</sup> The support consisted of a sum of money to cover the project's costs (equipment, travel, literature, etc.) and the costs for participating in three scholarly conferences (EURAM, SCOS, SHARP) where I would present my various findings. The Commission's support did not entail any form of personal funding (salary, etc.).



*Edmund Burke, "You should read this..."*

# I. Book Reading and Consumption

*The introduction and presented context form the general backdrop of this book. It provides illustrative examples that raise questions relevant to the research problem at hand and to society at large.*

## Introduction

A century ago, British writer Arnold Bennett (1867–1931) addressed the issue of books and readership in *Literary Taste: How to Form It* (1909). In the book, he voices a real concern for those who had not yet discovered the pleasures of literature, those still embedded in their prenatal sleep with dulled senses, those who were “no nearer being alive than a bear in winter.” Bennett disliked the notion that books were merely an elegant accomplishment or a charming distraction for the bourgeoisie: “Literature, instead of being an accessory, is the fundamental ‘sine qua non’ of complete living.” In order to elevate the status of the book, Bennett shares some good advice on how to become a reader. It is an agreeable enterprise, Bennett assures the skeptic. If it were not, it simply would not succeed.

Continuing, Bennett lays out a detailed plan for the consumption of books, a scheme that includes the writings of 226 authors before the nineteenth century or 337 volumes at a total cost of twenty-six pounds, fourteen shillings, and seven pence! Bennett admits that he would have added more authors if their books had been available at a reasonable price. Furthermore, the books were selected according to the space they would occupy on the shelf and the demand they would put on the purse:

I think it will be agreed that the total cost of this library is surprisingly small. By laying out the sum of sixpence a day for three years you may become the possessor of a collection of books which, for range and completeness in all branches of literature will bear comparison with libraries far more imposing, more numerous, and more expensive. (Bennett, 1909)

Present-day readers may share the amusement of Bennett’s contemporaries in reading such a detailed monetary scheme for individual investment in reading. For one, literary critic Robert Scholes (2001: 2) finds it “easy to make fun of Bennett” because he thinks it would be possible to acquire a basic library and

cultural capital for a specified amount of money.<sup>3</sup> When one considers reading in terms of economy and consumption and look at the lengths to which this process has been driven, one may well stop smirking.

## Context

### The Citizen-Consumer and Politics of Consumption

Over the last century, Western politics have had to take consumption and consumers increasingly into account as these matters have moved centre stage in the economy (Firat & Dholakia 1998: 134). The notions of “people” or “citizens” are often coupled with or considered synonymous with the concept of “consumers” (Burgess 2001; Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007, Trentmann 2007). In Scandinavia, political commissions have a tradition of proposing institutions and developing consumer legislation in accordance with the household economics paradigm of consumption. (Arndt 1986: 30) Consumption has been subjected to government agency and education throughout the twentieth century, especially in Sweden (Al  x 2003).

In fact, Sweden has a tradition of normative ‘consumer enlightenment’ that seeks to configure the behaviour of Swedish citizens with an ideal regarding the ‘proper consumption’ of goods. Essential to that ideal is a people’s ability to consume with parsimony and moderation in accordance with basic human needs. (Ibid.) Consumption emerges as a distinctly moral issue because it entails different forms of satisfaction and the problem of distributive justice in view of conflicting interests within a community. (Wilk 2001, see also Miller 2000) According to the Scandinavian model that meant a number of consumer groups were set up by the state in order to get the affairs of consumption on the political agenda. In time, this model has become the norm for all of Europe. (Burgess 2001)

### The Endangered Book

Bennett’s monetary scheme for the consumption of books might seem to some the perfect answer to the question of how to meet the many challenges to readership. Now, a century after Bennett, many people are still deeply concerned

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<sup>3</sup> Others, such as Ross Alloway (2003: 232), hold that Bennett was a pragmatist indeed, though certainly not a market-loving philistine, and that some of his thoughts may even have prefigured the cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu.

that the art of reading books and readership in general is in decline.<sup>4</sup> Hans Hertel (1997/1995: 206) speaks of society's veritable "reading atrophy" following the persistent depreciation of the book. Other scholars have conducted studies on whatever readership remains in these "times of de-reading" (eg. Knulst & Van den Broek 2003). Are we, in Roger Chartier's (2002) words, witnessing the death or the transfiguration of the reader?

Throughout the years, there have been many cries of alarm regarding books and reading. For instance, it was thought the ever-increasing over-production of books would flood the market; as a result, readers would drown in excess information and books would be pushed overboard by other books (Eco 1995/1987: 96). Literary education would break down (Hirsch 1987), whereupon the "death of literature" would occur, and reading books would be labeled old-fashioned and obsolete (Kernan 1990: 8). Spectacular mass media entertainment would rise from the ashes. New media would divert attention further away from books, especially audio-visual media (AV media) such as the phonograph (cf. Uzanne 1956/1894), cinematograph (Apollinaire quoted in Danius 1998: 15), radio, television (Postman 1985; Kernan 1990; Birkerts 1994), Internet, and computer games (Johnson 2005).

Some believed that the digital revolution and the emergence of the World Wide Web would eliminate the book as a physical object, turning it into dematerialized hypertext (cf. Joyce 2001) or re-casting it as an e-book. With the ergodicity of cybertexts (cf. Aarseth 1997), the full text would become inaccessible and reading would become a simultaneously fleeting and fragmented experience. With this promise or threat of having an uninterrupted stream of books (Douglas 1999), some wondered whether readers would eventually lose themselves in reading and in effect only one totalizing text would assume power and thereby supplant the former diversity of books. In addition, the digital revolution would transform publishing and printing, making these functions available to every man who had a word processor, a printer and/or access to the Internet. The field of professionally printed books would thus be swamped by a torrent of amateur publications, and undiscerning readers might not know the difference.

With all these changes and challenges looming, the prospect for the new millennium seemed uncertain. The key issue of the debate was often whether the changes for reading, writing and the book would bring the downfall of civilization or contribute to its rise. Alvin Kernan (1990: 10) wonders if we are witnessing the twilight of the conservative ideal of high regard for culture and civilization, or perhaps, as he himself proposes, we are beholding the complex

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<sup>4</sup> Apart from addictive products, not very many areas of consumption have posed such cause for concern. According to Jacob Östberg (2004), much anxiety is attached to the consumption of *food*, and consumers are subjected to a bombardment of normative messages from media and public policy makers. As we will see, there may be further reasons to relate reading and eating (see especially chapter VII).

transformations of a social institution in the midst of radical political and technological change.

## Heightened Interest in Reading and the Book

In the wake of these concerns, reading has found renewed popularity. The history of reading has become a popular topic for authors like Alberto Manguel (1999) and others (e.g. Fischer 2003), who enjoy a worldwide market for their books. And while the book was held as moving towards its imminent death, there was actually budding interest in publishing among scholars. Publishing was deemed a more inclusive term than the endangered book, and the change would then reflect the activities within the book sector in a better way. Publishing had also emerged as a business with the potential of international impact (Luey 1991). And if pressed on the issue, most scholars will acknowledge that reading is in fact a pre-condition for scholarship – indeed, scholars read all the time – although very few would be able to formulate its specific value (cf. Brown 2005). Ever since the ‘cultural turn’ within the social sciences, scholars have begun to pay more attention to literary theory, and to literary fiction, especially as empirical material.

Moreover, the issues of the responsibility and the means for establishing and supporting reading in society have come to the forefront of the discussion. The virtues of establishing citizens as readers have certainly been disputed throughout history. Just think of how totalitarian states or governments at war have sought to control and inhibit reading by means of censorship and persecution. Against that dark background still fuming with burning books, it is not surprising that peacetime governments seek to encourage book reading. In fact, reading is justified, perhaps even called for, in order to secure a future free democratic society that allows for critical reflection and open expression. In other words, mere literacy is not enough (cf. Cox 1998).

## Problem Background

Regarding the support for book consumption or reading, most countries of the European Union have cultural policies that seek to strengthen book reading habits; these include providing state support to publishing houses, book distributors and public libraries, and even enacting special tax regulations. This defense of books and readership is also set against the recurrent alarms of weakening or waning literacy. In this context, book historian Armando Petruccio has noted a peculiar thing:

Oddly enough, the loudest cries of alarm come from areas where the production and distribution of printed texts is the liveliest and where printing reaches the

broadest variety of social groups – the United States and Europe – rather than from Africa or Latin America. (Petrucci 1999/1995: 353)

This picture is well recognized in the Scandinavian context.<sup>5</sup> In the history of reading, writing and the book, Sweden is the only country for which figures are available on the development of literacy since the eighteenth century. And the figures do disclose an exceptional rate of literacy. At the end of the eighteenth century, the entire adult population, or approximately 1.3 million people, had a basic knowledge of reading and writing. By comparison, only 80,000 people in a population of around 6 million in Britain were fundamentally literate in the 1790s (Wittmann in Cavallo & Chartier 1999/1995: 288). But it was not until the eighteenth century that Sweden developed a functional structure for national bookshops. (Peterson 2001: 55) All in all, Scandinavia makes an interesting case for studying reading, writing and the book in consumer society, in part because it was in these countries that mass literacy first took root. (cf. Vincent 2000: 3)

In 2001, Sweden adopted a new strategy for increasing readership and cultural interest, and it can be connected to Bennett's monetary scheme. The Government strategy entailed a technical reform; they legislated a general reduction in the value-added tax on books and magazines as from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2002. In January 2002, ten days after the introduction of the new VAT on books and magazines, the Government passed a directive (Dir. 2002: 2) that stated that a special commission should be appointed for a three-year period. The Commission later assumed a name linked to economic value (The Book Price Commission, BPC), and its primary mission according to the directives was to "trace and scrutinize" the price development of books, magazines, *et cetera*. Furthermore, the Commission was to strive for a full and lasting effect of the measure in the consumer price. Last, but not least, "*An aim is that reading will increase in all groups.*"

In an analysis of the Government directives to the BPC, Erik Peurell (2004: 27) at the Swedish Cultural Council observes that in this context, reading really means reading literature, and especially assumed to be in book form. Furthermore, statistics on decreasing reading, especially among young people, are taken as revenue for increased government expenditure on promoting reading. There is no indication, however, of why reading is so important; "It is posited as unspoken evidence that reading is something desirable and good" (*ibid.*). Reminiscent of Bennett's monetary scheme for individual accumulation of literature – a plan that implies that a taste for books and increased reading somehow can be bought for money – we have now arrived at a time where the Swedish government expects increased readership by accepting less revenues. It is not so much a question of forming a literary *taste*, such as it was for Arnold Bennett;

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<sup>5</sup> In 1990, Euromonitor ranked Sweden and Finland as number three in consumer spending on books with 53 pounds per capita, after Germany (66 pounds) and Norway (64 pounds). (Bavertock 1993: 46)



rather, it is hoped that national readership will increase by individual commitments to book consumption. Through the VAT reform, responsibility for the increase in readership is thus assumed by the government, but effectively shifted to the individual citizen in his/her role as *consumer* on the market.

Importantly, at the time of the tax reduction, Minister for Culture Marita Ulvskog declared that the reform should not be regarded as politico-industrial support for the book industry. Rather she wanted book prices to stay low and book reading to increase (Press release 2002), especially among those who usually do not read books. Ulvskog emphasized that if only those who already read books read more, the government would certainly consider introducing the former VAT level again (Nilsson 2002). According to Leif Pagrotsky who succeeded Ulvskog as Minister for Culture, Education, and Research, the reform cost the state roughly one billion Swedish Kronor (SEK). The Minister hoped that for that large a sum of money authors would have a better chance of making a living from their writing and that people would have the possibility of buying books at more favourable prices. If that proved to be the case, it would have been worth the money. If it merely led to economic benefits for the book industry, then there was no guarantee that the tax reduction would become permanent, Pagrotsky maintained (Winkler, 2004).

The author and scholar Umberto Eco (1995/1987: 96) has officially taken a stance against taxes on books and was even the president of an international forum committed to the cause. Eco observed that the book is still an expensive commodity when compared with TV or other forms of communication, and lowering the price of books will encourage publishing and the circulation of books. Eco fears, however, that a lower price will also increase their number, so that readers will be drowned in a flood of information. In short, "Books are menaced by books. Any excess of information produces silence" (ibid.)

## Overall Research Problem

The background touches upon a wide range of important concepts such as the relation between economic and cultural aspects and how they are related to consumption and the value of books and reading in society.

Scholars across a wide range of fields describe books and reading as being subjected to both economic and cultural aspects. Especially book publishing is commonly held as dual in nature, comprising both cultural activities and business skills. (Bourdieu 1992; Coser, Kadushin & Powell 1982; Dessauer 1998, Gedin 1997; Gedin 2004; Hjort-Andersen 2000, Peterson 2004; Powell 1985; Schweizer 2000; Thornton 2004; Van der Ploeg 2004; Weber 2000) In society, however, there is a general and long-running tendency to uncouple economic concepts from everyday popular experience, rendering economy and economic concerns as the bottom-line in society (Miller 2000; Meikle 2000). This means

modern economic thinking is often readily applied to a cultural practice like reading that has developed over thousands of years.

Over time, reading and the book have increasingly been regarded through economic lenses: subjected to an economic logic and seen as constituting economic operations in themselves. Reading is often explained in modern economic terms: as production (cf. Fish 1980), as consumption (De Certeau 1988/1984), as part of a literary transaction (Appleyard 1991: 20), and as an exchange between input and output, costs and benefits (Cf. Furhammar 1985, Lundberg 1998). Support of increased reading often builds on the assumption that the value of books is finite and therefore must be defended (Baverstock 1993). The temptation may be to further “economize” our view of reading, and that will court the danger of perceiving reading – and even the support of readership – in terms of purchase and exchange. It remains to be explored and discussed whether these underlying economic assumptions are adequate or inadequate in this area.

What is ambiguously both priced and valued beyond price – like reading books in our case – is actually what renders something highly valuable, says anthropologist Daniel Miller (2000; 2008/2006). In the case of books, aside from price, the common range of cultural value (aesthetic, spiritual, social, historical, symbolic and authenticity value, Throsby 2001) is complemented with types that are both bounded and yet crossing boundaries: store value and bequest value (Van der Ploeg 2004). Following Miller (2008/2006), however, it is not a question of finding out what is the abstract, universal, yet individual value of books and reading, but it is more a matter of what their value does in practice, in society.

Consumption and morality have increasingly become a scholarly topic for discussion (cf. Borgmann 2000; Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Miller 2000; Wilk 2001). Miller’s approach to value suggests certain insights: what value does is more valuable than what it is; the relationship between economic value and non-economic values must not be dissolved. People’s use of value is different from the abstract, economic notion of people’s use-value or exchange-value (Cf. Aristotle *The Politics*, Marx *Capital*). Indeed, people’s own values provide important value. Above all, we should assume that readers seem to find their own uses of value valuable (Cf. Miller 2008/2006: 3). Moreover, Miller says bridging economic value and non-economic values can be seen as contributing to practice and society at large.

Over the years, the practice approach to consumption has gained ground within consumer research (De Certeau 1988/1984; Holt 1995; Warde 2005). With this theory, there is a shift in research interest, from studying the reader to the very doings and sayings of reading. One of the strongest lessons from theories of practice is that the key to changed consumption behaviour lies mostly in the development of practices (Warde 2005: 140). In other words, a reform such as the VAT reduction may induce more purchases, but if we are looking at

changes and development in reading, we had better understand reading in terms of practices. One benefit is that this approach avoids the pitfalls of a top-bottom consumer morality, bypassing top down perspectives, and foregrounding bottom-up doing.

The interest in social structure within cultural theory could be replaced by an interest in artifacts in practice theory, argues Andreas Reckwitz (2002a). He criticizes Theodore Schatzki (1996) for not bringing up the role of “things” in practice theory. He regards this as a culturalist way of downplaying the full relevance of practice and argues that doings necessarily are *doings with things*, and hence, so are most practices. Indeed, a consumption practice belongs intimately with the object at hand. (cf. Holt 1995) Within practices, particular items (or artifacts) are interconnected and determining elements of a practice and are deployed or consumed as conduits for its performance (Warde 2005). Arnould and Thompson (2005) envision further accounts of consumption in its historical and moral dimensions, suggesting among other things a cultural history of consumer society through a specific commodity form. Indeed, studying the consumption of books carries the promise of tying these dimensions together.

A starting point is that the case of reading can specifically contribute to an expanded understanding of consumption as practice, and its genealogy and morality. Interestingly, reading has been recast and revalued over time. The ancient Greeks regarded reading as either drudgery or buggery suitable for slaves and lowlives, whereas today reading in general is held as a beneficial thing, an epitome of civilization. Scholars have also highlighted the importance of consumers’ level of literacy skills, especially when they are low or wanting (Wallendorf 2001; Adkins & Ozanne 2005).

Importantly, after the turn of the millennium, there is a parallel counter-economization tendency among scholars for the study of reading and the book. This is not to say that reading and the book are non-market activities and things. Rather, this tendency entails exploring the book world and the practice of reading as phenomena of economy and consumption in their own right, and with an openness and sensitivity to their specific characteristics and logics (cf. Brown et al. 2006). However, it is important that they are not merely treated as simple exceptions to the economic rule, as this would establish economy as the bottom-line (cf. Miller 2000). It remains to be explored how the specific art and logic of books and reading have bearings upon the broader picture of value, culture and economy.

The more addictive aspects of book consumption share many characteristics with collecting behaviour (cf. Maclaran & Masterson 2006; Borgerson & Schroeder 2006), albeit coupled with the extraordinary communicative powers of books (Maclaran & Masterson 2006). The cycle of consumers’ acquisition, consumption, possession and disposal processes (cf. Arnould & Thompson 2005) of books thus emerges as an interesting topic. Books and reading already appear to bear strongly upon gift-giving practices (Schultz Nybacka 2005;

Maclaran & Masterson 2006). Historians teach us that appropriation may be more accurate than acquisition as regards books, not least because books have been read, and texts appropriated, without necessarily being bought. (De Certeau 1988/1984; Chartier 1992) Texts will necessarily belong with certain discursive and material forms, and therefore, reading practices and what text is read should remain distinct from each other, argues Chartier (1995/1992: 17). Considering the ever-increasing output of books (Eliot 2004, Zaid 2004), in what has become termed post-scarcity society (Slater 2000), we also need to reconcile the image of reading as consumption with the circulation of books on the market.

The practice of reading has been held a more general equivalent to consumption. (De Certeau 1988/1984) Reading is far from being an abstract operation of understanding; rather, it means that the body is involved and that one establishes relationships with oneself and with others. (Chartier 1997/1995: 20) Like all consumption practices are bounded (cf. Warde 2005), the practice of reading is of course bounded by time (cf. Van den Ploeg 2004), especially making clever use of time and space (De Certeau 1988/1984; Chartier 1992). Many people, along with Bennett in this introduction, hold that reading is a cumulative experience. “[T]he more one reads worthwhile books, the more one gets out of reading, the more one is able to appreciate the context and the more one develops an appetite for it.” (Van der Ploeg 2004: 5) Thus, reading is a practice that grows with repetition. Similarly, Colbert (in Wennes 2002) discerns an *accumulative logic* of art experiences. This is in stark contrast to other products and commodities that work according to a competitive logic, whereby the use of one product more or less eliminates the need for another (Ibid.). Thus, it is often a question of desire rather than need. Also, the accumulative logic rules out the economic principle of saturation, by which marginal utility is declining. There is no actual limit to how many books one can read in one’s life. Ultimately, reading gravitates around transgressing mortality, and yet, death sets the limit. (Bloom 2000)

The different philosophical views on consumption practice, however, are not easily transposed into empirical studies, says Warde (2005: 135). He holds that theory shows a tendency towards idealization and abstraction, and does not pay enough attention to the social processes in the production, sustaining and reproduction of practices. This reflection opens for a challenge to methodology in the area of consumption practices. Book historians have already pointed to the problems of finding relevant empirical data in the study of reading (Rose 2001; Price 2004), and of representing reading through reading (Chartier 1995/1992). Moreover, reading is essential for theory (Culler 2001); indeed, it is pivotal for the whole question of the relationship between science and literature. (cf. Snow 1964/1959) We may escape, to some extent, methodological problems connected to the empirical study of reading practice (including a top-down view of consumers), if we engage the readers in the empirical process beyond conducting interviews, etc. and allow for complementary experimental

activities or sessions that make it possible for participants to generate a material by themselves and help to visualize the very art and logic of reading.

To conclude, I argue for both meta-theoretical and methodological problematization and exploration of the underlying art and logic of consumption practice as regards books and reading. In contrast to a top-bottom, moralistic approach to book consumption, we need to know more about readers' voluntary use of the value of reading and the book, individually and collectively, in practice and in everyday life, as they may give us hints of another mode of value, consumption, culture and economy. Moreover, we need to further explore book consumption with a view to understanding the interplay between reading practices and the ever-increasing circulation of books. Taken together, the study of the art and logic of book reading as consumption practice provides important perspectives upon economy and culture, consumption and value, and not just the other way round.

### Aim and Thesis Statement

The overall research objective is to explore whether and to what extent the art and logic of reading books as consumption practice belong with traditional understandings of economy and culture, consumption and value.

The main thesis is that we need to envision another plausible mode of economy that belongs specifically with the area of books and reading, captured in the concept of "bookonomy".

### Research Questions

In order to argue for my thesis I have chosen to pursue a set of research questions which have guided my theoretical and empirical studies:

- ▶ What are the historical and present-day grounds for the value of reading and the book, and what are the context and conditions for their (consumerist) revaluation over time? What characterizes reading as consumption practice and readers' voluntary use of value, individually and collectively, in practice and everyday life?
- ▶ On a methodological level, how may experimental, qualitative, visualizing sessions help to capture the art and logic of book reading practice?
- ▶ On a meta-theoretical level, are basic economic and cultural assumptions adequate or inadequate in this general area?

## Contributions

The research project contributes to Business Administration Studies and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) with a socio-historical understanding of consumption practice and value in the empirical context of book reading. It also contributes to theories of practice on the topic of qualitative methods for empirical study of consumption practices. The theoretical and empirical studies will contribute a problematization of the underlying patterns and basic assumptions of consumption, value and economy, opening up for an alternative perspective and new conceptualizations.

## Scholarly Approach

The study is conducted with an abductive approach to science, which is increasingly gaining grounds in business research (cf. Alvesson & Sköldbberg 1994, Dew 2007). Put briefly, deduction operates as a function of logic from a general claim to empirical observation, and induction operates as inference from empirical observation to theorizing. Abduction however, is with Alvesson & Sköldbberg (1994) an approach that entails a pending movement between empirical-laden theory and theory-laden empirical work. It is best suited if one wants to move beyond observable facts and explore hidden patterns. In order to be valid, the conclusions about these hidden patterns must be plausible (cf. Dew 2007; McKaughan 2008) and ‘pursue-worthy’ (McKaughan 2008).

The abductive approach to science has enabled me to foreground the primary research problem that revolves around the art and logic of book reading as consumption practice, while simultaneously treating the related meta-theoretical question of the adequacy of economic and cultural assumptions to be explored beyond readily observable facts. The hidden pattern, which I have suggested to be conceptualized as bookonomy, will emerge and be brought up directly for discussion in the final, conclusive part.

## Considerations

Importantly, from the outset of my empirical study about reading, it was designed in complementary relation to the statistical investigations of the BPC and existent reading habit surveys produced by Statistics Sweden and their partners at Gothenburg University, Nordicom and the SOM-institute. I was to operate as an independent actor free to decide in what ways my project would complement their work. The existent material built on statistics gathered by means of quantitative methods.<sup>6</sup> In short, these methods aim at measuring dif-

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<sup>6</sup> As Project Manager for the research project Bookonomy, I had the opportunity to meet with several people directly or indirectly involved in the Commission, and I was invited to the semi-

ferent aspects of a phenomenon and thus producing long-term knowledge of general trends in society. In this way however, we gain little or no information of the relation between books and reading that could provide input to our understanding of these phenomena and their value in terms of practice.

There is no given or measurable boundary between literacy and reading, or even between different forms of reading, and therefore the interpretation of statistical results can prove to be difficult (cf. Peurell 2004). Moreover, the statistical surveys did not take into account any social circumstances or forms of interaction regarding books and reading. It is also unclear what is really comprised by the surveys' mention of 'book', especially since they do not take material forms into account, but only different literary genres. The starting-point of designing a study complementary to the BPC entailed consequences for the methodological direction of my study.

## Empirical Approach

Practice relates to both doings and sayings (cf. Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005). I decided to conduct a qualitative and interpretive study, based primarily on individual interviews and focus groups. As a complement, the study also comprises experimental methodology as a means for visual representation. I have investigated a wide variety of reading practices by means of interviews, both group-wise and individual, by means of an experimental, qualitative method as a way to create a visual representation of their practices. I have also accessed a written material of voluntary response letters to The Nordic Museum inquiry list about reading and writing (Nm 228), dating to 1999/2000, two years before the VAT reduction.

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nars arranged by the Commission, the Publisher's Association, and Statistics Sweden. This enabled me to gain some understanding of the issues and problems at stake. As we had agreed, I provided the Commission with written reports on a regular basis, and in June 2004 I made a presentation of work-in-progress before the Commission. In November I invited the Commission, along with scholars and trade professionals involved in the project, to a seminar at Stockholm University School of Business. In February 2005 I submitted my empirical study to the BPC. A brief summary is available in the Commission's final report (SOU 2005: 12). The Commission's final report to the Minister for Culture, Education and Research can be down-loaded at <http://www.educult.ministry.se/sb/d/108/a/39485> During the Commission's final press conference Chairman Ingegerd Sahlström made a brief presentation of the project. The press conference summarizes the Commission's conclusions and suggestions and can be viewed on the Government's web page. Chairman Sahlström briefly describes my research about reading and urges the Government to give more money to research of this type (min 26.55–28.10). <http://www.educult.ministry.se/content/1/c6/03/93/13/ce535d34.ram> Associate Professor Marianne Nilsson then evaluated the full report at my midway doctoral seminar at the Stockholm School of Business in March 2005. My report can be found (in Swedish) at [www.fek.su.se/current\\_research/bookonomy](http://www.fek.su.se/current_research/bookonomy).

In contrast to the prevalent statistical focus on the individual reader as part of homogenous social classes of readers on a vertical scale (cf. Antoni 2004), my focus has been to approach informants based on their relationship to the book, which has further bearings upon their reading practices. The individual reader is regarded as a node in continuous, horizontal relations among texts and books, people and practices. Moreover, I have explored the book circle phenomenon, a collective culmination and outlet for voluntary reading outside of any government support or regulation.

## Empirical Data

In this section, I will present the primary and secondary empirical data material for this study. I will approach the philosophy of science underpinnings in chapter II and present the methodological concerns in greater detail in chapter V.

### Primary Data

The primary empirical data material for this study consists of three main elements: interviews, visual images, and oral narratives.

### Interviews

Under this heading I will present the basic set-up of my interview study. An expanded account of my sample selection process is found in Chapter V on Method.

The interviews about reading were conducted both individually and in groups (so-called ‘focus groups’) in 2003 and 2004. Practice theory and focus group methodology go well together in integrating content with group dynamics. (Halkier 2010) Moreover, the generated data are based on language – ‘sayings’ with theories of practice (cf. Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005) - and could render complementary contributions to the broad, national surveys on readership.<sup>7</sup>

I designed my interview study with regard to the different relationships of books and reading. Hence, I have not created focus groups to reflect statistical variables or represent different socio-economic groupings. Rather, it is the relationship between books and reading that have guided my selection of groups, not least because different types and forms of books belong with a variation of both business and consumption practices. In other words, connecting with Miller (2000), I acknowledge the relation between the book business and readers. Moreover, different types and forms of books also carry varying degrees of

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<sup>7</sup> This was in fact a pre-requisite to my collaboration with the BPC.



public interest and support. It has also been my ambition to meet with people and with groups from across the country. The purpose here is not to provide a set of readers, representative of the whole population, but rather create conditions for discussing different perspectives on, and relations between, books and reading.

A rule of thumb posits that most research projects consist of four to six focus groups.<sup>8</sup> The most common justification for this number is that the data eventually becomes “saturated”, that is, when little new information is added. The more diverse participants and topics, the more groups are usually required in order to achieve saturation, Morgan (1996) suggests.

In the majority of group interviews, the participants already knew each other: so-called friendship groups (Catterall & Maclaran 2006). I have conducted interviews with seven different focus groups, all during 2004. In all, interviews amount in total to 68 people between the ages of 24 to 85. These focus group interviews were complemented with additional individual interviews. Importantly, the focus group method does not require this form of complementary input. I reckoned it would provide me with a deepened understanding of the informants’ reading practices in view of their personal history and everyday life experience. I have also conducted individual interviews with people who for various reasons did not belong to, or could fill, an entire group.

### **Images**

In the empirical study of reading, I have used an experimental, qualitative method that resulted in visual images. The images were painted or drawn by the participants, individually and collectively. These images render a rich material in the area of situated reading practices.

### **Narratives**

The readers’ visual images are closely complemented by their oral narratives, which I have recorded and transcribed.

## **Secondary Data**

### **Respondent Letters**

Regarding the subject of reading and writing, I have accessed the material from the Nordic Museum inquiry list Nm 228 that dates to the turn of 1999/2000.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Scholars using multiple segmentation design (according to age, sex, marital status, geography, socioeconomic status) may well conduct up to around different 50 groups. (Morgan 1996)

<sup>9</sup> I initially accessed this material with the purpose of creating an image of peoples’ attitudes toward book purchasing and reading before the reduction of the VAT. (Schultz Nybacka, 2005)

The material provides a wealth of data regarding reading practices and readers' use of value.

### Statistics, Press, and Other

In the wake of the VAT reduction, the BPC initiated statistical explorations of the book trade. Statistics Sweden provided an expanded investigation, especially into the area of prices. Their partners in turn, the SOM institute and Nordicom at Gothenburg University, made statistical surveys on the topic of reading habits; Rudolf Antoni's (2004) report "Läsa och bläddra" has come in handy for background figures. In all, the BPC issued five reports, each with useful figures and analyses.

A valuable resource for national book trade figures is the Swedish Publishers' Association (*Svenska Förläggareföreningen, SvF*) yearly statistics and reports, available since 1973. The members account roughly for up to 70 % of the total market for general books, which means that the figures are not applicable in all areas - for instance, mass-market paperback publishing, religious literature and school materials - but make for a fair image of general trends in publishing and the book trade. Starting in 2003, the Publishers' Association has issued a series of reports on topics such as the Swedish free book market, paperback publishing, and piracy, etc. The reports are published for informational purposes, but are not void of trade-specific interests. Due to changing conditions in the mid 1990's, the Association has increasingly taken on a lobbying function, starting with the campaign in favour of the VAT reduction. The report series gives an insight into the general book trade's common issues and values, but does not specifically represent the pluralism in the trade, or issues of internal debate.

The book trade magazine *Svensk Bokhandel* (SvB) provides up-to-date coverage and analysis of book market affairs in Sweden, dating back to 1952. The magazine is a shareholding company and was set up as a joint venture between The Publisher's Association and The Bookseller's Association.<sup>10</sup> It seeks to have an independent and critical role nonetheless. The material can be used for identifying "observable facts" within the book trade, but does not provide scholarly analysis.

Regarding statistics about romance novels in the studied period of time, I have relied upon ROMStat, which have been compiled by Romance Writers of America (RWA) since 1992. The financial data about the Harlequin Stockholm

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In the present study, this motive is downplayed and the theme of reading as consumption practice is foregrounded.

<sup>10</sup> *Svensk Bokhandel* was a merger between two previous magazines, the publishers' *Svensk Bokhandeltidning* (established 1852) and the booksellers' *Bokhandlaren* (established 1906). (SvF Verksamhetsberättelse 2008)

office, Förlaget Harlequin AB, was accessed through an Internet-based business information database, Alla Bolag.<sup>11</sup>

Other international statistics in the area of general trade publishing and readership, collected by, for example, UNESCO or Eurostat, is notoriously difficult to compare, due to national differences regarding informational and institutional structures and contexts. Any comparative figures on an international level must be interpreted and handled with caution.

All in all, it is a rich material that my study draws upon. Because the types of material differ from one another, the thesis will take on a different character in each part and present a rich and variegated picture.

## The Organization of this Book

The book is divided into four parts. Part I considers the scholarly underpinnings of the study: to the scholarly framework, theory and method. Part II undertakes a study of the different ways to theoretically describe the being of the book, and the emergence of literacy and reading in society. Part III is devoted mainly to the empirical study of book reading in consumer culture through various types of data: respondent letters, interviews, and visual sessions. Part IV is the final section where the deeper pattern is brought up for discussion and the study is summed up. After these parts follow appendices and a list of references.

In order to alleviate for the reader, each section will begin with a few lines that present the issue at hand and summarize the major lines of reasoning. In connection with every chapter I will be giving additional commentaries, afterwords or concluding reflections that have arisen during the process.

### Part I: Introduction to the Study

The first part considers the scholarly underpinnings of the study, including research fields, theory and method. *Chapter II* conveys a broad framework for the relationship between science and literature, and presents basic assumptions regarding ontology and epistemology. It opens with yet another example of a recommended reading list, this time by a well-respected scholar, followed by an account of the debate over the relationship between the logics of literature and science, a relationship where reading is at the nexus. Given that reading, writing, and the book are also pivotal within the culture and economy of academia, it is a discussion about how we can understand the relationship between the

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<sup>11</sup> [www.allabolag.se](http://www.allabolag.se)

social sciences and literature at large. This introductory portion serves as a paradigm for their complementary relationship.

The studies that pertain to books and reading, consumption practice, and value have emerged from a wide range of scholarly fields. An interdisciplinary approach is often called for by proxy, but requires an understanding of the basic assumptions and traditions of each discipline. *Chapter III* maps out the scholarly framework of the study with regard to Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) along with suggested loan-fields against the backdrop of the Scandinavian tradition of Business Administration as an academic discipline.

The following chapter (*Chapter IV*) pursues interdisciplinarity and provides an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, regarding the concepts of economy and culture; affluence, surplus and abundance; value and values; consumption and morality; and consumption as practice following the 'practice turn' in society. The chapter opens and closes with a reflection on the economy and culture of theory itself, as it is closely related to the practice of reading.

Scholars would agree that the theoretical understanding of these topics, referring here particularly to practice, is not easy to transpose into empirical studies of everyday phenomena. A range of methods and interpretive techniques are required. Moreover, the issue of methodology is not beforehand given in this area, especially if we are taking into account the philosophical view that there are no safe ways to attain knowledge; instead, we need experimental ways of doing research. Thus, *Chapter V* ventures questions of method and methodology, especially with regard to research into reading and into the art and logic of practices. The chapter presents the empirical data in more detail, in terms of selection, etc., and the empirical approaches at hand, including the experimental visualizing sessions, along with some experiences of this type of work.

## Part II: Theoretical Study of the Book, Reading and Literacy

Every consumption practice is related to an object or artifact, and the second part undertakes a theoretical study of the book and the socio-historical emergence of literacy and reading. *Chapter VI* presents and discusses various definitions and characteristics of the book in theory and in practice. Furthermore, the chapter seeks to problematize the book as a discrete product, and pays attention to the qualities of the book and mode of its being - its very sense of 'bookness'.

A practice such as reading belongs with history, but its value cannot be taken as a universal given across time. *Chapter VII* provides a genealogical overview of the revaluation of literacy and reading, going from a non-economic phenomenon closely related to economic value on near equal terms, to their increasing subjection to economic value. Consumption plays a vital role in this context. Today, literacy and reading is increasingly valued in society in terms of con-

sumption. The genealogical approach, based on secondary literature mainly on the history of reading, seeks to challenge the assumption that we can take this understanding for granted.

### Part III: Book Reading in Consumer Culture – an Empirical Study

The third part deals mainly with book reading through different types of empirical data: respondent letters, interviews, and visual sessions. Aligned with the phenomenon and the interests of the scholarly field at hand, the chapters deal broadly with socio-historical, experiential dimensions of the general cycle of consumption, namely acquisition, consumption, possession and disposal. Because every chapter belongs with different aspects of the overall research problem and build on different types of data, every chapter will have a slightly different character.

By the turn of the millennium, when printed books were deemed to perish, the Nordic Museum initiated an inquiry list (Nm. 228) devoted to documenting the vanishing reading culture of the 20th century. *Chapter VIII* takes a closer look at the respondent letters, and how people become literate readers in the first place, and whether economic factors have had anything to do with it. The material compiles a wealth of information about readers' use of value and reading practices in terms of place, artifacts, and related activities.

In order to understand reading practices, one may also need to contrast it with its very opposite, 'non-reading', which of course is a problematic, nonsensical concept as it encompasses just about everything. Nevertheless, much research has been devoted to 'non-readers' [*icke-läsare*], and this category became a powerful interest in the procedures of the Book Price Commission where it was symbolised by the male blue-collar worker set in contrast to educated women readers. Following a recommendation to include a group of non-readers, I made contact with a group of metal workers in Sandviken. Their views on and use of reading are found in *Chapter IX*.

Drawing upon stereotyped categories such as 'male non-readers' and 'female readers', it is easy to believe they lead wholly distinct and separated lives. This prevalent notion needs to be challenged by empirical study. In *Chapter X* we encounter "the Monday gang", five married couples who meet up weekly, women and men separately, and who have no direct connection to book reading as a group. It is interesting to see what role reading as a practice has in their everyday lives within marriage and friendship.

In the last decades, the audio book has reached a growing audience alongside the printed book, introducing a difference in kind on the literary market. When the phonograph first saw the light of day, it was believed that listening to literature would be the end of reading. *Chapter XI* explores the case of audio book listening as a special case of reading practice.

Another contested form of literature is the popular novel, which has been charged with being hazardous for morality. *Chapter XII* investigates the reading practices of Harlequin romances against the backdrop of mass-market publishing, especially with regard to avid consumers' acquisition, usage and disposal. It has been held that the increasing commercialization of the book industry has led to cheap editions that swamp society and impoverish the reading culture. In contrast, *Chapter XIII* studies the phenomenon of the book circle revolving around an ever-increasing output of paperbacks on the book market.

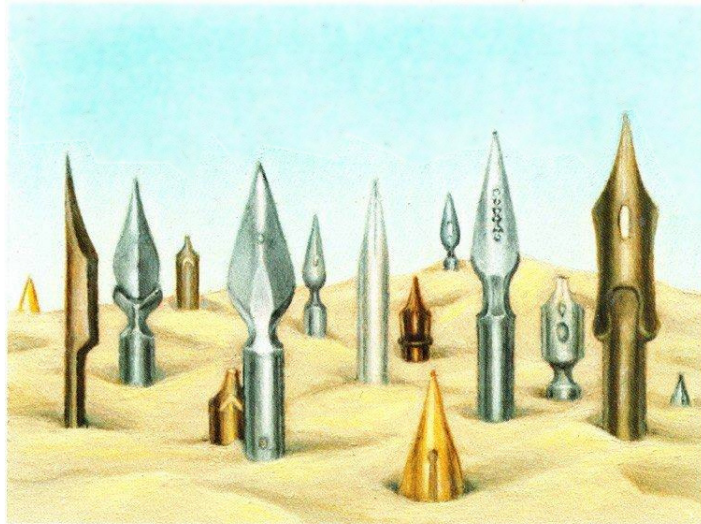
#### Part IV: Towards Bookonomy

If the previous part distinguished between different modes of books and reading, this next part brings together a synthesizing view of book reading as consumption practice and its underlying pattern. *Chapter XIV* portrays the specific art and logic of reading practices drawing upon the ways people voluntarily engage in reading. Drawing upon a breadth of data, this chapter also uses an experimental visual method, which offers a complementary input in order to put consumption practices in a new light.

The final chapter, *Chapter XV*, is reserved for the concluding discussion where the main conclusions are drawn from the study. The concept of Bookonomy is brought up as means to conceptualise the deeper patterns and logics of this area as an alternative mode of economy. This part is followed by a short epilogue with a reflection on the context and the rights of reading outside of any consumerist duties.

## Part I: Introduction to the Study

*This part considers the scholarly underpinnings of the study, including research fields, theory and method.*



## II. The Logics of Science and Literature

*The novel dealt with the unconscious before Freud,  
the class struggle before Marx,  
it practised phenomenology...  
before the phenomenologists*

*Milan Kundera*

*This chapter presents basic assumptions regarding ontology and epistemology. It departs from yet an example of a recommended reading list, this time by a well-respected scholar, followed by an account of the debate over the relationship between literature and science, a relationship where reading is at the nexus. This introductory portion serves as a paradigm for the different logics of, and complementary relationship between, literature and science as expressed in related academic fields. Given that reading and the book also are pivotal within academia, this chapter pays attention to how can we understand their different logics of reading through the relationship between the social sciences and literature at large.*

### Introduction

There is a long-standing and much-debated scholarly tradition that science should be either ‘value-neutral’ or ‘value-free’.<sup>12</sup> This concern was actualized as my empirical study of reading already from the outset was designed as a complement to statistical inquiry, commonly held as “objective”.

As it happens, literature and reading have played an important role in defining what objective science or research is all about. According to Gabriel (2008: 313), the value-neutral tradition started with Max Weber’s (1864–1920) 1918 lecture ‘Science as a Vocation’, in which he argues that science should represent objective knowledge, in stark contrast to philosophy, religion and ideology that embrace subjective value-judgments. Literature emerges as an area where questions of human existence are raised. Weber mentions how Russian author Leo Tolstoy posed in his novels the questions of “whether or not death is a meaningful phenomenon” and ‘What shall we do, and, how shall we arrange our

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<sup>12</sup> As relates to our topic of books and literature, this tradition has been the guiding principle behind the study of Sociology of Literature (cf. Svedjedal 1997).



lives?<sup>13</sup> The answers, however, cannot be found by either the natural or social sciences. (Gabriel 2008: 314) Only a prophet or a savior could reply, says Weber; certainly not hoards of petty professors. This is not to say that scientists are void of passion – for enthusiasm and hard work are often prerequisites to scientific ideas. In many respects, Weber argues for the benefits of science only in light of its very strong limitations.

The success of science as we know it – even hard science – would be inconceivable without widespread literacy and the printed page (Cf. McLuhan 2001/1964; Ong 1999/1982; Eisenstein 1985). In any scientific discipline reading and writing are academic tools, and publishing and the book are both the means for and the output of scholarly work. Those works by scholars that are deemed important in the long-run are the ones that give rise to a large number of new and inventive readings, which in turn spark off teachings, publications and political actions (Attridge 2004: 86). Many are the philosophers, scholars, and writers throughout history who have been drawn to both activity and analysis of the value of literature and of their own practices of reading, writing and publishing books. Indeed, as told by Howe (in Boyarin 1993: 67) the Old English word for scholar, *bocere* (cf. book) stood for scholar, author, grammarian, Jewish scribe. And above all, it denoted someone who has the ability to read.

In the following, we shall consider the different roles assigned to reading in science and literature in practice, and society. This account gives an illustration of their different terms and conditions, but will also convey interesting pieces of the puzzle as regards the logic of reading practice. The account also leads on to further questions pertaining to philosophy of science, and to ontological statements that underpin this study. Such statements concern for example the nature of the relations between the two cultures of science and literature, the various approaches to science at hand, and how the study envisions the relationship between things such as the book and activities and doings such as reading.

### “Five-foot Shelf of Reading”

Literary writers are not the only ones to care for the state of readership; scholars too have ventured solutions to this problem. The same year Arnold Bennett presented his reading list, the American Chemistry scholar and President of Harvard Dr. Charles William Eliot (1834–1926) launched a set of volumes known as *The Harvard Classics*, also known as “Five-foot shelf of reading” and it was the crown in his forty year long reign (1869-1909), during which Harvard

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<sup>13</sup> “Science as a Vocation”, Lecture given by Max Weber in 1918.

went from being a local college to a leading university catering for the entire nation (Going 2006).<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to Bennett, who had turned to price and pleasure as decisive factors regarding literature and readership, Eliot was emphasizing space and time. In a speech to an audience of male blue-collar workers, he had declared that a five-foot shelf filled with books could provide an alternative education to anybody who would devote at least 15 minutes a day to reading. At his very last year of presidency, two editors at P. F. Collier & Son approached him and persuaded him to actualize his idea and realize the five-foot collection of entire works in a series of volumes. The collection was intended as providing representative examples of “the world’s stream of thought”.<sup>15</sup> As Eliot was a celebrity, the publication rendered a lot of publicity and people across the whole nation discussed the issue of selection in articles and letters. Within the first twenty years of publication, 350,000 sets were sold and even today the supply seems endless (Kirsch 2001).<sup>16</sup>

Continuing, Eliot gave out a second collection with works of fiction, *Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction* of 1917, a set that includes modern novels, romances, and short stories by some thirty authors from seven different nations (Eliot 1917). The previous collection had excluded as good as all 19th century fiction, due to its “great bulk” and availability.<sup>17</sup> (Gooding 2006) Eliot admits above all that many volumes were too long to be included in the *Shelf of Fiction* (Eliot 1917). Furthermore the books were selected in accordance with their relative importance to society. In the “General Introduction” to this set Eliot wrote:

The influence of the novel on social and industrial reform has been strong in all the countries in which it has been well developed; and the historical romance and the novel have been, since the opening of the nineteenth century, a new force in the world.

At heart of the matter lay a concern for the nation’s development as regards the connection between education and enterprise. Indeed, progress is really what the Harvard Classics is all about (Kirsch 2001: 52).

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<sup>14</sup> Eliot was the youngest President ever, appointed at 35 for his love of educational reform and in his inaugural speech he declared did not favour either of “mathematics or classics, science or metaphysics”. (Going 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Other educators followed suit: John Erskine at The Columbia University published “The Delight of Great Books” (1928), and in the 1930s Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins at The University of Chicago pursued the idea of reading “Great books” and “Great Ideas” from the West. ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org), accessed 6 August 2008) Eliot emphasized however, that The Harvard Classics was not a “Great Books” collection (Gooding 2006), but a portable university (Kirsch 2001).

<sup>16</sup> The Harvard Classics are also available as audio-book in a version for cell phones, distributed by MobileRead.

<sup>17</sup> The two exceptions to this exclusion were Dana’s *Two Years before the Mast*, and Manzoni’s *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*).

It provides the intellectually ambitious family with a body of interesting and enjoyable literature, good not only for the present generation but for their children and grandchildren. It portrays the emotions, the passion and some of the moral efforts of the nineteenth century and the last half of the eighteenth century, and pictures vividly the changing manners and social states during that tremendous period; but in so doing it portrays intense human feelings and motives which will be only slowly modified and purified in time to come. It is, therefore, a durable collection. (Eliot 1917)

Bennett who was a literary man relied on his own, subjective taste for selecting literature, whereas Eliot engaged several scholarly colleagues around the country in order to make the selection of nations, authors and works. Thus, plurality became an important issue. Eliot writes that it was not possible to attain a general consent or unitary decision, and the final decision would be more or less arbitrary, provoking disagreement. The selection made for a variety of opinion, due to differences in “taste, literary discrimination, and moral judgments, combined with individual affections or devotions which are often warm”. The merits of the authors and their works were not causing any arguments, but rather the comparative values among the judges. (Eliot 1917)

Present-day scholars may share the fascination for literature and how it manages to portray bygone times and changes in society to ambitious readers. Professor of English William T. Going (2006) finds it easy to dip into the Harvard Classics for some “resolute” reading. Literary critic and poet Adam Kirsch finds it an “inspiring testimony” to the belief in the application of a democratic education with high standards. When one considers the relationship between science and literature, education and enterprise, Eliot’s concern certainly hold fast even in the present.

That said, Eliot’s selection and the translations give rise to minor objections and also remarks about its masculinity (Going 2006). Furthermore, Kirsch (2001) observes in the omissions a certain distrust of abstract thinking: Leibniz and Hegel are absent, as are Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In line with Harvard’s famous pragmatic stance, Eliot favours philosophy and poetry when it has practical implications. (Ibid.) In this way, his approach can be related to the practice-oriented field of Business Administration Studies. After Eliot, many scholars have been deeply concerned with how books and literature can capture the emotions, passions, and moral efforts of a time, and bring to life the changes in behaviour and social states.

### “Can You Read?”

Half a century ago, a fierce debate over the relationship between science and literature flared up between scientist and novelist Charles Percy Snow and literary critic F.R. Leavis. In *The Rede Lecture*, Snow proposed the idea of *The Two Cultures* (1959), arguing that the gap between scientists and literary intellectuals was increasing. He hoped that this separation could be bridged and that the

literary intellectuals – “natural Luddites” in his eyes – could communicate with the scientists who had the future at their fingertips. Snow was most concerned with the lack of interest among literary persons in the importance of the industrial revolution for society, and especially for the poor. The ensuing debate echoed a nineteenth-century discussion between Matthew Arnold whose position was adopted by Leavis and T. H. Huxley whose stance was defended by Snow.<sup>18</sup>

Snow relates how when he asked a group of well-educated literary people how many of them could describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics, he received blank stares and shrugged shoulders, yet he appraised his question as the scientific equivalent of how many have read a work of Shakespeare. In retrospect he concluded that even if he had asked a simpler question such as what do you mean by mass or acceleration – the scientific equal to “Can you read?” – most of these very sharp people would have thought he was speaking a foreign language (1964/1959: 15). Parenthetically, within this context of a cultural divide, Snow’s question about reading ability was directed to the literary intellectuals, not to the scientists. Surely even the scientist has to know how to read. But for most scientists, books would be used as tools and not as bread and butter as for the literary persons (hence, suggesting that literature is an everyday basic consumable). But what type of tool is a book? Snow ponders. “Perhaps a hammer? A primitive digging instrument?” (Ibid. 13) And so, he expounds, a scientific barrier is erected, with many very bright people left with little insight into what the barrier actually was.

Leavis, a well-known literary critic, launched his retaliatory attack on Snow in the Richmond Lecture of 1962. It was a tit-for-tat barrage of Snow’s arguments and employed both moral and personal volleys; Leavis ultimately accused him of being a PR man for the scientists. Adopting Matthew Arnold’s cultural critique, Leavis claimed that twentieth-century culture was in a precarious position, perhaps even in a downward spiral. The basic assumption of what has come to be termed “Leavisism” is that culture, and especially high culture, is sustained by only a few in society, not by the masses. Snow (1964: 19) criticized the overly specialized English educational system that produced only a tiny

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<sup>18</sup> Arnold in turn had been inspired by the writer Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who in his critique of industrialism had distinguished between *civilization*, a mixed good pertaining to the whole nation, and *cultivation*, which denotes the harmonious development of human qualities and faculties, and that is essentially the property of the small minority he labels “the clerisy” (Storey 1993: 25). Another important concept was *imagination*, referring to the poet’s ability to synthesize and create balance and unity between seemingly incompatible elements and qualities. This concept inspired I A Richards, who pioneered the New Criticism movement. In *Science and Poetry* (1926), Richards distinguishes between two forms of linguistic statements: scientific referential statements that refer to objects and conditions, and the emotive statements of poetry that are non-verifiable and valued because they satisfy psychological needs (Ljung 1993/1992: 92).

elite<sup>19</sup>, whereas Leavis lamented that the status of the minority had changed, the value of culture had vanished (Storey 1993: 27). In light of this perspective, Snow's challenge to the literary intellectuals to look up to scientists must have been a hard blow.

Two cultures debate was actualized in Sweden when the translation was published and reviewed already within the same year as the original. This debate has remained a vital recurrence in Swedish press, flaring up from time to time, up until our days. As shown by Emma Eldelin (2006), the Swedish scene differed greatly from that in Britain: literary Sweden had no Leavises and Pounds and the educational politics was more directed at general rather than specialized knowledge. Also, when translated, the concept of "literary intellectuals" was transposed more broadly into the Arts [*"humanister"*], and therefore, the Swedish debate centred mostly on the context of university education. It reflected the broad changes of the 1960's and 70's, when the arts faculties were radicalized and embraced Marxist theory, and the 80's and 90's when they were strongly influenced by poststructuralist thought. (Ibid.) Indeed, the recent debates over Scandinavian literary canons could well be seen in light of this two cultures debate. (Nordin 2006-11-24)

In 1963 C. P. Snow wrote *The Two Cultures: A Second Look* (1964) in follow up of his Rede Lecture, which had also appeared in book form. The first book gave rise to a curious flood of literature from all over the world. "The literature has gone on accumulating at an accelerating pace: I suppose I must, by the nature of things, have seen more of it, than anyone else; but I have not seen anything like the whole" (Snow 1964/1959: 54). In the additional book, Snow met the criticism when he could. Based upon some of the interpretations of his writings, he wondered if certain kinds of animosity made it physically impossible to read. He proceeded to clarify some things while he regretted others. One thing he regretted was his unfortunate use of the test question about the Second Law of Thermodynamics in his inquiry into the nature of "scientific literacy." Another was the title; his first suggestion had been 'The Rich and the Poor', which draws on economy instead of culture, and he rather wished he had kept it. (Ibid. 79)

Above all, Snow submits some fresh reflections on the possibility of a "third culture." This new third culture would inevitably bring a softening of the difficulties of communication. It is a culture in becoming, one that belongs with the social sciences, including social history, political science, economics, and government; in short, it involves disciplines concerned with how human beings are living or have lived. This culture-to-come would have to be able to communicate with science and certainly with literature and its creators, but it would also

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<sup>19</sup> Snow (1964/1959: 18) even believed that the Scandinavians, especially the Swedes would approach education more sensibly, but are handicapped by the necessity of spending time teaching and learning foreign languages.

have to pay attention to the manifestations of literary culture. New explorations along these lines, he claims, are of utmost importance to mankind's "intellectual and moral health." The fruits of this new knowledge will be profitable to all (Snow 1964: 71).

### Middle Roads between Science and Literature

The same year that Snow readdressed his speech, novelist Aldous Huxley (1963: 5) sought to show that there are – notably in the plural – *middle roads* in-between literature and science. In contrast to Snow, Huxley avoids the concept of different cultures altogether. Instead, he proceeds to describe the functions and modes of literature and the *literary* use of language in relationship to the functions and modes of science and the *scientific* use of language (Ibid. 6).<sup>20</sup> I will next briefly sketch Huxley's views on the main differences as an introduction to my general approach to science and to the research project at hand.

According to Aldous Huxley, literature builds upon the acceptance of the world's diversity and manifold activities, of the uniqueness of events, and of the impossibility of total comprehension (Ibid.). The literary challenge is to convey the richness of those unique experiences in abstract words and common language. Language is not really suited to this purpose however; language is so remarkably inadequate that a true literary artist has to invent new tools, an extraordinary language, in order to even come close to that which cannot be captured. The purity of literary language, as Huxley sees it, is not achieved by simplifications either by reduction or by some jargon, but rather through increased complexity: extension and depth (Ibid. 14).

Science in its totality, Huxley (1963: 11) argues, seeks to reduce the striking multiplicity of the world into a unified perspective. By means of investigation, order, and communication, science transforms the endless series of unique events into a scientific order. The scientist seeks an unambiguous form of

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<sup>20</sup> Viktor Schlovsky's (1917) influential essay on art drew upon a distinction between a practical (automatized) language and a poetic (estranged) language. The communicative function, which was alluded to above, belongs here with the former, practical use of language, and not the latter. It is the very difference between automatism and estrangeness of language that defines its specific 'literariness' and calls for closer analysis, according to the Russian formalist tradition. This tradition brought close attention to formal and aesthetic elements of the text. The material for literature in turn was considered 'pre-aesthetic' and the content with its ideas, themes, and reference to reality was deemed an external factor. This view is held as an overturning of the traditional hierarchy, (Entzenberg 1993/1992: 8), but questions of literary, formal aspects of 'style' have in fact been especially important in theoretical discourse since Fichte. Put briefly, Fichte held that the content of art belongs to all, but the specific style belongs with its creator. This view has come to inform the discussion around what is a literary 'work' (cf. *oeuvre*) in view of copyright law, etc. Hence, in many ways, formal and modal aspects have been central to the concept of literature for very long, even in practice.

expression in a professional context and invents a technical language, a simplified jargon that can convey a limited meaning. We may compare this view with the discussion on the Special Scientific Purpose (SSP), a concept that clearly demarcates the special terrain on which scientific use operates, separated from ordinary language about everyday experiences. (Meikle 2000: 265)

Regardless of the purity of scientific and literary languages, neither science nor literature can adequately grasp the manifold aspect of the world and of experience. It is simply impossible, according to Huxley, and that we must accept. Science and literature should stop squabbling and join their forces instead. Huxley does not necessarily mean that larger and larger areas will be covered and completed in this way. Rather he hopes that science and literature will extend farther and farther into the “ever-expanding regions of the unknown” (Huxley 1963: 99). Snow (1964: 64) had claimed that neither science nor literature is adequate for understanding the potentiality of man and the work that lie ahead. Huxley similarly urged men of letters and men of science to go out in the world together, as complementary forces, instead of surviving combatants in a field.

### Of Facts and Values in Science

Famously, the Hermeneutic thinker Wilhelm Dilthey, posed the subjects of literature, economics, and anthropology in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, a humanly, socially constructed reality which seeks to understand the *ideographic*; that is, the representation of ideas by graphic symbols (Webster’s u.a. 1123). This type of science was contrasted by *Naturwissenschaften*, which seeks to explain the *nomothetic*; i.e. what relates to the abstract recurrent universal laws of nature. Paul Ricoeur (1993/1986) later argued that the distinction between “understanding” and “explaining” as posed by Dilthey is not clear-cut, but rather that the two co-exist, interact and even make up part of each other, so that there is always an element of explanation in understanding, and vice versa. In other words, they could be seen as complementary.

The modern model of science entails that Fact and Values are necessarily separated, (along with description and evaluation, for example). (Herrnstein-Smith 1983: 2) Given that objectivity and rationality are rendered possible within the modern strand of science, any judgment of values are held as subjective, and irrational. Those in science who dream of separating facts from values belong to what Latour (2001: 65) call ‘modernists’. The distinction between facts and values also creates a dividing line between science and the application and usability of science.

According to the tradition of Karl Popper, the application of science is an issue that should be settled in the political sphere, in non-violent negotiations (Wellmer 1969: 25). This rational mode of decision-making is possible once the ex-

perts have reached their final analysis in unison. And if there is no common understanding, then there is no decision either. (Latour 2001: 73).

But for Latour (1993/1991), there was never such thing as modernity. He rather speaks of our present condition as ‘common’ or ‘ordinary’, reminiscent of how De Certeau seeks to bring back scientific language and practices back to everyday life. Above all, facts and values cannot be separated.

### Devaluation or Revaluation of Science

Weber’s argument was for a science outside of subjective value judgments, because they belong with philosophy, religion and ideology. Objective knowledge is commonly understood as being belonging to the scientific tradition of *positivism*. Commonly, students who venture “objective” surveys, etc. are aligning themselves with positivism by default. However, Auguste Comte who is the founding father of positivism, envisioned science comprising moral beliefs; his “positive school” sought to strengthen contemporary centres of power other than religious and impose upon them moral duties that would respond to the real needs of the people (Comte 1979/1844: 64). Thus, positivism does entail value judgments of which needs are worth attending to, and which are not. As such, “objective science” provides the secular state with as a tool for societal progress. It is in this (moral) tradition that we should place the emergence of broad statistical surveys that monitor the population. Indeed, the first survey in Sweden concerned crime and criminals (Cf. Beronius 1994).

Connecting with the context of the VAT reduction, suffice it to say that the large statistical surveys on readership conducted by the SCB and its partners (Nordicom, SOM-institute etc.) belong with a tradition permeated with moral concerns and values. We find, for example, values as to what counts as books and literature, and how much reading is to be valued as “frequent”. A consequence is that some people are categorized as ‘readers’ and others as ‘non-readers’. In extension, the moral perspective calls for a further valuation of what group and whose needs society should cater for. Typically then, the different groups are set against each other, although the categorizations may be arbitrary, in practice and in society. The problem here is not that the assumed objective investigations is permeated with values; rather, the problem is that these values are not enough explicit and subjected to debate.

If we are to complement this perspective and tradition, we should also problematize the morality involved in these judgments. This however, entails a new role for science and for scholars. Famously, Nietzsche opened up for discussing the importance of values, and of willful revaluation, in practice and in society. His views on values also involved the sciences. Moreover, seeing as Nietzsche was omitted from *The Harvard Classics*, I find an expansion of his perspective even more justified.



## Nietzsche's Objection to Objectivity

Nietzsche held that Comte's clear and present will is what was lacking in his contemporary science (Cohen in Babich & Cohen 1999: 101), although his later writings express a concern about the dangers of moral beliefs. In Nietzsche's early works, science is conceived as an accumulation of random, objective facts with an outright disregard for the values that belong to true culture. In *Human, All too Human* (1878), Nietzsche allegedly had a "fling with positivism," which amounted to a temporary attachment to its desire for reliable knowledge and for its contributions to human welfare. He valued above all the training that science brings about: an orderly way of thinking that helps one advance towards one's objectives. From this point of view, the production of knowledge is only secondary. The training of the will is not only valuable but also necessary if we are to envision a great "hall of culture" that would embrace both science and the arts (Cohen in Babich & Cohen, 1999: 103f). For Nietzsche, science's demand for objectivity – privileging no particular focus – poses a threat to culture if we mean by "culture" a unified focus (Ibid.).

Nietzsche (1998/1887: 107) in his time observed that nowhere in contemporary science is "a goal, a will, an ideal, or a passionate fervor of great faith" to be found. He instead argued that science had become a hiding place, a Platonic cave perhaps, a place where tempo is slowed, instincts thwarted, affects cooled down, and faces kept serious. Science then appears as a means for "self-anesthetization," and Nietzsche regards this as its very weakness: "Oh what does science today not conceal! How much is it at least supposed to conceal!" (1998/1887: 108) He also laments that the scholar is ideally seen as an "objective person" (1998/1885: 207: 97). This type of person is fragile like glass:

The objective man is a tool, a precious, easily injured and demoralized measuring tool and artful mirror to be preserved and honoured; but he is not a goal, not a way out or up, not a complementary person in whom the rest of existence is justified, not a conclusion – and even less a beginning, a begetting or first cause, nothing tough, powerful, autonomous that wants to be the master: but rather only a delicate, empty, thin, malleable vessel of forms that must first wait for some sort of content and substance in order to 'take shape' accordingly – usually a person without substance or content, a self-less person. (Ibid. 99)

This view captures what Nietzsche finds so repulsive with the supposed objectiveness of science. The objective scholar is not allowed to have objectives. And by being non-personal, the objective man becomes a non-person, a thing, an object, a lens. The objective scholar is "certainly one of the most precious tools that exist: but he needs to be put into the hand of someone more powerful" (Ibid.). Radically, here objective science is understood as pure means. Because objective science does not actively partake in any moral or cultural struggle, Nietzsche meant that it remains sterile and fails to contribute to human life (Heelan in Babich & Cohen, 1999: 203).

Those who have opposed Weber's argument for a science outside of subjective value-judgments have countered with saying that scientists too have values; indeed, the position of value-neutrality itself is based on values; and even if scientist could be neutral, others would take advantage of their results in accordance with their specific values, and this could be potentially dangerous. Just think of value-neutrality in relation to poison gas (Gabriel 2008: 314) or atomic bombs.

Nietzsche (1998/1887, 2: 12: 85) emphasized strongly:

There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival knowing; and *the more* affects we allow to speak about a matter, *the more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our "concept" of this matter, our "objectivity" be.

Hence, with Nietzsche real-life 'objectivity' does not constitute the opposite of subjectivity, but rather denotes its expansion. (Beronius 1994: 188) We are bound by time and space, but we can always bring up more perspectives on a particular topic. However, this does not mean that any perspective will do, or that one will encompass all others. This view poses a challenge to the scientific tradition, which often presupposes that the rational perspective is privileged above others. (Beronius 1994: 188) According to Nietzsche, (1998/1886: 3: 7) logic too is guided by value judgments and physiological demands for preserving a particular kind of life. There is, strictly speaking, absolutely no science without presuppositions;

[...] the thought of such a science is unthinkable, paralogical: a philosophy, a belief must always be there first so that science can derive a direction from it, a meaning, a boundary, a method, a *right* to existence. (Ibid.)

This means that even science is permeated with presuppositions and belongs with a perspective. Even Statistics Sweden and its partners employ assumptions and beliefs according to its perspective when conducting surveys on reading. Importantly, Nietzschean perspectives are not the same as beliefs – "they are modalities generated by quanta of power and societies of them, some of which societies can generate beliefs" (Welshon in Babich & Cohen, 1999: 44). This does not mean that truth does not exist, only that true beliefs are necessarily perspectival. Nietzsche (1998/1887: 72) scorns the Kantian proposition of a "spectator" that can engage in disinterested viewing;

[...] here it is always demanded that we think an eye that cannot possibly be thought, an eye that must not have any direction, in which the active and interpretive forces through which seeing first becomes seeing-something are to be shut off, are to be absent; thus what is demanded here is always an absurdity and non-concept of the eye. (Ibid. 85)

Nietzsche's perspectivism belongs with Hermeneutics in that meanings are inherently historical and cultural and take place under the Will to Power, by

which some meanings are privileged and some are fought and forgotten. (Cf. Heelan in Babich & Cohen, 1999: 214)<sup>22</sup>

## Towards a Culture of Research

Since the mid-nineteenth century, scientific development has been phenomenal. In 1998, Latour observed that there has also been a change in the way we perceive this progress. The traditional model posited science as the very hard kernel of the fleshy fruit of society. The shift in perspective is best described as a movement between two cultures, he argues, from the culture of “science” to the culture of “research.”

Science is certainty; research is uncertainty. Science is supposed to be cold, straight, and detached; research is warm, involving and risky. Science puts an end to the vagaries of human disputes; research creates controversies. Science produces objectivity by escaping as much as possible from the shackles of ideology, passions and emotions; research feeds on all those to render objects of inquiry familiar. (Latour, 1998)

This conceptualization and revaluation of science as a culture of research also relate to society and the rest of culture in different ways.

Previously the word “social” in ‘social sciences’ put limitations on science’s claim to reliability and truth, according to Latour. Today society and science are so intermingled that it is hard to discern any distinction. And Latour predicts people and things will be even more entangled in the future. Since science will not be able to bring order to the chaotic society, it will instead add new and uncertain elements to that list constituting the society of humans and “nonhumans” (artifacts, etc). This should mean that we are not just expanding *into* the unknown as held by Huxley, but also expanding it ourselves. Moreover, scholars have proceeded to problematize what happens when ‘experts’ are taking an increasing part in society (cf. de Certeau 1988/1984), and how some groups or individuals become involved in science as ‘co-researchers’ (Latour 2001). This new condition will also bring a new definition of the social sciences, a definition bringing consequences for epistemology, for the community of scholars, and even for political institutions.

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<sup>22</sup> Already in the Archaic age, Homeric epic poetry was not only perceived as an aesthetic experience but became the subject of many exegetic commentaries on the world of gods and men. Xenofanes directed critique against Homer’s anthropomorphist view of the divine world. If oxen and cows had hands, they would proceed to portray their gods as oxen and cows. (Szlézak 1999: 52) Later this point was picked up by Nietzsche, who held that God is a representation of Man, rather than the other way around.

## Contemporary Swedish Academia

So what is our contemporary condition for scholarly life in Sweden? This question is important if we are to frame the conditions, circumstances and events that may or may not have bearings upon our research problems.

In 2001, the year when the VAT reform was passed, business administration scholars Kaj Sköldböck and Miriam Salzer Mörling (2001: 299), diagnosed Swedish higher education as having three main symptoms or characteristics:

- *Instrumentalism*, by which academic life is perceived as serving Government rule. The reforms in 1977, 1993 and the counter-reform 1994 are primarily driven by ideological motives: 1. the vision of social engineering; 2. Neo-liberalism; 3. Political correctness.
- *Great Power Ideology*, by which academic life is linked to the idea of Sweden as one of the world's Great Powers.
- *Homogenization*: as instruments for the State, universities and colleges are by necessity centralized and not permitted to have a distinct character.

These are discerned in other countries too, but its configuration is especially intense in Sweden. To this image I shall add the pan-european standardization of higher education through the so-called Bologna process. The Government saw it as a voluntary engagement, but many Swedish colleges and universities, among them the highly decentralised Stockholm University, implemented the Bologna Programme starting 2007 as a means for central reform.

Since 2001, there has been a general change in research policy towards supporting 'strong research environments'. There is a tendency towards specialization into discipline-specific areas where institutions may show 'excellence'. And yet, these areas are more and more dependent on influences from other disciplines. In effect the strong environment strategy has mostly led to the concentration of financial resources to high-tech areas within medicine, technology and the natural sciences – areas where the Government believes Sweden as a nation will be an international player and that will have important effects both in the private and the public sectors. (Romanus 2005: 2)

In this light, the situation for the Arts is rather difficult, with little or waning resources. There have been many on-going debates termed "the crisis of the humanities" [*humanioras kris*] in both national press and academia around the general usefulness or utility [*nyttu*] of the Arts, in society, and especially as regards employability vis-à-vis the business sector.<sup>23</sup> A report issued 2008 by Lund University points to the value of art of writing; argumentation; taking part of advanced information and knowledge, often in other languages; source criticism, and critical thinking are mentioned as capabilities that the Arts convey

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<sup>23</sup> See for instance "Universitetet ska inte förmedla jobb" (*SvD* 2008-04-21)

and that are valued by the employers. The author of the report, Fredric Schoug (2008: *ibid.*), argues that the Arts crisis rhetoric may simply lead to fewer students and stakeholders; thus, it does very little to solve the financial situation.

To conclude, we can observe that the Two Cultures problem is ever-present and possibly even more complex when taking into account economic concerns. These issues remain unresolved, in (academic) practice and society.

## Complementarity

Based on the introductory overview of the relations between science and literature, there is a need for a principle, or rather, a concept that could create a frame for our investigation and carry it forth. Arkady Plotnitsky (1994: 5), who holds degrees in both mathematics and comparative literature, holds that the concept of complementarity connotes both mutual exclusivity and descriptive completeness. From that point of view, complementarity cannot operate as a simple extension of any given system, which should mean that scientists cannot use literature to extend their scientific system and conversely that literary writers cannot use science to extend their world. Together however, they can contribute to the general description of the world and of life.

Plotnitsky describes two basic forms of complementary relations: one is the *particle/wave* complementarity and the other is *coordination/causality* complementarity. Light, for instance, can be described as either discontinuous particles (photons, more specifically) or as continuous waves, but never as both at the same time. The same phenomenon then requires two different modes of representation. The second form of complementarity describes *coordination*, which denotes a configuration of positions of a quantum object or system. This is mutually exclusive of *causality* that seeks to capture the logic of behaviour of such a quantum object. For Plotnitsky quantum physics/quantum mechanics is not so much the ideal model of complementarity, but the “minimal model” for examples of multiplicity.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, he claims that modern science is affecting the social and human sciences, or literature and art, and vice versa (*Ibid.* 86).

As such [complementarity] entails a multiple interplay – multiple parallel processing – of models and nonmodels, regimes and nonregimes, closures and unclosures; or still other economies, names, unnamables, or that which can be neither named nor claimed to be unnamable. (*Ibid.* 269)

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<sup>24</sup> Plotnitsky relates complementarity to what he terms the anti-epistemological tradition of Nietzsche and Bohr, Bataille, and Derrida. Plotnitsky (1994: 12) states clearly that one need not adopt a thoroughly Derridean or deconstructive world view in order to use complementarity as a framework; it is broad enough to be encompassed by many fields, especially across the social sciences and the humanities.

I am inspired by Plotnitsky's concept of complementarity. What I find especially stimulating is that Plotnitsky (1994: 10) extends the notion of "complementary features" to encompass the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and the indeterminacy of *any* representation. Thus complementarity brings consequences for our views on both ontology and epistemology that will proceed to guide our work.

### Complementary Treatments of Science

Even in a discussion of various complementary relationships – such as the one between science and literature – we should not take science for granted; there are also complementary approaches to or treatments of science.

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychologist Félix Guattari (1987: 361ff) hold that there are two types of (epistemological) models of science, one rational and one eccentric. In contrast to the dominant "royal" or "state" science, they posit a "nomad science" or "minor science". Sketched very roughly, nomadic science posits that reality is flux and flows rather than solidity. It opposes the constant, the stable, the identical, and the eternal, and proposes instead a model of heterogeneity and becoming. In contrast to the striated, closed space that characterizes Royal model, the nomadic model operates on an open, plane space where "thing-flows" are distributed. Indeed, nomadic science cannot be reduced to some particular kind of scientific practice but is rather a "field" where relations between, say, science and practice are played out. (Ibid. 367) This model operates on complex problems rather than on straightforward theorems and hypotheses. The interest in problems also means taking an interest in whatever conditions have contributed to the problem: events and circumstances, even accidents.

One does not go by specific differences from a genus to its species, or by deduction from a stable essence to the properties deriving from it, but rather from a problem to the accidents that condition and resolve it. (Ibid. 362)

In this way the problem is inseparable from the way science itself emerges. (Ibid.)

Regarding method, Royal science applies reproduction as method, whereas the nomadic sciences are in search of the singularities of material. In this way, they extend outside of the space of simple reproduction. They employ a different model of labor that draws on both art and technique. Where royal stately science seeks to reproduce entities or categories (such as "the circle"), nomad science follows flows and captures the mode (such as "roundness"). To Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 364), the nomad scientist is less hooked on working with the duality of form and matter; instead, energy is concentrated on the tension between *material* and *forces*. Hence, rather than investigating being itself,

the nomadic sciences explore the very *mode* of being. For the nomadic sciences, the notion of essence is not important at all.

Quite often state science seeks to appropriate what it can from nomad sciences. Sometimes they are given a minor place within royal science; ranging from integration, fight, or alliance (even to the extent that one person may be offered a small position within the system). And yet, nomad sciences are closely connected to collective, nonscientific sets of activities and will attempt dispatching royal science. The state sciences, however, appropriate whatever solid categories can find in the nomadic sciences and put them back into their own conceptual apparatus (Ibid. 373). Most of the time this only entails an appropriation of static elements, void of all heuristic and ambulatory capacities, for only the static are deemed tolerable.<sup>25</sup>

These tensions between the State and Nomad sciences as sketched by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) inspired my study of books and reading during the course of time. The Bookonomy project operated as a nomadic ally to the BPC. Statistics Sweden and its partners reproduced categories such as the book and classes of literary genres, as well as categories of readers in terms of gender, age, and levels of education, etc. (Cf. Antoni 2004). Moreover, they centred on entities, quantities and frequencies. The Bookonomy project, however, complemented this picture with an empirical exploration of the different *modes* of books, readers and reading. It also opened up for different modes of economy. This is not to say a nomadic approach is superior in any way; importantly, it is just different, not necessarily “better” (Ibid. 372). It needs however to be put back within the State sciences in the end.

## Towards Abduction of Science

Although the nomad approach had inspired my project to some extent, I have needed to reframe my project in order to further ground it in a field of research. As mentioned in Chapter I, I have chosen an abductive approach to science (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 1994). This model is increasingly gaining grounds in Business research since the mid 1990s.

The approach of abduction or retroduction was suggested by Charles S. Peirce alongside deduction and induction as a kind of inference. Put broadly, where deduction operates as a function of logic from a general claim to empirical observation, induction operates as inference from empirical observation to theorizing. Abduction, claims Peirce, entails a mode of reasoning from consequence

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<sup>25</sup> In the context of the studies commissioned by the BPC, the problem of the book as gift is a good example of something difficult to appropriate. Obviously, the increased buying of books as gifts in the aftermath of the VAT decrease was rendered much too ambulatory and errant to be properly contained within any stately investigation, as were communities of reading.

to antecedent. It also pays attention to what is surprising and anomalous. The process of reasoning is as follows: “The surprising fact, C, is observed. But if A were true, C would be matter of course. Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.” (Quoted in Chamberlain 2006, McKaughan 2008) Important to Peirce, the logic of abduction operates in the same way as philosophical tradition of pragmatism. (McKaughan 2008) Undoubtedly, this connection could be explored further in terms of practice theory, etc., but I shall draw on the experiences within the broader discipline of business administration.

The abductive attention to the surprising and anomalous is what makes it suitable for business strategy research for it resembles learning from case studies (Chamberlain 2006) or strategic decision-making (Dew 2007). Indeed strategic issues held an important part of abductive reasoning itself. (Paavola 2004, McKaughan 2008) Business scholars Alvesson and Sköldböck (1994: 47) do not delve deeper into the surprising or anomalous in abduction but describe the logic of abduction schematically as the observation of b gives rise to the positing of “If a, then b”, which then leads to the contention: “therefore a.” They emphasize that abduction entails a pending movement between theory-laden empirical observations and empirical-laden theory, quite reminiscent of hermeneutic processing. It moves from a general observation to an *intrinsic* condition or mechanism. It is best suited if one wants to move beyond observable facts and explore the underlying patterns. (Ibid.)<sup>26</sup> Hence, unlike smooth nomad science (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), retroduction brings a “movement, paradigmatically, from a ‘surface phenomenon’ to some ‘deeper’ causal thing” (Lawson 1994: 264).

The conclusions drawn from abduction do not need to be probable in the strictest scientific sense of the word in order to be valid, but rather *plausible* (cf. Dew 2007; McKaughan 2008) and *pursue-worthy* (McKaughan 2008). Indeed, with Peirce, the abductively drawn conclusions can even be non-epistemic in character. (Ibid.) In practice, this entails a lot of guessing (Dew 2007). Peirce observed, “[P]roposals for hypotheses inundate us in an overwhelming flood”, and their verification is costly in terms of time, energy and money. Interestingly, Peirce (in McKaughan 2008: 452) claimed the guiding principle, when faced with different abductions, must be the basic, practical economy of research:

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<sup>26</sup> The question is if abduction is used more in consumer research than what is commonly formulated and recognized. Thompson & Hirschman (1995: 141) for example, write in their study of consumers’ deeper sense and self-conception of body image and their consumption behaviour: “Our interpretations were therefore neither fully deduced in an a priori fashion nor induced in a classical sense; rather, they emerged from an interplay between our initial preconceptions and the insights and unexpected results that arose through the actual conduct of the study.” Hence, it may be argued that consumer researchers did not only apply a hermeneutic logic, but adopted an abductive approach to science.



“the lesser expenditure of time, vitality, etc”. (Ibid.)<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it is the only principle:

Economy would override every other consideration even if there were any other serious considerations. In fact there are no others. (Ibid.)

Given the ‘culture’ view of sciences discussed in the Snow-Leavis debate and Latour’s reorientation of research, it is interesting that in Peirce’s abduction economy becomes the bottom-line. Notably, it is in view of difference and plurality that economizing of scarce resources emerges as an organizing principle or logic.

Actually, one of Peirce’s own favourite examples of abduction actually relates to writing and reading: the deciphering of the cuneiform:

In the first steps that were made toward the reading of cuneiform inscriptions, it was necessary to take up hypotheses which nobody could have expected would turn out to be true, – for no hypothesis positively likely to be true could be made. But they had to be provisionally adopted, – yes, and clung to with some degree of tenacity too, – as long as the fact did not absolutely refute them. For that was the system by which in the long run such problems would quickest find their solutions. (Quoted in McKaughan 2008)

Perhaps abduction could be fitted alongside the two approaches suggested by Deleuze and Guattari. Gideon M. Kressel (2003), described has the three-party-relationship between the state, the nomadic pastoralists, and sedentary agriculturalists.<sup>28</sup> Inspired by his account, we could perhaps place the abductive scholars as the sedentary agriculturalists. In other words, the abductive mode of science denotes a certain sense of withdrawal from open space, seeking to find causes of phenomena in internal, intrinsic structures or events that cultivate effects and meanings. To abductive science, a green plant is not only interesting as entity (plant) or mode (greenness), but in terms of being the natural and yet surprising result or process of the hidden seed (growth/blooming).

The abductive approach to science has enabled me to foreground the primary research problem that revolves around reading books as consumption practice, while simultaneously treating the related meta-theoretical question of the adequacy of economic assumptions as a hidden pattern to be explored as grounds for readily observable, and sometimes surprising, facts. In other words, my exploration of the adequacy of economic thinking in this area will permeate the whole study, although not always explicitly. It will be a lead motif that carries

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<sup>27</sup> Dew (2007) recommends a cost-benefit analysis of being wrong or being right (in strategic abduction) so that the preferred abduction is the best abduction. This means that with abduction, the question of scholars’ values is embedded in the process.

<sup>28</sup> Power has shifted among these three parties over time, primarily between the state and the pastoralists. The state has emerged as protector of the agricultural food producers, the “submissive and compliant tax-paying clients” who were the weaker party among the three (Kressel 2003: 2).

through each part and it will be brought up directly for discussion in the final conclusion.

## Implications for the Study

Already from the outset of my empirical study, designed in complementary relation to the statistical investigations of the BPC, I had decided to grapple with complementarity by seeking out those perspectives, relations, modes, materials, and forces relating to books and reading that were invisible in the statistical surveys on book readership.

Empirically, I have moved away from exploring reading in atomistic terms, by which reading can be understood only in terms of discontinuous particles or readers. In my view, we need to explore more fully the wave side of readership, whereby reading emerges as a continuous concept. In this way, it will be possible to study both the meaning and value of readership over time as is done in chapter VII. In addition, instead of regarding reading as a *causal effect* of the reader's gender, age, level of education, and access to income and time<sup>29</sup>, I address reading as spatial, bodily practice (cf. De Certeau 1988/1984, Chartier 1995/1992, Littau 2006), especially with a view to mapping its situated, coordinated character.

Theoretically, the concept of value as discussed by Miller (2006) entails a relationship between economic and "other-than-economic" value. This constitutes a paraphrase of Hegel's dialectic and implies its ensuing culmination (Cf. Plotnitsky 1994: 25). If Miller treats people's values as the (yet) unknown and economic value as the known, then the use of value and the new value created in the process should denote the highest knowable. Moreover, it is to that level we scholars aspire in our work. Plotnitsky (1994: 11) contends however that a complementarity relationship can never form a perfect Hegelian synthesis; it will necessarily entail interactive heterogeneity.

Fitting Miller's "use of value" into a complementary perspective then means downplaying the connotations of completeness and usefulness that Miller's theorizing may evoke. Complementarity relationships and objects are never fully contained, and they are never totally meaningful and intelligible. Plotnitsky (1994: 25) draws on Bataille to argue for a movement from the known to the unknown to the unknowable. In other words, like Huxley, one may say that the regions of the unknown are ever expanding into the unknowable. This all means that research is less about formulating the culmination of theory, the highest knowable, as perhaps in Miller's search of an actual theory of value, but

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<sup>29</sup> Antoni (2004: 4) uses the different frequency of reading (often, sporadically, and never) and creates three categories of readers based on the background factors of sex, age, education, social class, and, a new factor, place of living (city or countryside).

more an attempt to challenge what we already know and move toward the unknowable.<sup>30</sup>

## Ontological Complementarity

Central to the philosophy of science is the question of *ontology*, which is defined as the study of the nature of being or reality. The prefix of *onto-* is a combining form meaning 'being, existence' and is derived from the present participle form of the Greek verb *einai*, which means 'to be' (Webster's: 522). Ontology revolves specifically around the Greek concept of *ousia*, which denotes substance, entity, things.

The discussion of ontology often concerns the concepts of things and activity (Meikle 2000). The question is of course central to scholarship and it will guide our research interests. For example, do we study consumers or consuming? Organizations (things), or organizing (activity)? Business Administration Studies tends towards activity and practice. Economics on the other hand, tend to measure the quantity and price of things.

According to Aristotelian ontology, things are described in the following way (Meikle 2000: 249, following David Wiggins):

[...] things are naturally occurring entities, or artifacts (substances, in Aristotelian terminology), which persist through change, and whose identities are bound up with the continuity of the path they trace through space and time, and with their membership of natural kinds, into which they fall in virtue of their composition, properties, structures, origin, typical or nomological behavior, and so forth.

With Nietzsche in contrast, an object is not determined by any solid and enduring entity – it is a complex of events that is in either a compatible or contestant relation to other events and forces, some of which assist or enhance and some of which bring harm. The object emerges as a result or product of these events and relations and therefore it cannot possibly constitute their fundament. (Nehamas 1985: 85)

The problem with economic theory, says Scott Meikle (2000), is that it has got rid of the variety of things and their qualitative differences, in order to make quantifiable, homogenous abstractions. Regardless of which concept we give most weight, things or activity, we need to treat them ontologically in relation

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<sup>30</sup> Kovač and Sebart (2006: 62) claim that understanding and interpreting – indeed theorizing? – the European data on books (provided by Libecon and Eurostat) still is an unexplored territory that awaits its Stanleys and Livingstones.

to each other.<sup>31</sup> Practice theory is one way to deal with both concepts (Reckwitz 2002), not least in a consumption context (cf. Holt 1995).

In the case of literature, Anders Palm (2009) suggests that we should depart from a dual model of ontology – literature as artifact and as *artiact*. *Artifact* denotes the status of a fixed object or art product with a static and permanent identity. This comprises the writing of the text with its linguistic orders and elementary verbal meanings. The etymology of the concept artifact stresses the manner of making involved in the process by terms of the past participle of *facere*, to make; it is an art that is completed [*fullgjord, fullbordad*]. Though past participle “expresses action completed before a given or implied time” (Webster’s, p. 544); Palm says the concept of artifact captures the [present] ‘being’ of literature. This shift is not entirely clear. Moreover, artifact is an element of the text that one could describe and analyze narratologically, dramaturgically, etc. without any form of valuation. (Palm 2009: 288)

*Artiact* is a neologism that denotes the dynamic side of literary art, namely, literature as an act, and therefore in ‘becoming’. As readers we act with the factual text. Thus, the artifact side of the literary work will be subjected to the *actiact* side, by which it is interpreted and evaluated in the contemporary literary institution. A literary work is both a being and a becoming. The static and the dynamic side interact and form an ontological totality that Palm terms an *arti()**act*. This formula captures the doubleness in the literary work and the connection between the lasting elements and the variation in values. This ontology is the basis of his theory of literary value (cf. Chapter IV).

Palm’s proposal of a double ontology is interesting in so far as he attempts to relate thing and activity to each other, pointing to their interconnectedness in literature. There are, however, two rather problematic issues that I want to raise here, related to Palm’s subjection of the artifact to the *artiact*. First of all, it is symptomatic that Palm as a literary scholar does not give any deeper consideration to the material side of the artifact, i.e. the very body and format of the text. Consequently, Palm does not speak of “books” and its various forms, and he does not pretend to do so. He speaks only of literature, literary work, literary text, literarity, and so forth, and as a rule of thumb they all refer to fiction.

Second, when literature is treated in this way, we do not get any proper chance to envision the extension of his model to related activities and processes of appropriation and consumption revolving around the artifacts, such as buying, borrowing and stealing books, and their disposal. Furthermore, we cannot discuss literature or books in a consumer context without at least considering the

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<sup>31</sup> Even in the context of the VAT reduction, Erik Peurell (2004) noted that the Government seemed to privilege what he called “quality reading” of fiction. As for quality of reading, it is often associated with literary fiction only (Bourdieu in Reeser & Spalding 2002/1985; Gedin 1997).

activities that have brought it into being. And conversely, we cannot discuss these activities without acknowledging that things have organizational powers, or force that organize different activities and artifacts. In other words, activities revolve around things, and things in turn give rise to activities.

We do however find an interesting aspect in Palm's way of speaking of the literary work as completed [*fullgjord, fullbordad*]. Given Plotnitsky's (1994: 11) complementarity perspective by which a relationship is never fully completed, but always retains an interactive heterogeneity, we can reinterpret the role of reading: for through the performativity of the arti(f)act (cf. Palm 2009), the activity of reading is also completed, but never fully contained, entirely meaningful or even wholly intelligible.

## The Doing of Being

In the Aristotelian model, activities fall in to different kinds, depending on their ends, and their means to those ends. For instance, going for a walk is different from a medical doctor seeking to attain a patient's health. So even if different activities may share characteristics such as duration, they are still heterogeneous and incommensurable. They cannot be added up together. This model has posed problems to economic theory in so far as it desires to make activities commensurable (Meikle 2000: 259)

Ever since Adam Smith, the concept of labour is held as that which could quantify activities, even to the point of aggregation. Even if David Ricardo argued that labour would be the underpinning of value (at the market) he was still aware that there were different kinds of labour. The value of these would be settled at the market, which of course is a circular argument, Meikle (Ibid.) observes. Moreover, economic theory consequently has come to privilege the value-in-exchange (price) in buying and selling over value-in-use (or any other value for that matter) (Ibid.). This has remained a problem of economic theory to our days.

In the case of consumption activities, Aristotle's model has stood fast in theory. In *Politics*, Aristotle argued for different means to different ends in speaking of acquisition of goods. As we will see in Chapter IV on theory he holds there are either natural or unnatural ways of acquisition, and proper use of goods, depending on the objectives. Thus, at bottom-line, Aristotle posits that there is a 'mover' behind the activities, whether an animal in the hunt for food, or a human in activities of exchange. Long (1998) describes the Aristotelian discussion on ontology as "authoritarian", not least based on Aristotle's keen interest in determining "the first immovable mover". He exemplifies this abstract concept by means of the general of an army. It is the general that brings order to the army and not vice versa. The order of the whole Universe begins, according to Aristotle, with the general of the Universe. (Long 1998)

Before Being, comes Politics, as held by Guattari. (Deleuze & Parnet 2001/1977: 17) For instance, the word for beginning and principle, *arche*, means ‘ruler’ or ‘political office’. And besides meaning ‘being’ and ‘substance’, *ousia* is also the word for ‘property’ and ‘that which is one’s own’. (Long 1998: 3) In the works of Homer, the notion of property belongs to two classes: lands and houses on one hand, and slaves, animals and other movables on the other. (Lacey 1968: 45) Importantly, words that denote ontological meanings – those that describe the nature of *ousia*, ‘being’ and ‘substance’ – are abounding with political-ethical connotations. (Long 1998)

Nietzsche (1998/1887: 25, my italics) argues against the common belief in the individual subject as the natural cause to doing and being, such as in Descartes *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am).

But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is simply fabricated into the doing – *the doing is everything*.

This means that to Nietzsche (1998/1886: 17), Descartes’ logic is outright untenable; existence is not a matter of a separate ‘I’ who think.<sup>32</sup> He relentlessly argues:

As regards the superstition of logicians, I never tire of underlining a quick little fact that these superstitious people are reluctant to admit: namely, that a thought comes when ‘it’ wants to, and not when ‘I’ want it to; so it is falsifying the facts to say that the subject ‘I’ is the condition of the predicate ‘think’.

Instead, the being is woven into the doing, even to the extent that the doer is the outcome of doing, rather than the cause. Even to say “I think” is impossible with Nietzsche, as it would re-instate the subject anew. Moreover, Nietzsche holds that whoever thinks in *words* thinks not as a thinker, but as a speaker, which is different (1998/1887: 3:8: 77). Word and thought is not the same thing, as one may have held under the banner of *Logos*. Thinking is different.

Nietzsche (1998/1886: 32: 33) nurtures the suspicion that the decisive value of an action (such as thinking) belongs precisely with that part that is *not intentional*. “In short, we believe that the intention is but a sign or a symptom, first of all

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<sup>32</sup> Also for Deleuze, thinking is external, it happens to us, from without. Thinking is beyond choices, beyond morality. Thinking is the *affirmation* of the event, of chance. Therefore there is a kind ‘violence’ of thinking, in which affect plays an important part. Affect, which is what art creates, is intensive, working upon us internally, operating on us in uncountable ways. To Deleuze, art, philosophy and science are three specific modes of *thinking*, each with powers to transform life. (Colebrook 2002: 12) The capacity of rupture is a potentiality, something which goes beyond the *actual*, the state at hand, into the *virtual*. The purpose of art and philosophy is to go beyond what life *is*, to what it might *become*. Every act of art, philosophy and science is an event, a distinct moment with a capacity to rupture life, to transfigure life. In fact, all thinking is an art and event of life. (Ibid.)

requiring interpretation, and furthermore that it is a sign with so many meanings that as a consequence it has almost none in and of itself [...].” (Ibid.)

To Nietzsche (1998/1887: 1), even experience is something we necessarily observe in hindsight. He writes that even as a bell might wake us up for noon, we ask ourselves afterwards, still dazed and confused, ‘what did we actually experience just now?’ and ‘who are we actually?’ Then we count in hindsight all twelve bellstrokes of “our experience, of our life, of our *being* – alas! and miscount in the process...” Hence, Nietzsche problematizes reflexivity: “[W]e remain of necessity strangers to ourselves, we do not understand ourselves, we *must* mistake ourselves, for us the maxim reads to all eternity: ‘each is furthest from himself,’ – with respect to ourselves we are not ‘knowers’...” (Ibid.) Here we encounter Nietzsche’s ‘anti-epistemological’ stance that Plotnitsky (1994) builds on in his theory of complementarity.

### The Close Relation between Activity and Things

The trouble is that economic theory also dispenses with the close relationship between activity and thing. Meikle (2000: 249) suggests that in order to study the identity of things – how things are similar in kind – the best option is to “uncover and describe the actual practices and criteria that are used in individuating and re-identifying things of the different kinds that there are”. Hence, practices and criteria in kind will be vital to the understanding of both identity and difference in kind.

Recall that ontology is a concept derived from present participle of being. A participle denotes a sense of partaking, and is defined as “having the qualities of both verb and adjective” (Webster’s: 542). This means that if we want to use an adjective to capture ontological being as a thing we still cannot escape the verb. And likewise, being as doing brings along a description in the form of an adjective. In other words, if we want to deal with ontology, we need to investigate and describe two things: the doing of being, and the qualities of being.

Long (1998) writes of identity against the reformulation of the Aristotelian model, based on an analysis of past and present tense:

[...] to be is to exist as the active identity of past and present, it is to be determined by the past, but *not* exclusively so; for there remains in this formulation an explicit emphasis on the action of the present, an activity that injects the structure of identity with a dimension of openness and even freedom. (Long 1998)

It is here that we discern a bridging relationship between things and practice.

To think *ousia* as *praxis* is to hold the tension between past and present; it is to recognize that the past determines the present, but that the present also continually re-determines and re-creates itself, thus preserving and transcending that

which has come before the sake of that which is to be. This is the activity of being. (Long 1998: 6)

Dealing with *ousia* in terms of *Praxis* means that its value lies within activity itself, and not in its outcome. (Cf. Ramírez 1995) Moreover, observe that practices (and the criteria that go with them) vary with each kind of thing, says Meikle (2000: 249). This provides us with ample opportunity to study books and reading with a view to say something about them that will be different from other things. In doing so, we will help economic theory to recreate itself and support its rapprochement to the everyday realm.

## Genealogy

If the concept of *ontology* serves to explain what the world *is*, then Nietzsche suggests *genealogy* as a means to understand how it became a world in the first place. (Nehamas 1985: 104) A basic understanding of genealogy is “to map out ancestors or sets of parents from which an individual or family of individuals has come.” (Clark, Foreword GM: xxi) Although this entails a strikingly naturalistic approach that gives no reference to metaphysics (Clark: xxii), it is not only a matter of origin, as Nietzsche (1998/1887: 4) makes quite clear, but of *values*. For the interesting about those values that we presently hold as true or take for granted – such as ‘reading is good’ – is that they stem from the very opposite. Yesterday’s evils have become today’s virtues.

Thus, a genealogy seeks to disclose the emergence of interpretations of values. Not in terms of their development or progress, but rather as power play of values under construction. The aim is far from uncovering subjective motives or causality, but it may certainly take will, forces and events into account. Hence, a genealogy is directed at groupings of interpretations that each hold a set of values as expressions of a will to power. The genealogy sheds light on how these groupings and values affect each other. (Nehamas 1985: 105) Since all knowledge is perspectival according to Nietzsche, there cannot be just one, true genealogy of any given thing.<sup>33</sup>

The foremost value of genealogy is that one can dismantle and demote a phenomenon widely held as virtuous and natural – ‘morality’ in Nietzsche’s case - and gain a renewed understanding of it. The method does not simply aim at tearing up a weave or bringing it down, but rather to create the opportunity to re-weave differently. “His point is to show us what we had, so that we can see now what we need.” (Clark Foreword GM: xxxiv) Thus, the whole venture

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<sup>33</sup> Reminiscent of how Socrates characterized writing/ the written *logos* as the son of the writer (Cf. Svenbro 1993/1988: 3, 29) and how it can be separated from its father and set off “to roll to the right and to the left” [*kulindeísthai*]; we must acknowledge that even if the genealogical table of certain values is clear, there is still much to say about the tug of forces pulling at it in different directions.



drives as much at creation of new meaning, “a ‘creation’ that is not *ex nihilo*, but is a matter of providing new interpretations of practices and fragments of ethical life that are already there, seeing and presenting their ultimate value in new ways” (Ibid.) In short, genealogy provides many opportunities for studies into phenomena in the social sphere.

### Concluding Comments

Reading is a human doing at heart of literature and research, and there are different ways to envision and encourage its value in practice. Literary writer Bennett subjectively promoted price and pleasure as decisive factors regarding readership and the taste for literature; Eliot emphasised devoting space and time to the practice of reading, and the selection of texts was based upon plurality of values, an objectivity of many eyes, so to speak. The polarisation of literature and science in the 20th century was according to C. P. Snow (1964/1959) nothing but creative, intellectual and practical loss to people and to society. Moreover, these concerns cannot be separated from each other. Huxley suggested a charge for middle-roads into new territories.

To conclude this section on ontological complementarity, ontology need not begin and end with being as either a noun or thing. They are complementary. In order to deal with this complementarity in practice, being is better described and treated as a partaking relation between thing and active verb. Hence, we are speaking of the *presently ongoing activity of being*, and it will entail a variety of qualities that are also dynamic. This also means that I will not study the Reader, or Readership, in my further discussions, but rather people reading different books, and different ways and modes of reading. I gather this perspective will be helpful as a background in my investigation into consumer practice theory (De Certeau 1988/1984, 1997/1974; Holt 1995; Warde 2005), and the use of value (cf. Miller 2000). It is intimately linked together with different *doings* (activities and practice) and with the past and the present.

### III. Scholarly Framework

*This chapter maps out the scholarly framework of the study with regard to Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) along with suggested loan-fields, against the backdrop of the Scandinavian tradition of Business Administration as an academic discipline.*

#### Introduction

What is the connection between business administration and reading and the book anyway? Business scholar Tanja Sophie Schweizer (2001: 51) is especially surprised to find that the publishing sector had been “completely neglected” and “marginalized” in economic and business research in fields like cultural economics and arts management. She speculates that publishing may essentially fall in-between two academic chairs; it is too businesslike for the arts scholars and too cultural for the mainstream economics and management scholars. Regarding the book market, Chr. Hjort Andersen (2000: 27) presumes that why researchers within the Cultural Economics field have not been devoted to investigating it is because it is a free market activity in many countries, unlike theatre that to a larger extent is more directly subsidized by the state. Baverstock (1993: 14) concludes that there are some differences between the book industry and other industries, some that really do set the book business apart and some that the industry by itself has appropriated or encouraged and will be reluctant to dispense with.

The number of disciplines that cater to this area is already quite large and ever-expanding. Books, literature, and reading are studied in a host of scholarly fields including Marketing and Consumer Studies, Organization Studies, Sociology, Cultural Economics, History, Book History<sup>34</sup>, Cultural Studies<sup>35</sup>, Print Culture,

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<sup>34</sup> *Book History* encompasses studies on the production and circulation of books and printed material at large. Unlike the sociology of literature, researchers in book history rarely address issues of the characteristics of texts, their literary form and structure (Furuland 1997: 21). See also *The Book History Reader* (2002) edited by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery.

<sup>35</sup> *Cultural Studies* emerged out of Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies that was set up in 1964 by Richard Hoggart at Birmingham University with financial support from Allen Lane of Penguin Books. (Rose 2001) Drawing further inspiration from Raymond Williams, the discipline in time was extended from literary concerns to encompass cultural life at large. One main as-

Publishing Studies, Material Culture, Media and Communication Studies, Information Studies, Anthropology, and in departments of languages and Literature including Sociology of Literature<sup>36</sup>, Translation Studies, Linguistics, Psychology, Pedagogy, and History of Ideas. Any research project on the book must consider a number of sources and employ an interdisciplinary approach, and the *Bookonomy* project is no exception. The challenge to such a project is to organize, interpret and present the project in terms of academic territories. Academics within different fields have a variety of ways of dealing with books, publishing, and reading, even within the different areas of interest that pertain to Business Administration Studies.

### Belonging with Business Administration and CCT

In Scandinavia, the discipline of Business Administration, or *företagsekonomi* in Swedish, emerged at the turn of the last century at trade schools. Three different strands influenced its development: 1) practical knowledge; 2) generalization of this knowledge, and 3) moral responsibility (Gustafsson 1994). In its tradition, the discipline places a strong emphasis on empirical studies and real-world experience. Traditionally, it comprises a broad range of fields that in other contexts are known as organization studies or management, accounting, finance, marketing, and consumer studies. In earlier days these areas made up the businessman's own ABCs: administration, bookkeeping, calculation, and distribution. Many business schools reflect this structure to this day.

In the area of theory, economics (especially micro-economics) was the first discipline to inform the Scandinavian business schools, but its influence has gradually subsided in favour of a more behavioural approach to business. Many times the term Business Administration has become nearly synonymous with organization. (Cf. Brunsson et al. 2010) Lars Engwall (1998) has conducted an empirical study as regards the theoretical direction and development of Scandinavian business administration research up until 1992. The results suggest that it has mostly been inspired by US scholars, especially by the Carnegie Tech School where scholars presented alternative models for handling problems traditionally dealt with in the field of microeconomics (Cf. Cyert & March 1963; Thompson 1967).

Consistent with the Carnegie Tech School, Swedish research has been less prone to adopt normative strategic business perspectives as formulated by Igor H. Ansoff (1965) and Michael Porter (1980), but rather sets out to develop new

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sumption is that the world can be seen as text, open to analysis with ethnological methods and sociological perspectives (Svedjedal 1997: 71).

<sup>36</sup> Three domains are of particular interest in this field: Society in literature, literature in society, and the literary society itself (Svedjedal 1997).

theories about business. Many of these are inspired by Glaser & Strauss (1967), who have given rise to an increasing predominance of qualitative studies (Engwall 1998: 285). With time, Business Administration has become what is called a 'loan-discipline' because it borrows from a range of other academic fields within the social sciences: Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, and History, for example. This rather fragmentary identity of Business Administration [*företagsekonomi*] has inspired some attempts to encompass and formulate a joint mission.

To summarize Engwall's findings on the joint core of Swedish business research: it breaks with the neoclassical model on several points, especially regarding the role of the enterprise. First of all that it rejects that companies act independently of one another. Most often, only a few actors operate on each market, and they tend to be observant and adaptive to each other's behaviour. Moreover, companies are not isolated but cooperate with subcontractors, etc. in large systems where relationships are steadfast and long-term. Thirdly, enterprises do not always plan their future as rationally as one may believe, but rather formulates the rationality in hindsight.

When it comes to the role of business-leaders, scholars point out that leaders' range of control is limited, and so is the real possibility of creating optimal results. Due to the complexity of business, in which there are so many interrelated elements, it is difficult to tell cause from effect. Instead, one must consider the context for it will have a decisive impact on things done. Importantly, as business administration scholars study actual practice in a changing world, rather than scientific laws as do economics, Engwall concludes that the basic assumptions will be valid even as we enter the electronic era.

According to early economists, productive actions are exactly what enterprises [*företag*] are engaged in (Guillet de Monthoux 1998/1983).<sup>37</sup> This is also where we find the nexus of business and art, for they both are involved with different forms of productive actions (Guillet de Monthoux 1998, 2005). Most business research however has been described as getting busy with "serious things." At the heart of the discipline lies a basic assumption of individual, cognitive instrumentalism (Gustafsson 1994). This approach effectively rules out studies of all things fun and frivolous (Rehn 2006).

In an essay Alf Rehn (2006: 44) criticizes research within business administration for privileging special interests before the especially interesting. Moreover, if the research is supposed to be of worth only to business(es), then there is no need to mix it up with science (Ibid. 16). "A real science cannot exist for the sake of a special interest, but is justified by how it is tied to a general totality.

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<sup>37</sup> The word enterprise denotes an action that is above all an undertaking or project" (Websters': 251). Compare to Swedish '*företaga*', which denotes to act (productively) (see also Bay 1998). Interestingly, Wessén's (1989) etymological dictionary makes no mention of the word.

Science should serve humanity, and not selected parts of it” (Ibid. 44). In the context of readership I take this claim as support for my candid refusal to privilege the political interest over the politically interesting. Rehn (2006: 49) believes that one of the most fundamental potentialities for business administration – aside from still having many uncharted territories within its reach -- is that it could strike up connections to what is happening around us. In this way, the discipline could gain real academic importance and weight.

The question is: could we really speak seriously of the book (Cf. Derrida 2001: 16)? Of course we can! The business of book publishing is in fact a business comparable to any other, some organization scholars maintain (Coser, Kadushin & Powell 1982; Powell 1985). Other scholars find the area of books and literature particularly noteworthy and inspiring (Björkegren 1992; Czarniawska & Guillet de Monthoux 1994; Czarniawska 1997; Land & de Cock 2006), *Marketing* (eg. Brown 1996; 1999, 2005), and *Consumer Research* (Brown et al. 2006).<sup>38</sup>

This thesis could above all be placed broadly within consumer research, more specifically within the tradition that has been termed Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson 2005). It is not a singular theory but more a family of related perspectives regarding the dynamic between the marketplace, consumer actions and cultural meanings. It acknowledges that consumption is a historically shaped sociocultural practice that emerges within dynamic marketplace and subjected to its influence. And yet, consumers are not rendered passive; they are actively and proactively interpretive, and sometimes even resisting the market.

The CCT tradition draws on an interdisciplinary body of theory and it comprises a methodological pluralism and multiple sources of empirical data, embracing both interpretive approaches and quantitative measures, although many studies revolve around topics and aspects that are difficult to capture in surveys, laboratory experiments, etc. Its main interests cuts across the experiential and socio-historical dimensions of the consumption cycle of acquisition, consumption and possession, and disposition. CCT can be divided in four major and particularly illuminating areas: 1) consumer identity projects; 2) marketplace cultures; 3) the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and 4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies. For the future, the authors envision accounts of consumption in its historical and moral dimensions, suggesting among other things a cultural history of consumer society through a specific commodity form. Indeed, studying the consumption of books carries the promise of tying these dimensions together.

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<sup>38</sup>Matters relating to contemporary marketing, consumption, and economy have also become topics and sub-disciplines in Book History (cf. Squires 2007) and the Sociology of Literature.

To sketch the broad framework of my study, the Bookonomy research project is framed by the CCT tradition while being situated within the department of Business Administration Studies, sharing the basic assumptions of the Scandinavian tradition: critical of the economics perspective; providing a non-normative, practice-oriented perspective, adopting qualitative methodology with a theoretical interest, bringing inspiration from and hopefully contributing to other disciplines and fields such as Sociology of Literature, Book History and Publishing Studies.

## Sociology of Literature

A sociology of literature perspective builds on the assumption that literary works are linked to the society from which they are sprung and where they are read. (Escarpit 1971) According to the “reflection theory”, literary works will operate as a mirror of society. The changes over time are often explained in terms of a dialectical movement between social and ideological play of contrasting impulses.<sup>39</sup> And yet, as pointed out, literature is not always an exact reproduction of common life; many times it forms a protest against the everyday (Svanberg 1946 in Furuland & Svedjedal 1997: 516).

Wendy Griswold (1981) claimed that the understanding of literature as reflection should also include a reflection of author characteristics, circumstances of production, and the larger concerns of society.<sup>40</sup> According to Johan Svedjedal (1996), the sociology of literature perspective addresses the relationship between fiction and society, and it will do so in three specific ways. The first will consider *society in literature*; especially the image of society with regard to group categories of social class, gender or ethnicity. This approach ranges from philosophical realism by which reality is independent of the spectator, to ontological solipsism by which reality exists only in the mind of the spectator. Second, it can analyse the *literature in society*. Here the role of fiction is to bring new ideas and create public opinion in terms of its political power. The narrative means to

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<sup>39</sup> Furuland (ibid.) mentions how in the 1940s and 50s, there was a widespread belief that literary fiction should leave the societal analysis to the emerging social and behavioural sciences. Hence, there was a widening gap between literature and science. In the 1960s, the pendulum had swung and many writers began to create works that took the political and ideological context into account and addressed a variety of social (mis)conditions and problems. For an interesting study on the Swedish ‘report book’ in the 1960s, see Annika Olsson’s (2004) dissertation *Att ge den andra sidan röst*.

<sup>40</sup> In her analysis of the American novel in the late 19th to early 20th century, concluded that “mundane things” (copyright laws, etc) influence the fictive content. Then ‘national literature’ is not reflecting ‘national character’ only, but rather several factors: genre imperatives, national character, literary market, author characteristics. Just like a real mirror, literature will reflect all things placed before it, Griswold concludes. And yet, the multiple meanings of an individual work will emerge in the interaction between the work cultural power and the readers’ various concerns and frames of references (Griswold 1987).

promote literary campaigns; often combined with a study of the reception within different population groups. The third will investigate *literary society*, based on the claim that outer conditions for literature will influence the structures of fiction. This analysis is a means to explore issues of literature and society at large.

Sociology of literature nurtures a systematic ambition, according to Svedjedal (1996), and it is guided by the following basic assumptions: 1) *Materialism* – as a means to *explain* literature (and not just understand). Drawing much upon Marxism, sociologists of literature hold the material conditions within any given society will determine the literature. 2) *Group perspective* – set on broad categories or the individual against the backdrop of a collective in search of larger patterns, often with the use of quantitative methods. 3) *Socio-poetics* – by which we find a wide range of theories on the relationship between society and literature: reflection theories, creative interaction models, and theories of cultural production. 4) *Wide concept of literature* – revolving around fiction only, but including studies into both literary canons and popular or marginalised literatures in any material form and distribution channel they may come. 5) *Value-distance* – an analytical distance to fiction for science is guided by a principle of systematic suspicion. Sociology of literature is not a valuating science as such, but rather a science about literary valuations.

These basic assumptions underpin and permeate many interesting studies on bookreading and consumption (Furuland 1997; Hansson 1988; Rosengren & Thavenius 1970, etc.). In relation to the present study, by using theories of practice (Chapter IV) I have sought to move away from, challenge and complement some of these assumptions, above all the group perspective as traditionally envisioned by sociologists of literature.

### Inspiration from Book History

Book historians too have long reminded us that no text can exist outside a societal, cultural and material structure. Hence, the Book History perspective has problematized bibliography and textual studies (Finkelstein & McCleery 2002).<sup>41</sup> The field of Book history has been most successful in terms of gaining rapid international acknowledgement in academia. The scholarly journal *Book History* was first set up in 1998 and the SHARP (*The Society for the History of Authorship, Readership and Publishing*) annual conference has drawn an international audience of researchers and librarians and several regional gatherings have been institutionalized.

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<sup>41</sup> Some say that the emerging field of Book History is like Sociology of literature perspective, only without the textual analysis. Another difference is that Book History includes both fiction and non-fiction. Moreover, for Book History the analysis of literary society is an ends in itself (Svedjedal 1996).

An important starting-point was Lucien Febvres and Henri-Jean Martin's seminal work *L'apparition du livre* (1958), sprung from the *Annales School* of social history that gave a comprehensive account of the coming of the book in 1450-1800. Roger Darnton (2002/1987/1982) then proposed the model of "the communications circuit" for the study of how texts are at all points in history transmitted by different persons such as authors, publishers, printers, shippers, booksellers (including their suppliers) and readers, all being informed by intellectual, socio-economic and official influence. This model has been modified by Thomas Adams and Nicholas Barker (1993) who instead proposed that there are five events in the book (or the 'bibliographic document', as they say): publication, manufacture, distribution, reception, and survival, and they are under the outside influence of intellectual and political/legal/religious views, as well as commercial pressure and social behaviour and taste.

Roger Chartier (2002/1992: 51) has brought together the study of print culture with that of readership, thus problematizing the relations between the public and the private sphere. After Chartier (1992), Book History has turned away from the quantitative, group-oriented approach associated with sociology of literature. Society consists not only of striated social categories, but many other forms of differentiation. Texts are rendered with different meanings in the sectors or communities in which they are read. In this respect, it is perhaps close to the consumer culture perspective, especially that which involves a "tribal" view of communities where there is a multiplicity of meanings (cf. Cova 1995; Cova et al. 2007).

Book history showed early that the very same texts have been read by different people in different ways and with very different outcomes. (Chartier 1992) Indeed, appropriation may be more accurate than acquisition, not least because books can be read without being acquired. (De Certeau 1988/1984; Chartier 1992) Moreover, given the great variety of readers and texts at hand, if we are to understand how readers seek new texts, and conversely, how texts seek out new readers, Chartier suggest we could either characterize the most popular reading practices and seek to discern its major contrasts; or, we could pay close attention to the changes when old texts are offered to new readers - publishing changes that make the text available to larger number of readers, especially those of modest condition. (Ibid. 49) For this study, I have drawn inspiration mainly from the first approach, namely to characterize popular reading practices.

Regarding the two cultures debate, one of the most important insights drawn from Book History is that changes in the textual tradition also affect science. According to Elizabeth Eisenstein (1983), there is a tradition of misconceiving the book as a metaphor in science. Philosophers Whitehead and Haydn had discerned certain disenchantment with book learning after the Renaissance that led to a cultural backwash. Eisenstein points out that this was less distrust against books in general, but rather against the outmoded, badly hand-copied



books. Early scientists such as Sir Thomas Brown and Kepler did not at all substitute reading the Book of Scripture (*The Bible*) for the Book of Nature, as often is believed. They certainly continued to read the books of ancient and contemporary writers. Indeed, they were very familiar with print culture and this is true for most early scientists. Of course, the printed books too contained many errors, as pointed out by Adrian Johns (1998). In any case, Darnton (1998/1980: 48) meant that book history contributes to science by showing that books not only tell of history, but indeed make it.

Book history in Sweden can be traced back to the 17th century with research into runes, and aspects related to the book market entered the discussions in mid 18th century. With the industrialization, the market increased and the discipline was more thoroughly founded with a national take on the topic; the 20th century brought book production, distribution and reception to the fore. The history of reading remains the most elusive branch of the discipline. (Björkman 1998: 87) Recent work has brought attention to the material and visual sides of books in the overall transformation and extension of 19th century consumer society (Lundblad 2010, Strömquist 2010). On an international level, a clear example that our contemporary market concerns are pressing is Claire Squires' (2007) *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain*. Previously, contemporary topics have been largely left outside the discipline of Book history.

### Contributing to Publishing Studies

In-between Book history and Cultural studies, Simone Murray (2006) maps out Publishing Studies as a possible field; a field that acknowledges the three C:s – the *contemporary* development of the book publishing world, including published works other than those canonized, and pay special attention to the very format of books, literary or not; *the cross-media flows*, in which books are at the nexus of the analogue and the digital, and intertwined with closely related media (newspapers, magazines, radio, film, television, computer gaming, and the Internet); *cultural politics*, which call for engagement in critical cultural theory and multifaceted, hybridized extension of methodology in order to map a 360-degree view of book publishing. For, says Murray (Ibid. 17), “books are both vectors for cultural change, and themselves compelling sites for analysing cultural forces”.

Building further on Murray's proposition, we could well add another C, for *consumption*. Doing that, this project may well be contributing to Publishing Studies, connecting book consumption and reading against the background of the publishing industry and book market. The concept of ‘publishing’ is derived from Latin *publicare*, which builds upon a distinction between the private and

the public sphere.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, the German concept of *Verlag* (Swedish *förlag*) has emerged in an economic, everyday context, where *Verleger* (*förläggare*) denotes a venture capitalist (Peterson 2004). These concepts are charged with different meanings due to dissimilarities in context, cultural underpinnings, and philosophical assumptions. Moreover, the notion of “publishing” will at most account for the latter part of book history, from the invention of movable type by Gutenberg in the fifteenth century and forward. In this way, research into the revaluation of books and reading from an early date is written off at a stroke. The main promise for the future of Publishing Studies, is acknowledging the importance of economy and consumption at the heart of our subject matter.

## Literary Inspiration in Academic Marketing and Management Cultures

The very vivid discussion on the two cultures, separating literary people and scientists, even trickled into the fields of management and marketing where Starr (1964) commented that it could be called a battle between Art *versus* Science, but it would be more reasonable and appropriate to label it Anti-Science *versus* Science. He drew parallels to the different fields of management science and marketing science, where he observed a similar cultural gap between scholars and practitioners. Marketing science was much more susceptible to this debate than management science, says Starr (*ibid.*), due to marketing’s already fragmentary development as a scientific discipline. There was a rift between the scholars and the practicing marketers in the field that science intended to serve. The scholars had largely adopted a positivist approach and methodology as the dominant tradition for several decades. Eventually, this dominance was challenged by the question if ‘science’ really is a splendid case of marketing – about successfully “selling” propositions and contributions (Peter & Olsen 1983). Furthermore, consumer researchers voiced the concern that the expected managerial perspective prevented a full exploration of consumption in its own terms, as a topic and as a discipline. (Eg. Holbrook 1987)

Some had begun to argue that the scientific enterprise within marketing, and especially consumer research, should be viewed more broadly, and should also comprise a wide range of analytical and conceptual approaches, especially inclusive with the regard to the relationship to humanism. (Hirschman 1985) More specifically, there was a call for a humanistic approach to marketing research, as regards its basic philosophical underpinnings; methodology and evaluative criteria. (Hirschman 1986) The community of consumer researchers was well

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<sup>42</sup> Publishing Studies however, should also be able to take into account horizontal relations within either of these spheres.

advised to adopt an attitude of rapprochement and a sense of critical pluralism. (Hunt 1991) It became a matter of determining values – what research is *good* and what is *bad* – than what kind of research it is. The key point being: does it contribute to our knowledge? (Kassarjian 1989 in Hunt 1991: 40)

For consumer researchers and marketing scholars after the literary turn, *literary criticism* proved a humanistic approach that was primarily accepted and applied within the area of advertising, due to its literary and textual aspects. (Stern 1989) Here, the conception of literary criticism departed from Northrop Frye's (1973 in Stern 1989) definition as the systematic and organized study of creative fiction. The relationship between literary criticism and consumer research was described in terms of analogy. Hence, literary concepts such as author, text, and reader were seen as *substituting* the concepts of company persona, ad and consumer. (Stern 1989: 323)

Eventually, following Paul Ricoeur's view of *action as text*, it was argued that the concept of text could go well beyond literary criticism and interpretivism and apply to different philosophical positions vis-à-vis research: 1. Empiricism; 2. Rationalism; 3. Socioeconomic Constructionism; 4. Interpretivism, and 5. Subjectivism. Above all, it was claimed that with the concept of text one could escape many heavy connotations that were tied to concepts such as 'ideology' and 'theory'. In this way, marketplace phenomena could well be treated as texts with the tools of literary criticism (Hirschman 1992; Cf. Stern 1995, 1998; Schroeder 2000). Feminist literary criticism in particular was used to forge postmodern perspectives into consumer research. Here the notion of 'reading' was adopted both as a locus for inquiry (more specifically, different styles of gendered reading) and as method of deconstruction. (Stern 1993) Eventually, Stephen Brown (1999) argued that literary theory could be applied to the field of marketing research itself, especially as a case of Harold Bloom's conception of an anxiety of influence.<sup>43</sup>

Not only literary theory sparked an interest with the field, but also literature itself. Allegedly, Russell Belk (1986: 24 in Brown 1999) argued, "one can learn more from a reasonably good novel than from a 'solid' piece of social research". Following this lead, literary works such as comic books could provide consumer researchers with interesting material and knowledge about consumers' material values (Belk 1987), given what Sociologists of Literature terms the 'reflection theory', namely that literature reflects society and peoples' interests (see Svedjedal 1997). In this way, a macro inquiry into contemporary publication of books can give many clues to shifts in consumers' interests, according to Wikström, Elg, and Johansson (1992/1989: 114). For instance, books published between 1970 and 1985 mirror the change toward more "experiential"

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<sup>43</sup> This sparked a small debate within the field (see Levitt 2000; Holbrook 2000; Brown 2000), where misinterpretations of misinterpretations of misinterpreted misinterpretations are discussed (Brown 2000: 89).

consumption. The publishing sector reflected emergent changes in consumption and society at a very early stage. (Ibid.)

If science really is about successfully marketing and “selling” propositions and contributions (Cf. Peter & Olson 1983), then successful science depends on good writing and readability: simple words, short sentences, and a good structure (Sawyer, Laran & Xu 2008). But there is more to it, says Brown (2004), who does not cease to claim that marketing is a literary endeavor, and points out that the primary source of “successful writing” is “reading, and more reading, and even more reading”.<sup>44</sup>

Everyone, of course, knows that reading is important and, more to the point perhaps, everyone does it. The merest glance at almost any academic marketing article reveals that the writer is well read, very well read. Copious citations striate our texts and the final few pages unfailingly provide an impressive inventory of the author’s insatiable textual appetite. It follows that telling people reading is important is, well, superfluous, pointless, unnecessary. Reading, rather, is *de rigueur*. Is a perquisite, an obligation, a must, not something that helps individual scholars stand out from the clamouring crowd. (Brown 2004: 330)

In other words, scholars do value reading, but they make little effort in formulating its value. For Brown, reading is the pre-condition for scholarship and so widely practiced among scholars that there is little meaning in formulating what it does. It suffices to say that reading rules. Other scholars have brought up the importance of consumers’ level of literacy skills, especially when they are low or wanting (Wallendorf 2001; Adkins & Ozanne 2005).

Sometimes, reading is part of the general exploration of consumption. Consumer researchers Holbrook, Lehmann and O’Shaughnessy (1986) designated housewives’ purchases of novels alongside products such as coffee, bread, liquor and perfume as they combine aesthetic appreciation and routinized behaviour. This rationality gave rise to some concern on part of the scholars:

For example, it is difficult to account for the position of novels unless one assumes that these housewives are implicitly referring to thrashy pulp paperbacks that are bought by reflex as soon as a new one appears. (p. 57f)

In hindsight, Holbrook (in Brown 2006: 97) has transformed this assumption to a clear fact. The housewives, he says, snatched romance novels at the cash registers on their weekly tour to the supermarket. He finds nothing “good”, or “worthwhile” or “aesthetically excellent” about this. “Hey, face it, most people prefer schlock, and there’s and awful lot of it out there for them to choose from.” (Ibid.)

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<sup>44</sup> Apart from Reading, the two other R’s are Righting, a special way of writing that asserts the right way, and Rhythmic. (Brown 2006) Brown here makes a pun at the Irish hedge schools’ 3R’s: Reading, ‘Riting and ‘Rithmetics.

According to Brown (2004) the relationship between marketing and literature has softened and attuned to each other. The “literary community” has undergone important changes in production, publication, distribution and reception, due to desktop publishing, conglomeratization, on-line activities, mega-storing, Oprah shows and reading groups. Following the electronic and digital revolution, the book-selling trade has been used as example of the emergence of the many-to-many marketing with its variety of high-tech and high-touch solutions in retailing, ranging from Internet bookshops to local niche booksellers (Gummesson 2004).

Piles of literary fiction swamp the stores just like any commodity, observes Brown (2005: 223) and conversely, it seems that commodities swamp literary fiction. “Brand names abound and product placement is rife” (Ibid.) In this way, with a growing ‘mart lit’, the scholar can look forward to expanding data banks, getting deeper, richer and more attractive (Ibid.). Fiction especially could bring us experiential knowledge before scientific, propositional knowledge.<sup>45</sup> It could provide us with thick description, and could reach farther than scientific methods can.

Brown however, rejects this “two cultures” view on the basis that it brings a mental cul-de-sac. The key question is whether how good the novels are and of course what you mean by good. Good for whom? Good for reading? Good for the genre? Good by the critics? Good by the whole “literary-industrial complex” or by the film producers? (Brown 2005: 232) A highly instrumental view of literature would say that it should be good for the consumer and marketing research perspective, Brown says. Indeed, the two novels he investigated, Alex Shakar’s *The Savage Girl* (2002) and Max Brook’s *Jennifer Government* (2004), did not bring any new un-chartered territories for research. He evaluates them as being a bit “too much” – Brook had too many characters, and abounding banalities; Shakar “too much purple prose”.

In order to think in novel ways and enhance creativity, Brown is aligned with Case (1999) and De Cock (2000) within organization studies, in suggesting novelizing our scholarly studies instead. Brown (2005) then places special emphasis on creating “faction”. For Brown (Ibid.) echoes Belk and claim that practitioners within marketing may learn more from reading novels than from academic literature (see also Schroeder 2000). Even to the extent that Brown wrote a rather factional novel himself, *The Marketing Code* (2006), a playful tribute to Dan Brown’s worldwide bestseller. The remarkable success of such best-sellers in recent years – let alone the famous case of Harry Potter (Terego &

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<sup>45</sup> The distinction between these concepts is not clear-cut. For Belk (2002: 123), words work fine in providing propositional knowledge, whereas experiential knowledge is often conveyed in visual images. Propositional knowledge is *about* something and entails cognitive understanding; experiential knowledge is *of* something and entails an emotional understanding.

Denim 2006; Brown 2007) – has made for a renewed interest in the consumption culture of books and readers.

Today, “publishing provides rich pickings for marketing”, as Brown (2006: 9) writes in the book *Consuming Literature: The Marketing and Consumption of Literature*. Brown mentions increased Competition, rapid Consolidation, new Channels of distribution, and Celebrity as four important influences on the book trade of today. As regards consumption, there are three developments: the culture of meeting the author, the emergence (or at least re-emergence) of consumers becoming producers, and the book group, representing the “reclamation of reading” and the consumer’s “authentic voice”. This volume marks a new approach for research on writing, reading and the book in that it is actually affirmative of the book business in a wide sense. Though many papers are informed of the historical background, the perspective could gain many insights into the nature of economy and business as such if they learn even more from two areas: from the study of texts and literature, and from the study of history. In this way, we could learn more about the specifics of the book world and discover that many of the things or marketing practices we believe are modern abound in texts and in history.

It has also been argued that novels and other literary genres can be used to challenge the dominance of case studies in business school strongholds and bring about better management. Novels are superior to cases when it comes to subjective aspects, narrating personal experiences of organizational reality, conveying tacit knowledge. Moreover, novels handle complexity, issues of values and valuation, and combine different levels of analysis: micro and macro, individual or institutional and the like (Czarniawska & Guillet de Monthoux 1994).<sup>46</sup>

The emergence of a symbolic-interpretive perspective in the 1980s (Cf. Hatch 2006), saw a new interest in the concept of “reading”, as in “reading a situation”. There has also been an increase in theory relating specifically to literature. Drawing on Dwight Waldo’s (1968) work on the administrative novel,<sup>47</sup> there has been a renewed interest in the literary novel as vehicles for inquiries into organizations and society. For instance, Benjamin De Mott (1989) addressed the two cultures problem in terms of businessmen on one side and on the other, academic and creative thinkers. Moreover, he claims that literature has the power to raise important moral issues that bears upon business and society

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<sup>46</sup> The Department of Literature at Stockholm University has a tradition of giving a course in Literature on Management at Stockholm School of Economics under the supervision of Professor Stephan Larsen and Eva Faye Wevle. This educational approach to literature is also applied in the context of Medical schools and Law schools – see for instance Robert Coles (1989) *The Call of Stories. Teaching and the Moral Imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

<sup>47</sup> For a rather dated review of this research interest, see Thomas R. McDaniel (1978) “The Search for the Administrative Novel”, *Public Administrative Review*, Nov/Dec., pp. 545-49.

at large. Business believes that it is a world apart, but the truth is that we all live in the same world and the same age, Mott argued.

Two decades later, the cultural rift between businesspeople and literature still runs deep, as told by Diane L. Coudu (2001) in *Harvard Business Review* under the headline “Different Voice – A Reading List for Bill Gates – and You”. Facing the hectic business-life, who has the time to read 400-page novels? Especially the literary canon appears more irrelevant than ever, says the article and continues, “That’s not, of course, entirely true. Every individual – regardless of profession – needs to stretch his mind and to reflect, now and again, on the human condition. Literature beckons, but which works should be read and why?” (Ibid.)

In a small booklet published by the Swedish Publishers’ Association as part of their anti-VAT campaign, Mikael Timm (1999: 16) also emphasizes that the Swedish businessmen who travel around in the increasingly internationalized business environment will need to read more than the company product brochure. “It is good to know one or two books to have something to talk about before the start of final negotiations”, Timm holds. “One novel a week is good also for the toughest of negotiators or the businessman most exposed to competition. An essay keeps the thoughts sharp. A poem makes life richer.”

Literary critic Harold Bloom (2001: 65) is interviewed saying that based on proper teaching, the humanities have a lot to offer businesspeople:

By reading, people can become more aware and acquire a broader range of sensibility. But I disagree that the study of literature will make business-people more moral.

Bloom backs up his argument by saying that many highly sensible, literary people he knows are scoundrels nevertheless. On the same topic, literary scholar and author Carina Burman (2008) reflects that perhaps terrible book readers would be even worse without the reading...

### Scholarship for Sale

Let me raise one final caveat about academia’s relationship to the business of reading, writing and the book. Beyond the truism of “publish, or perish!” rarely do scholars acknowledge that their own works are up for sale. Those who look up Stephen Brown’s (1993) sixteen page long article on “Postmodern marketing?” without having access to the restricted community of academia is met with this message:

<p><b>Purchase this document:</b> Price payable: GBP £13.00 plus handling charge of GBP £1.50 and VAT where applicable.</p>
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Clearly, buying scientific articles at nearly a pound a page is expensive business. Brown's literary business book *The Marketing Code* (2006) however, a 400 page long paperback, is available at Amazon UK from £6.49, which is half the price of the article. The title *Consuming Books* (2006) in hardback costs £66.50 at Amazon UK and SEK 907 (!) at Adlibris. Continuing, let us not forget that even scholarship is available to consumers at a price, and subjected to VAT regulation.



## IV. Theoretical Underpinnings

*The great danger to literature  
is not the argument that literature subverts  
citizens by teaching them falsehoods;  
it is the argument, implicit or explicit,  
that literature has no real value  
or potential to affect either good or evil,  
that it has no role in human affairs  
and ought not be taken seriously.*

*Marc Shell (1993/1978: 150)*

*The following account will seek to provide a background and overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, namely the concepts, assumptions, relationships, and perspectives that have informed our understanding specifically regarding the concepts of economy and culture; value and values; consumption and morality; and consumption as practice.*

### Introduction

Theory has become a literary genre within the sciences, and thus, some argue that scholarship and theory should be treated with the help of literary devices and forms of criticism. Jonathan Culler (2000/1997) is a literary theorist who has endeavoured to describe what theory is, and also, explain why theory can be so intimidating at times. What makes it dismaying is because theory is endless. (Ibid. 16) Put differently, to engage with theory is to enter the famous, limitless library in Jorge Louis Borges short-story “The Library of Babel”. Theory however, is with Culler’s words, “an unbounded corpus of writings” (2000/1997: 16).

Thus, theory evokes a specific response intimately connected with reading: “Theory makes you desire mastery: you hope that theoretical reading will give you concepts to organize and understand the phenomena that concern you.” (Culler 2000/1997: 16) Moreover, theory is augmented to overrule tradition, rediscover old works, and promote new ones. Connecting with Max Weber’s views on “Science as a Profession”, scholarly work is a form of creation that does not aim at finality or eternity, but is closely tied to the prevailing scholarly

discussion and frontiers of science that will ceaselessly be on the move. The difference between academic theorizing and everyday common sense theorizing is the extent of specification, correcting errors, and sharing with others (Hatch 2006).

Culler argues one has to make an “open-ended commitment” because there are always many things that we still do not know – as is the “condition of life itself”, according to Culler (Ibid). This view certainly coincides with non-closure and non-knowability, as discussed by Plotnitsky (cf. Chapter II). If theory requires an open-ended commitment – to what does one commit? What is theory anyway? First of all, Culler (2000/1997) maintains that theory operates inter-disciplinarily as it is a form of discourse that brings effects outside the discipline or field of origin. Second, theory brings critique of what is held as common-sensical knowledge, especially of concepts that are understood as natural. Third, theory is both an analytical and speculative endeavour “to work out what is involved” in whatever phenomena we study – those termed ‘sex’ or ‘writing’ (Ibid.) or, in our case, ‘books’ and ‘reading’; ‘economy’ and ‘value’, etc. Fourth, theory is to Culler “reflexive” because it concerns thinking about thinking. (Ibid.) Taken together, these listed characteristics have come to inform my approach to theory.

### Market Optimism and Pessimism

In the last chapter, the joint body of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) was presented as an academic tradition or framework departing from a basic assumption that consumption and its range of meanings and social arrangements are mediated through markets. (Arnould & Thompson 2005) Thus, even with the concept of culture, one cannot seem to escape the market (Firat & Dholakia 1998: 96; Kozinets 2002), in fact we may argue that life is largely played out on the market, holding that culture is “most inductive to immersion”, and perhaps more radically, “Culture is now just another marketable product” (Firat & Dholakia 1998: 108).

In the area of books and reading, this understanding is not wholly uncontroversial. Most writers from a wide range of disciplines describe books and reading as being subjected to *both* cultural and economic aspects and many times this relation is difficult to resolve. By tradition, scholars have interpreted these concepts in terms of a dichotomy, set against each other, engaged in a never-ending struggle for precedence. (Coser, Kadushin & Powell 1982; Powell 1985; Schweizer 2000; Gedin 1997; Gedin 2004; Dessauer 1998, Hjort-Andersen 2000, Van der Ploeg 2004). Especially book publishing is commonly held as dual in nature, comprising both cultural activities and business skills. Though the issue is not easily resolved, this chapter will first deal with some definitions and accounts of ‘economy’ and ‘culture’ and the relationship between them.

Cultural economist Van Der Ploeg (2004) claim that present-day scholars are divided into either ‘cultural optimists’ or ‘cultural pessimists’, depending on their views on how books fare on the market under commercial conditions. In effect, this means that they are optimistic or pessimistic about the market, and not culture as such, forming market-optimistic and market-pessimistic camps.

Sven Rinman (1951: 17) for instance, writes in his thorough overview of Swedish Publishers’ Association history 1843–1887, that the general “need for reading” [*läsebehov*] in society was previously catered for by specific reading societies for the city bourgeois, poetry albums among the landed gentry and parish libraries for the peasantry. In modern times by contrast, the need for reading is satisfied by the regular book trade and market. In other words, in modern society, the well-functioning market would extinguish the need for what is held as off-market, socially transmissible knowledge of literature and books.

A decade later, the optimistic stance vis-à-vis the mid 20th century book market was challenged by Jürgen Habermas (2003/1962) who voiced a deep concern for the state at hand. Looking back in history, he grieved what he called the structural transformation of the public. He feared the consequences of the decline of the bourgeois society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a period when citizens played double roles: both a public and a private role. The private role did not build exclusively upon the rational individuality of the market, but comprised the possibility of collective sociability. Hence, people engaged in literary salons, clubs and reading groups that were not subjected to the dictate of production and consumption. The family functioned as a circle of literary propaganda and provided the necessary reverberation for a reading culture. According to Habermas it was here, in the private sphere that the seeds for (public) humanity had thrived. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, literary salons had vanished. Even collective pleasures such as cinema, watching TV and listening to the radio had lost its public thrust; the activities took place in a social space without the participants ever having to partake in discussions. Only reading would remain as a reflective activity, in the private seclusion of the home.

According to Habermas (2003/1962), two complementary phenomena dominate the literary sector in mass society: *commercial book clubs* and *paperback books*. Both operate by facilitating access to literature *economically*, but Habermas sincerely doubts that will render psychological access to it. Mass production of highly qualified paperbacks could seem to be beneficial as they become easily accessible to students with little money. He is critical of its *form*, however, seeing as the durable text is cloaked in perishability. He is pessimistic regarding whether the paperback’s content really is conveyed to the readers. In sum, the 20<sup>th</sup> century destruction of the public is paired with a cultural consumption that forms but non-cumulative experiences. Rather, they are regressive and leave no traces. Of course, there are arenas for public discourse, Habermas admits, but discussion itself has become a commodity. The public who previously reasoned around books have become simple consumers.

In his model of the literary process, Lars Furuland (1997: 40f) distinguishes between two phases of consumption, I and II, which stand for passive and active consumption. The activities of buying and borrowing books, receiving books as gifts, or any form of licensed access to reading count as 'passive consumption' of the material work. The reader who encounters the "the ideal work" is placed within the phase of 'active consumption', along with listeners, viewers, goers to the theatre, and computer-users. Active consumption is when the book is actually read and that the author's text gets through to the reader. (Ibid.) Such labels make it quite clear how they are valued. Of the two phases, it is not difficult to tell which Furuland count as the most valued form of consumption. This view does not take into account the revaluation of consumption within marketing and consumer research, whereby consumption is held as just as active and productive a process and practice as ever production, and the hedonic forms of consumption just as valuable.

Some scholars maintain that the nature of economy and of consumption changes with increasing surplus and affluence, creating a move towards higher (read more cultivated) modes of consumption. Therefore we will expound on some notions of affluence and abundance for they will set the relationship between economy and culture in slightly different light. We will also further acquaint ourselves with Miller's theory of bridging economic value and cultural values, whereby new value can be created. We need here to take an interest in the cultural use of value, namely how people use value in practice.

Many scholars following Adam Smith hold consumption and not production as the central feature of society. The present-day concept of 'citizen-consumer' is of vital concern here as it crosses the border of domestic economy into the political. Investigating different genealogies of modern mass-consumption, points to the limitations of both 'modern' and 'mass' - especially as relates to reading, writing and the book – and ventures the relationship between consumption and morality. Morality often deals with the question of excess and elevates an ideal of moderation and temperance. Because morality explicitly is directed to the doings and sayings of people, we turn to view of consumption as practice.

## Early Concepts of Economy

Early economists had a moral view on the means and ends of economy and it was often held that economic success was based on catering for human needs and should not be devoted to creating ever-more money and profit. In case surplus was attained, it was to be given to those beautiful things outside of economic concerns: to art and love. (Guillet de Monthoux 1993/1983)

The Greek notion of economy, *oikonomia*, appeared in writings in the fourth century B.C.E, denoting “activities of management, or administration, applied to persons or goods belonging to an *oikos*, a term whose meaning varies from house to family household, dwelling place or region, home land, as well as to property in general” (Singer 1958: 30). In Xenophon’s dialogue *Oikonomikos*, there is a strong emphasis on how to “co-ordinate the activities and attitudes of the various members and attendants of a house” (Singer 1958: 31). The meaning of *oikos* range from “house to family household, dwelling place or region, home land, as well as to property in general” (Singer 1958: 30). The verb *oikeō* is an expression of spatial relation, meaning, “to inhabit, to dwell, to have one’s abode in a place, to settle in, also to colonize”. In time, the concept was extended to “managing, directing, administering, governing”. It also became a synonym of *διοικεῖν* a verb that encompassed both *oikos* and the political sphere (*polis*), and that Plato extended to the governance of the entire cosmos. (Ibid. 34f)

Importantly, the *oikos* was foremost connected to its means of subsistence. An *oikos* either supported its members, or else it was not an *oikos* at all. Hence, the *oikos* was understood as family, and according to Aristotle it consisted of the members of a unit who feed together. It comprised three elements: the male, the female and thirdly, the servant, defined as that which is under the rule of another for reasons of security. Thus, the slave is the servant of the political man, and the plough-ox is the poor man’s servant. Moreover, an *oikos* had to encompass children, or else it would not be rendered a proper *oikos*. (Lacey 1968: 15) The individual was tied to a number of societal units as every *oikos* was part of one or more larger groups: the clan (*genos*, the phratry, the tribe (*phyle*), the deme, whose members make up the *polis*. Only emigrants and colonists were liberated from their ancestral *oikoi*. (Ibid. 16)

As concerns *nomos*, according to Kurt Singer (1958: 55) it does not, as proposed by Rousseau (and Derrida for that matter), belong to the realm of ‘law’ (*nómos*) but rather to that of a pastoral life: “distributing, allotting (primarily grazing ground, *nomós*), managing, feeding, caring for, a flock by the herdman (*nomeus*)”. Importantly, Singer (1958: 38) holds that the concept of *nemō* is amphibolic or amphitypical, an epic word meaning two-edged: “one meaning pointing to limitations imposed by acts of appropriation and apportioning, the other to expansion”. This doubleness forms an interesting tension at the heart of economy. Specifically, *Oikonomia* appears in a duality of meaning: as description of a pattern of action, and as the norm by which those actions have to be judged. The criterion of *goodness* is embedded in the well-ordered whole that constitutes the Greek notion of reality. (Singer 1958: 32) In this way, the action relating to goods is evaluated by its goodness.

Drawing on Aristotle’s concept of *oikonomia* and *oikonomike*, this natural economy is perhaps best described as *oikonomics* (Bay 1998: 18), denoting economic activities that take place somewhere proper and concern real life necessities.

This entails barter and ‘natural trade’ – which means that money is not used as an end in itself, but as means only – activities that take place in a primary market and revolve around basic human needs. Hence, it is an economy that remains within natural boundaries. This economic logic can be formulated as Commodity – Commodity (barter) and Commodity – Money – Commodity (natural trade) and it is aimed at products with both use value and exchange value.

In contrast, there is to Aristotle an *unnatural*, form of acquisition of goods: trade that is essentially characterized by the use of money and a strong desire for monetary gain beyond the natural limit for satisfaction of needs. With *chrematistics* the primary market place is supplanted – complemented and replaced – by a secondary market where the *market mechanism* rules. Here, the Aristotelian formula is Money – Commodity – Money’ (M-C-M). The produced goods are simply merchandise for exchange; put bluntly, there is no use-value, only exchange value. (Bay 1998: 19)

Production and generation of value is a key issue within the Aristotelian economy. Nature bestows land or sea or whatever, but the householder starts with given supplies in order to dispose of them in proper usage, distinguishing what is good and suitable from what is bad and unsuitable (cf. Politics 1258a). Economic generation is understood as natural, resulting in qualitatively different kinds, i.e. they are heterogeneous. Chrematics, on the other hand, denotes monetary generation where the offspring is homogeneous, i.e. identical to its ‘parent’. It is here we first find the problematic of quality and quantity in economic thought.

## Towards a Political Economy

Economics meant the management of the household, from the private household, to the city, and then to the state. Thinkers from Aristotle to Rousseau did not designate economy as the all-pervasive lens through which all life must be seen. Instead, for Rousseau, the problem was how to introduce economy in its sense of “wise government for the common welfare of all [...] into the general running of the great family, which is the state”. (Guillet de Monthoux 1993/1989) Hence, economy understood as government and conversely, government understood as economy, that is, a “general economy” (*économie générale*). (Virtanen 2004: 212) Rousseau primarily sought a general economy of mankind by mankind, and not by God.

For the physiocrats and economists up until Keynes, economy was only a matter of means to greater ends: to achieve peace, stop starvation and to live in accordance with nature:

The concrete economists do not mean that everything is business. On the contrary, the most important things in life have nothing to do with economy. But

without balance between production and consumption and between investment and saving, we can never get peace and powers to devote ourselves to the higher, uneconomic values of life. (Guillet de Monthoux 1989/1983: 405, translation mine)

Maximization of profit, however, was not at all the ends *per se*, but was regarded as creating leaks into the state or into stock-holding companies. Instead, the surplus could be taken out as spare time for engaging in love and the arts. That would be much better than feeding giant organizations with taxes and stock-purchases. Surplus could be a gift. Moreover, early economists did not wish to control what the artists and courtesans would do with the money, as long as they render us with pleasure, and do not return and pester people as administrators of supposed utility and their disservice to society. Rather, they meant for those gifts to be free, directed at what is good and beautiful, outside the boundary of the concrete economy. (Guillet de Monthoux 1989/1983: 435)

The aim of economic theory was to create balance, and any eventual surplus should be given to culture and the arts, without any taxation or capitalist interest rates or rents. For any intervention in the economic system were regarded as leaks that would be soaked up by unproductive, greedy middlemen instead of being put to proper use for the happiness of all (Ibid.)

The first appointed Professor of economy in Sweden, Anders Berch, installed in Uppsala 1741, claims that “the science of general house-holding is about all the ground rules that in some way affect the happiness of people – except those that concern those rights, connections and obligations by which states are dependent of one another, as these belong to the state wisdom [*statsklokheten*]”. Hence, Berch distinguishes between internal *Politie* as (in Virtanen’s words) “the means for increasing the forces of the state from within” (Police in English and French, *Polizei* in German) and *Politik* [or *Statsklokheten*] which increases the forces of the State externally by means of an organized military force and a system of alliances.

When Adam Smith (1776) launched his economic theory, his concern was to attain wealth of the nation in close interaction with other nations. The primary means for attaining wealth was the production and exportation of surplus tangible goods. Thus, he privileged ‘productive’ activities through specialized skills that result in tangible output, and reserved the term ‘unproductive’ activities for those kinds that did not, regardless how necessary they may be, like the services provided by medical doctors and lawyers. This productivist view has laid the grounds for a, goods-dominant logic within economic scholarship, placing a strong emphasis upon the benefits of monetary exchange revolving around commodities. (Vargo et al., 2008: 147)

With the increasingly abstract flows of finance in the 20th century, Thomas Bay (1998) posits the creation of a new level of market, where only price risks are traded. No value is produced here; instead there is a speculation into that which is not an object, into the value of ‘no-thing’. The relationship is thus as follows:

Money – Money’. Transactions are made into transactions; only exchange itself is exchanged. This type of economy Bay terms ‘gamenemics’. De(p)rievd of any content, gamenemy comes across as sheer form without real content. It is a non-founded and non-grounded economy that, with Jean Baudrillard, would entail no surplus value (as with Marx), but rather be *surplus to value*. (Bay 1998) And yet, there are a number of formal and informal institutions that support this type of economy, and they in turn are closely connected to cultural norms and values.

### Situating Abundance in Economy

Aristotle argued that one of the important social preconditions for the development of philosophy was the emergence of economic surplus (Shell 1993/1978: 40). In contrast, the Christian theological perspective upon economy had been based on the idea of a world created out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. The early economist Simon Patten (1852-1922) reinterpreted classical economic theory and claimed the challenge was a shift or adaptation from a society of scarcity to a society of abundance.

Patten suggested that with increasing affluence, basic needs would subside as each additional unit of food and drink would be less desirable. Hence, for Patten, affluence contained the key to the future development of civilization. The main challenge was to adapt to this new abundance, for in a society based on scarcity and lack of fulfillment, needs and desires would be simple and crude. Gratification and intoxication through gluttony was a common way to meet more lean times. People would have to break the old pattern of either starvation or overindulgence, and strive for higher types of satisfaction. (Cross 2000: 119f)

For Patten, the notion of abundance is subjective, because it answers the question of “How much is enough?” (Editor’s preface, Patten: viii) Interestingly, Patten argued that the solution to this problem was not to be found in employing old moralities or creating new coercive institutions, trained on fighting desires, but rather in learning to overcome or transcend those crude desires. (Cross 2000: 119f). If successful, people would begin to demand new and “higher” forms of consumption. It would be possible to devote the new surplus of resources, time and energy on refinement, recreation and the arts. Thus, Patten could be related to the tradition of other early economists (Cf. Guillet de Monthoux 1993/1989).

Georges Bataille criticized the economic sciences for having too a limited perspective upon economic phenomena that are difficult to isolate and coordinate in themselves. His book *The Accursed Share* (2002/1967) was an attempt to observe the movement of “the general economy” in human practices and societal rituals against the backdrop of nature. If Professor Berch had envisioned a



general economy of mankind by mankind, Bataille's conceptualization of the same entails a global view, in light of the excess energy bestowed upon us from the radiating sun and further produced in the photosynthesis of plants. According to Bataille, this abundance of energy will necessarily *expand* until it reaches its limits, given by the available, terrestrial space. (Ibid.)

When growth is no longer possible, *squander* sets in, and it is here that the real excess begins. These laws it bears upon human economy as well. Reminiscent of Durkheim, Bataille (Ibid. 45) sets out to "describe sets of social facts manifesting a general movement of the economy". Bataille's real concern is not the abstract, universal principle of excess, but rather social facts as a series of multiplicity: as a movement of excess and an excess of movement. He addresses mankind and points to the play of forces that rule the material basis of life and the errors and problems that this disregard produces. In order to do that, Bataille holds that we must acknowledge that it is not necessity, but rather its opposite, "luxury", that render all living matter and mankind with its basic problems.

For Bataille, *eating, death and sexual reproduction* are the three luxuries of Nature. It is "useless consumption". In a sense, this expression and the notions of "productive" and "non-productive" expenditure may be connected to a basic, perhaps particular value, but in fact Bataille rather aims at a *suspension* of value, even to the extent that some values just *cannot* be utilized. According to Plotnitsky (1994: 36), Bataille's greatest contribution is the complementarity of gains and losses, so that where traditional economic sciences find "gain, conservation, investment, and meaning", Bataille inscribes "loss, waste, expenditure without reserve, and meaninglessness".<sup>48</sup>

With John Kenneth Galbraith's (1969/1958) book *The Affluent Society*, the discussion on affluence took a new turn. Galbraith had been studied the poverty in the agricultural sector and was appalled that people could be continuously poor in an over-all wealthy society. (Ibid. 20) Hence, increased production (as proposed by Keynes) could not be the final measurement of social progress and solution to social ills. He also observed a mismatch between the ideology of and the reality of Western affluence, especially in the US. The wealthy parts of the world however, were still guided and governed by ideas that were forged under very different conditions, namely that of grim scarcity and "hunger, sick-

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<sup>48</sup> Alexander Styhre (2002) has proposed that we use Bataille's thought on a general economy to understand the new, emergent technologies of information and communication in order to grasp a different order of management and organization in the digital era. However, Styhre does not acknowledge that the "old" technologies of information (in other words, reading, writing, the book and print culture) have in fact been around for as long as there has been an economy to count with (cf. chapter VII). And for the other, by privileging the latest new information/communication technologies and posing them against the classic notion of economy and management, does not Styhre evoke that economy as a new privileged, *particular* economy quite against Bataille's own thoughts?

ness and cold”. The result is an affluent world that does not understand itself, says Galbraith (ibid. 34) <sup>49</sup>

Avner Offer (2007/2006) has adopted a highly critical perspective on affluence, due to the harm it brings to the role of choice and wellbeing for humans and society. He situates it mainly in the time after the World War II and refers to affluence by a combination of a flow of new goods, services and opportunities and increasing riches. The main problem he sees is that novelty and abundance – which he uses as synonym for affluence – both “displace and devalue the stock of pre-existing possessions, virtues, relations, and values” (Ibid. 1). Choice is fallible, especially under the condition of affluence. Affluence undermines habits, conventions and commitments. (Ibid. 358) To Offer, affluence generates impatience due to the constant flow of new rewards, and impatience erodes and destroys well-being because we lose the capacity to enjoy the rewards. Paradoxically, happiness in society thus declines. (Ibid. 357) The economy is made up from interpersonal relationships, says Offer, and argues for the importance of non-market exchange of gifts and love.

In contrast to the Christian tradition that posited the birth of the world from nothingness, there is also a worldview of an *original* abundance. Famously, in his book *Stone Age Economics* (2004/1974), anthropologist Marshall Sahlins reverses the traditional interpretation of the primordial hunters-gatherer economy as one of lack, starvation, unrest and dismay. Instead, drawing upon a substantivist rather than formalist view of the economic practices, he suggests that we rethink this economy and proposes it as an “original” affluent society in the sense that it offered easy satisfaction of human needs due to a material abundance. According to anthropologist George P. Dalton (1960: 483), also within the substantivist tradition, surplus is recognized as an empirical fact. It is simply “more of something” that is presently available than it was before and that society recognizes that this is the case. Thus, the definition of surplus varies in practice from context to context. Later, Dalton (1963) questioned that surplus food could be the cause for the rise of non-food producers in society. He claimed the important issue remains unanswered: were there ever societies without food surplus or social strata? (Ibid. 391).

Unlike *Homo Oeconomicus*, the hunter-gatherer’s “wants are scarce and his means (in relation) plentiful” (Sahlins 2004/1974: 13). The idea of *infinite human needs* arrived at a time when culture was nearing its material peak. (Ibid. 39) Hence,

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<sup>49</sup>Galbraith’s book is an extraordinary example of scholarship in that it has become an international bestseller (See Luey 2003). A curious story is that Galbraith expected his book to become a bestseller, which was highly unusual for a book in economics, and had entered a bet with his publisher. According to his brief bio in the Penguin edition, it stayed on the bestseller lists for “some 30 weeks”. This rendered Galbraith a really expensive meal at the publisher’s expense, and yet, how much he ate and drank, the publisher never spent any important money on that meal. He learned an important lesson: “Publishers rarely lose.” (Ibid. 24)

“[E]conomic Man is a bourgeois construction – as Marcel Mauss said, ‘not behind us, but before, like the moral man.’” (Ibid. 13) Sahlins observes that poverty is a product of civilization and it is foremost relational, indicative of standings on a society’s social scale. The evolution of the economy has given rise to a peculiar paradox: it has enriched the world, while also impoverishing it, allowing man to appropriate nature, but also expropriating man from nature. (Ibid. 37) Moreover, “the amount of hunger increases relatively and absolutely with the evolution of culture” (Ibid. 36).

## What is Culture?

*Culture*, according to Raymond Williams (1976: 87ff) one of the most complicated words in English, was developed from the Latin verb *colere*, which had a wide array of meanings: “inhabit, cultivate, protect, honour with worship”. Hence, ‘culture’ is related to words such as ‘colony’ and ‘cult’. In the early use of the word it is a noun denoting *process*, the tending of natural growth, basically crops or animals. (Ibid.)<sup>50</sup> One word is sprung from Greek and the other from Latin, indicating two different genealogies of the concepts. Note that the Latin noun *colo*, is an off-spring of Greek *boukolos*, cattle care [*Rinder hütend*]. (Benselers 1931: 141) In a sense then, the basic sphere and meaning of culture was not yet fully separated from that of domestic economy.

Interestingly, different academic fields stress different aspects of the concept of culture. By tradition, cultural anthropology refers primarily to material production, whereas history and cultural studies tend to privilege the symbolic, or the signifying systems. As Williams himself points out, these two are often interrelated rather than opposed.

According to Williams, ‘culture’ was introduced as a metaphor for the process of human development from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Notably, this shift happened around the same time of early book printing. Through the abstraction and generalization of previously particular tending processes, culture became closely connected to civility (civilization) and cultivation (cultivated) (Ibid.) I suspect that it was this process that would spark off the division between the spheres of culture and economy to a higher degree.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Throsby (2000: 3) refers to the original connotation of culture as “tillage of the soil”. In other words, he leaves out the animals! We will return to this issue of crops and animals in Chapter X when providing a genealogy of reading, writing and the book.

<sup>51</sup> Consider how our understanding of ‘culture’ in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was shaped by reflexivity (Schmidt 1991; Littau 2004), whereby the cultivation of the soil for economic purposes became a cultivation of ourselves.

As from the 18<sup>th</sup> century – just when literacy became increasingly widespread across Europe (cf. Vincent 2000) – the concept of culture assumed two meanings: 1. the general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development; and 2. the anthropological: a particular way of life of a particular people, group or of humanity at large, or of a specific period of time. At a later date, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, a third meaning came to the fore: “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic creativity”. Hereby, culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film (Williams: 90).

To David Throsby (2001: 14), culture is an impulse that “can be seen as gathering together the collective desires of the group or groups within a given society”. As a collective impulse, the cultural belief is “emphasising the group, operating through shared values and cooperative behaviour” (Ibid. 158). Throsby (2001: 34) characterize ‘high culture’ norms as “conservative, elitist, hegemonic, absolutist”. As Williams has observed, there is also a widespread hostility towards the word culture, resulting for example in the mock-word “culchah”.<sup>52</sup> By use of the concepts of distinction and habitus, Bourdieu (cf. 2000/1992) has linked culture to a divisionary power that operates on the structural level of human identity and socialization. In a European context, Bourdieu (2002/1985: 670) remarks:

One of the effects of normal contact with high-brow literature is to destroy popular experience, leaving people sadly deprived between two cultures: an original culture that has been abolished and a learned culture that has been acquired just enough that one can no longer talk about the weather – just enough that one knows what not to say and is left with nothing to say.

Definitions of ‘popular culture’ usually draw on Williams’s second and third meanings of culture. John Storey (1993: 6ff) offers six common definitions of popular culture: 1) in quantitative terms: that which many people like and favour; 2) that which is left as a (sub-standard) residue after ‘high culture’ is defined by judgments mostly based on aesthetic and moral criteria; 3) ‘mass culture’, i.e. that which is mass produced for mass consumption, the perspective being wholly commercial (and often of American origin); 4) culture which originates from the people for the people; 5) drawing on Antonio Gramsci, a site for struggle between forces of power of dominant groups and forces of resistance of sub-ordinate groups; 6) from a post-modern perspective, there is no longer any distinction between high culture and popular culture.

Jonathan Rose (2001: 367) says critics have since long connected popular culture with a wide range of social evils: “juvenile crime, racism, violence, male supremacy, consumer capitalism, not to mention bad taste”.<sup>53</sup> Though Rose (explains that ‘high brow’ intellectuals were actually keenly interested in ‘low-

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<sup>52</sup> Allegedly, Ezra Pound coined this expression.

<sup>53</sup> Rose himself, holds that these accusations are not without ground, but emphasises the complexity and ambiguity of peoples’ actual uses of literacy and culture.

brow' culture and regarded it as "earthy, authentic, indigenous, unselfconscious, vital, traditional, natural, free of the taint of commercialism, a source of inspiration for high art" (Ibid. 432). Virginia Woolf claimed there is a complementary relation between 'high-brow' and 'low-brow': "they cannot exist apart, when one is the complement and the other side of the other!" (Ibid.) What has arisen debate is the emergence of the 'middle-brow' culture, a strange position in a stratified class system, termed pejoratively "bourgeois, petit bourgeois, mass culture, mid cult, admass, suburban, middle-class" (Ibid.) For 'high-brow' writers like Woolf, the 'middle-brow' became invariably connected with the new moneymaking class and writers like Arnold Bennet (cf. Chapter I), who earned both popularity and royalties. Famously, Radway (1984) has studied how book actors successfully cultivated the 'middle-brow' market in the US.

Following the collapse of "highbrow" (high culture) and "lowbrow" (popular culture) in the US, John Seabrook (2000: 28) speaks of "nobrow". Nobrow entails earning social rank by commercial culture, a veritable "hierarchy of hotness". Recently Steven Johnson (2005) addressed the still-pervasive morality against popular culture and media and criticized the tendency to make literary culture – reading books – into the yardstick that all cultural development must be measured against.<sup>54</sup> He argues that especially popular media have been made increasingly complex over the years, making us smarter all along, even to the extent that "Everything is bad is good for you". Tyler Cowen (2000: 39) regards what he calls 'junk culture' as a kind of luxury that we can afford in a wealthier society.

For De Certeau (1997/1994/1974: 143), what is "trivial" is actually fundamental in culture; along with the operative and the illocutionary it forms the hub of an on-going cultural revolution, "sketched out at the base and disseminated in the innovations that swarm at grassroot levels". Culture thus oscillates between two forms, one that permanates and one that innovates. (Ibid. 137) Cultural expression is to De Certeau foremost an operation, which in turn entails movement. It comprises three themes (here rephrased as present participle throughout): 1) doing something with something; 2) doing something with someone; and 3) changing everyday reality, modifying one's lifestyle as a challenge and risk to existence itself. In this way, De Certeau moves away from both the representations and from the "cultivated" beings, and adopts a perspective that centres on practices, human relations and the change and movement of structures in social life. (Ibid. 143) It is generally hoped, says Ann Swidler (in Schatzki et al. 2001), that the practice perspective would resolve the problems of culture to link ideas with behaviour.

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<sup>54</sup> Johnson (2005) approaches popular culture as a "complex system of interacting forces" that operate on different levels ranging from narratology/semiotics, media theory via economics and sociology to neuroscience.

## Limitations of Culture

For Nietzsche, the mere fact that society in modernity has formed a concept of culture is the evidence that a real, lived culture was gone. Therefore, he engaged in a long struggle *against culture*, but importantly, his cultural critique just like his philosophy was launched in the language of natural history (Reed 1978: 159). With Nietzsche (GM: 23) “*the meaning of all culture is simply to breed a tame and civilized animal, a domestic animal*”. Hence, culture forms an important part in what Nietzsche described as the pervasive herd-formation of society. Culture operates as a tool for social sanitation. This may sound controversial to our contemporary readers, but if we look for ‘cultural workers’ in the national statistics for employment in Sweden, (SCB 2005: 308), we will find that they belong in the category of “Personal services and cultural activities, sanitation”.<sup>55</sup>

Bourdieu’s theory of the divisionary logic of culture captures what Nietzsche found so disgusting about culture. To Nietzsche, culture forms reactive instincts and *ressentiment* which are tools of culture. Culture is produced by the Slave; the Slave will remain its conscious Master (Klossowski 1997/1969: 11). In Nietzsche’s view, Christian slave morality is extended into ‘bourgeois culture’ and further into industrialized society by means of a certain form of ‘communality’. (Klossowski 1997/1969: 12) Later, Freud famously observed how humanly impulses are repressed and that people feel increasingly displaced in culture and society. Nietzsche showed no mercy, “These ‘tools of culture’ are a disgrace to humanity, and rather something that raises a suspicion, a counter-argument against ‘culture’ in general” (GM.: 23) He then ventured a combat against ‘culture’ and ‘cultural belief’ (Cf. Throsby and Bourdieu) in order to restore a *lived* culture – a culture of *affects*.

De Certeau (1999/ 1974) distinguishes between ‘culture in the singular’, which always enforces a law of a power, and ‘culture in the plural’ that calls for engaging in struggle. (Ibid 139) A cultural tactic is a matter of existence and apportioning an unquantifiable risk to other forms that are both quantifiable and already given to us. It is about inspecting the “madness of being”: the desire to live, and at the same time, losing all assurances (and reassurances, I shall add) that society multiplies and provides us with. In this way, culture covers more than the (ideological) questions of values or mankind.

According to Latour (1993/1991: 104), the very notion of culture is created by society by putting Nature within brackets (eg. “bracketing Nature off”). With Latour, there are only “natures-cultures”. In other words, nature or cultures do

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<sup>55</sup> This sector employed 338,000 people in 2003. The other categories are: Agriculture, forestry and fishing (89); Manufacturing, mining, quarrying, electricity and water supply including engineering industries (723); Construction (239); Wholesale and retail trade and communications (802); Financial intermediation, business activities (593); Education, research and development (516); Health and social work (687); Public administration, etc (243) and Unknown (4). The total work force amounts to 4234 000. (Ibid.)

not exist separately. In the wake of Latour's realization, Tony Bennett, Liz McFall and Mike Pryke (2008) envision a whole complex of 'nature-cultures-economies-socials'. Thus, in view of the discussion of economy and culture that informed the set-up of this book (see Chapter I), Bennett, McFall and Pryke suggest an enlarged take on the problem. It can be argued however, that the social aspects are already included in the concepts of cultures and economies. And yet, bringing social to the fore is specifically interesting for my study, due to the social nature of the use of value, and of reading practices.

### Culture Set Against Economy

Pierre Bourdieu (2000/1992: 190) describes the emergence of the literary field in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in dualistic terms: literature is either for art's sake or for money's sake. He maintains that the *l'art pour l'art* literary field has committed a fundamental break with the economic order in order to attain autonomy as a field. It is what he calls, 'anti-economy'. To Bourdieu, this break is the starting point into the field of "limited production" which operates according to binary principles or mechanisms of hierarchical differentiation. The primary opposition of, on one hand, the 'pure production' in which the people at the receiving end at the (limited) market are simultaneously the competitors;<sup>56</sup> and on the other hand, the 'large scale production' which entails the subjection under the expectations of a broad mass audience.

Bourdieu (2000/1992: 271) maintains that he seeks to re-evaluate the foundations of economic theory *per se* by looking into the field of cultural production. But Bourdieu rather establishes the privileged position of a traditional economic order and takes the neoclassical economic theory for granted.<sup>57</sup> In defence against this critique, Bourdieu (1990: 111) argues that his way of treating the economic and cultural fields as homologous is mistaken for an attempt to make them identical. The mistake follows upon a severe case of reductionism in which, for example, all interests are made into economic interests.<sup>58</sup> He admits that it may seem that he has taken an economic perspective and transferred it to his theory of fields of production, in the way that Weber did in his analysis of religion, but he claims that this is not the case. Instead, he holds that these characteristics were generally valid for the fields at hand and that economic

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<sup>56</sup> This binary mechanism continues to govern the field of pure production, so that it too falls apart in avant-garde and consecrated avant-garde groups.

<sup>57</sup> See for instance Amy Koritz & Douglas Koritz's (1999) critique against Bourdieu's use of economic language in cultural theory.

<sup>58</sup> But even so, Alain Caillé (2001/1994) maintains his critique against Bourdieu's way of granting a causal primacy of the economic capital. In other words, to Bourdieu, to be "disinterested" in the face of a variety of interests is only a privilege of the rich...

theory has highlighted this before without giving it its proper theoretical grounds.

Jack Amariglio and David F. Ruccio (in Woodmansee & Osteen 1999) emphasize that all economic criticism need to monitor and refine its assumptions in order to avoid misuse or unnecessary extension of the term “economy” and challenge an all too simplistic “economism” that seek to explain cultural phenomena as cause and effect. Bourdieu claims that it is the construction of the object of study that has attracted economic thoughts and concepts, rather than the other way around. (2000/1992: 270) In other words, in order to understand the literary field, it just happens that we need to call for economic theory. To Bourdieu then, even if “Culture” seeks to break free of the economic order, we need to follow suit, wearing our economic lenses. Whether Bourdieu wants to or not, he establishes that culture is economy.

Throsby (2000: 12) holds that this perspective does not rule out other conceptions of culture:

Rather, this economic view of culture simply accepts as a descriptive fact that the activities of producing and consuming cultural goods and services within an economic system do generally involve economic transactions, that these activities can be encircled in some way and that what is contained within the circle can be called an industry and analysed accordingly.

However, my critique against Bourdieu is not really directed against his proximity to neo-classical economics, but rather the opposite. Bourdieu’s analysis of the literary field starts with the assumption of a *break* from the economic order. By envisioning such a primordial break, he in fact reinstates the privileged power of the economic field.

And yet, many economists (Ahlmarm & Brodin 1978; Ahlmarm & Ljungqvist 1979; Fishwick 1985) and cultural economists (Van der Ploeg 2004; Hjort-Andersen 1996; Tietzel 1995) seek to formulate economic models and laws that are suitable to the book and to the book trade, for instance as regards price, market structure, consumption, *et cetera*. However, they seem to depart from a very traditional understanding of what these concepts mean and what they entail. They rarely, if at all, think over or question whether their tools are appropriate for their enterprise. Moreover, they have no expectance that they will have anything to contribute to other trades and to general thought on economy.

### Complementary Culture and Economy

In conclusion to an article, cultural economist Chr. Hjort-Andersen’s (2001) writes: “So it is not all economics. But in my view this is hardly as interesting as the conclusion that it is *also* economics.” Hence, here the writer suggests a complementary view of cultural and economic concerns. In recent decades, there have actually been many attempts to reconcile the differences between



economy and culture, either regarding culture as fundamentally economic in nature, and conversely, following both the 'cultural turn' in the 1980s, economy as a fundamentally cultural phenomenon. Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2004: xiv) have termed a 'synthetic model' of culture and economy because they are often held as partners. With the increased discussion and scholarly interest in 'postmodern' perspectives, it has been suggested that the boundary between economy and culture have been blurred, even to the point of oblivion. (Cf. Firat & Venkatesh 1995) The prevalent aesthetization of economy is often held as a primary argument in this direction.

The synthetic model is deemed to be dominant in the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. It has also become subject for dissatisfaction and critique because in practice it transfers nonviable or inappropriate models from one sphere to other. In other words, the model is less synthesising than believed. First, because economic practices are social and meaningful, it has become popular to describe them as "cultural". Moreover, the process of 'Culturalization' implies that culture is playing an increasingly large part in economic relations, a development that many hold to be "good" because no one is opposing culture.

Culture, as Alan Warde (1997: 185) notes, has come to encompass a wide range of meanings: non-material, social, aesthetic, informational, intellectual, normative, communicative, meaningful, human and civilizing. In an increasingly global knowledge economy, Paul du Gay & Michael Pryke (2003/2002: 1) observe that 'culture' is rendered as privileged in organizations because it influences the very structure of people's thoughts, feelings and actions. Hereby culture is attractive to management looking to establish the "right" norms and values that are needed for creating successful, effective organizations. This forms what Ash Amin & Nigel Thrift (2004: xiv) call the 'additive model' of culture and economy, in which the cultural elements are added to economic assumptions.

The reverse movement however, that economic relations are gaining ground in culture, is often held as bad, because it could be a consequence of rationalization and commoditization. (Warde 1997: 186) With Habermas's perspective, society and the book is caught in a dichotomy of *commercial life versus culture*, a relation in which the first will seek domination over the other. Habermas has been duly criticized for not being really interested in living people and in their doings. His analysis does not concern the "Plebeian" public sphere and he does not consider at all how people go about their lives, or what stuff their dreams are made of. Has he "never been to a sewing society meeting, dancing at Folkets Hus or in a shed of enlisted men [*manskapsbod*] during lunch break"? (Dahlgvist, Habermas preface xxix)

It is important to note that Habermas launched his critique before the student revolution of 1968 – an event that would influence many thinkers about the relations between society and individual. De Certeau (1988/1984), among many others, was sincerely shaken up and was inspired to pay more attention to the

*ordinary* man and his ways and means to take part of society. What is interesting is the use that is made of things by means of practices. With this shift, the everyday life suddenly gained ground as an interesting field for research. We have already seen that Miller (2000) sought to establish a rapprochement between commercial life and culture, and the argument for a bridging of economic value and peoples' values, and how we may venture studies into the use of value.

### Societal Uncoupling of Economy

In society however, there is a general and long-running tendency to uncouple economic concepts from everyday popular experience, rendering economy and economic concerns as the bottom-line in society (Miller 2001; Meikle 2000). The establishment of this binary relationship between "culture" and "economy" often entails that one of these aspects is subjected to the other. This quite commonly means that economic language and/or theory is privileged when explaining the phenomena of literacy (Lundberg 1998), reading (Furhammar 1985), and the production of books (Bourdieu 1992; Thornton 2004; Thompson 2005). The posited dualism between economy and culture may have led us to believe that they do not operate in specific modes other than in binary relation to each other. Hence, these models constitute less an encounter between economy and culture than commonly intended – regardless whether encounter means debate or intercourse.

Miller (2000) reflects in his text "The Birth of Value," upon the relationship between commerce and culture and offers a vantage point for value. For him, culture is neither the context of commerce nor its constraint. Far from it, commerce is often that which creates culture in the first place, and as such it is the source and not the opponent of value.

Based on history however, 'commerce' is not a ready substitution for 'economy', especially in terms of value. The ancients did not trust tradesmen and commerce was held in low regard (cf. chapter VII). The theories by Plato and Aristotle regarding the *oikos* actually developed against the historical backdrop of booty from warfare and colonization. When self-provision was the economic and political ideal, trade was seen as undermining independency. This is not to say that commerce and trade have not brought us culture – indeed, in chapter VII I will give an example in this direction – only that the issue of value must be framed and discussed in its terms of economic and political complexity.

What is especially interesting with Miller's approach is how he envisions that culture draws upon an (economic) source for value. In other word, he does not say that is caused by commerce as an effect or logical consequence; rather that it springs from it, as a stream surges up from a spring. In my interpretation, this means that they are connected, but yet different from one another.

What we have before us here is quite a different problematic than the one that C. P. Snow addressed – that we are witnessing the falling apart of two different cultures. Regarding economic practices as profoundly cultural has in extension led to the commonplace argument that no distinction is possible between the concepts of economy and culture, or that the boundaries are collapsing. This view has appeared especially in the marketing and consumer research inspired by ‘postmodern’ perspectives (Cf. Firat & Venkatesh 1995). According to Amin & Thrift (2004), this collapse of boundaries often emerges as a hybrid view of culture and economy, drawing upon Latour’s and Callon’s actor-network theory and similar approaches, even to the point of getting rid of the two concepts altogether, relying instead upon different modes and kinds of orderings.

Apart from the additive model and the synthetic model of culture and economy, Amin & Thrift (2004) envision a new relation and analysis, for which they lack a definite terminology and vocabulary. It is an approach that takes into account the sheer variety and diversity of actors, both human and non-human.

[...] it is an attempt to identify the varied impulses and articulations through which *value* is formed, added and circulated; summing to what can only be described as a cultural economic ensemble with no clear hierarchy of significance. These impulses and articulations are not only plural and mixed, but also performative, since they involve not only following the rules of the game but also constantly establishing new rules. (Ibid. xv, italics added)

Indeed, this approach should also entail an understanding of the relationship of the cultural economic ensemble to nature and the social, for they too need to be taken into account. Tony Bennett, Liz McFall and Mike Pryke (2008) have suggested we should map the complex of ‘nature-cultures-economies-socials’, as they tend to emerge together. It is not entirely clear however, in what way socials is differentiated from cultures. Miller (2000) may also have views on the posited order of the complex on his premise of culture drawing upon an economic source.

## Theories of Value

Cultural economist Throsby (2000: 20), argues that the divide between economic(s) and culture can be bridged and linked together by the concept of value as a common denominator, for value carries both economic and non-economic connotations. He has sought to establish recognition of culture and of cultural value within economics, rather than as an exception to the traditional economic rule. (Throsby 2001)

Since the time of Aristotle, the concept of value has remained at the heart of economic analysis. For him, the value of economic organization and acquisition of things lay above all in the proper use. Today theories of value pertaining to economy and culture are in rich supply inside and outside of academia. What

makes the concept of value especially interesting according to anthropologist Miller (2006: 2), is that it encompasses both the monetary worth given to an object (value), and its very opposite, that which cannot be reduced to monetary worth (values), such as the significance of our family or our religious beliefs. Values then should not be understood simply as value in the plural, but as that which is 'inalienable' in everyday life.

According to Steven Hitlin and Jane Allyn Piliavin (2004), scholarly interest in values has tended to shift over time and has taken academic focus and approach with it. That said, the term has recently recaptured attention in the social sciences. As the idea appears and reappears in economic concepts, the distinction between values and value may be analogous to the prevalent distinction between an everyday commonsensical world and an economic world. The difference between these worlds is often explained as though it were a difference between the realist and the idealist perspective, with the accountant arguing with the economist about which one of them is concerned with the 'real world' (Meikle 2000: 247).

The question of the relationship between 'value' and 'values' is important, but not quite resolved, neither in fields that relate to economy, or those that relate to culture and literature. As we have already seen, Miller describes 'value' as connected with economy and 'values' as fundamentally 'noneconomic', or 'outside-of-economic'. In this section, we will deal with each concept in turn. We will begin by venturing some notions of what are 'values', then exploring value from an economic perspective, up until it has been appropriated into marketing and consumer research. Then we will turn to outside-of-economic perspectives on value and values, specifically in the context of literature.

## About Values

If *value* generally is regarded as economic, forming the bottomline of economics, then *values* are regarded as forming the constituent of culture. The interest in values have shifted over time within sociology, according to Hitlin & Piliavin (2004), who observe that scholars often refer too hastily and superficially to "norms and values" and their importance to society. According to organization scholar Gabriel (2008), most often values are placed in opposition to money, markets, and the economy, and it is common from a critical point of view to argue that cultural *values* are destroyed by economic *value*.

Values are "core beliefs about what is important, right, good, and desirable" (Gabriel 2008: 312). Values touch upon what is held as moral, social or spiritual in nature. Values belong with individuals but are the result of long processes of socialization and cannot easily be changed. They are less tangible than symbols and reach far deeper than norms (Ibid.). Norms are unwritten rules for expected social behaviour. (Hatch 2006) Values and norms and are group-level

phenomena, but norms are tied to specific situations, when values are “trans-situational”. (Hitlin & Piliavin 2004) Yet “core values” change with their cultural context, so they must be understood in their local setting. (Solomon, Bamossy & Askegaard 1999: 106)

Moreover, most scholars treat values as almost deterministic in relation to individual behaviour. Many will agree that values influence both motivation and action, but the general relationship to “concrete behaviour” is quite far-fetched in most cases. Actually, consumption may be one area where values do direct specific behaviour; here personal values and consumerism tend to blend together. Therefore much marketing and consumption research relies upon psychological studies that seek to discern what values provide behavioural motivation (Solomon et al. 1999). Following psychologist Milton Rokeach’s (1973) argument, individual behaviour is better explained by one’s entire value system, which entails a ranking order of values and ideals in accordance with their importance. There is also the difference between two sets of values: *instrumental values* which designate the specific mode of conduct, and *terminal values* that specify the end-state.

Values can reflect cultural ways to deal with biologically based needs, but should not be confused with them. Values also differ from attitudes, which are applied more directly to concrete social object. Attitudes are also positive and negative, whereas values tend to carry positive valor only. (Hitlin & Piliavin 2004) Indeed, following Rokeach (1973), consumption scholars gloss ‘value’ as a “belief that some condition is preferable to its opposite” (Solomon et al. 1999: 504, see also Thompson & Troester 2002). Of course, values are often conflicting.

Extensive psychological research by Shalom H. Schwartz (eg. 1992; 2001) follows Rokeach’s systems approach and points to a theoretical relationship between ten universal types of values that provide motivation across many cultures (Hitlin & Piliavin 2004; Schwartz 2001; Solomon et al. 1999). The values are distributed along two dimensions and grouped in accordance with four higher-order values: Self-enhancement; Self-transcendence; Conservation and Openness to Change. These groups of values are modelled in terms of a wheel (see figure in appendix), that both expresses the opposition of values, and their proximity to one another.

According to the model, self-enhancement comprises hedonism, achievement and power. Here hedonism is defined as sensual gratification centring on the self’s needs. Achievement is understood as personal success under competitive conditions and power as prestige and status, control over resources and people. In the opposite end of the dimension, self-transcendence is placed, encompassing benevolence, described as the desire to attain, enhance and preserve the welfare of those people in close contact; and universalism, defined as the concern and tolerance for everybody’s welfare across the world.

In the other direction, Openness to change and Conservation are placed at different ends. Conservation comprises security, conformity, and tradition. By security we speak of the stability, harmony, and safety of the self and in relation to others and to society. Conformity brings the self-restraint and subordination of the self in relation to others' expectations. Tradition entails the wide array of religious and traditional activities. By contrast, Openness to Change draws upon the values of stimulation, the enhancement of risk-taking adventure, and of self-direction, which comprises individual thought and action, the very idea of agency. (Ibid.) In the case of cultural values, some are held as more enjoyable than others, depending on their possibility of providing "change, novelty and self-renewal" (Bianchi in Hutter & Throsby 2008: 244).

The Rokeachian value-system tradition, which is strong in consumer research, has been criticized by Thompson & Trester (2002) for undue reductionism on part of cultural context, understanding and meanings, especially in view of the increasing fragmentation of postmodern consumer culture (cf. Firat & Venkatesch 1995). Importantly, this critique needs to be understood against the discussion of whether and to what extent values and culture can be causally linked to specific behaviour in the first place (See Swidler in Schatzki et al. 2001). Where Swidler suggests that values could be substituted by a discussion on systems of practices, Thompson & Trester (2002) retain the connection between culture, agency and values.

Drawing upon a study of the natural health marketplace Thompson & Troester (2002) suggest developing an awareness of microcultural domains that draw together distinct meanings from a broad, shared culture in a way that is specific to the context. In this way, a value system can be understood as a network of narratives. Individuals tell stories about their experiences of consumption and thereby articulate their value systems. Among other things, these "consumer articulations" bring together broad, generic issues (such as health, wellness, illness), with mainstream norms of consumption and the industry context (the health care industry). Indeed, together these articulations can be used to challenge what consumers perceive as outmoded worldviews and pervasive economic thinking. Foregrounding cultural contextualization, value systems are also far from universal, but dynamic and everchanging.

## About Value

Questions of value in literature have of course been dealt with implicitly ever since Aristotle's *Poetics* and the ancient art of rhetoric that provide norms and values regarding literary forms of construction and expression.<sup>59</sup> They appeared

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<sup>59</sup> A recent contribution to the literary discussion about value is the anthology with the title *The Value of Literature* (2009) [*Litteraturens värde*, ed. Anders Mortensen], where literary scholars and

long before the concept of ‘axiology’ was coined for the philosophy of value (Gk. *axios* – value). (Palm 2009: 283)

In his essay on value, Porter (1965: 42) writes that if philosophy generally deals with the concept of what is rendered “good” – to which all human activity and desire are directed – then economics deal with ‘goods’, a concept that encompasses both goods and services. With Plato however, philosophy and money both revolve around ‘worth’ and provide order to the other arts. (Shell 1993/1978: 25) Yet they are different; the money good is not the same as Good. (Ibid. 41)

This specific value of the ‘good’ should not be thought of as a given, for it too has a genesis and it too must be scrutinized and discussed in terms of valuation, says Nietzsche in his essay *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1998/1887). What is deemed “good” originates neither from an abstract concept of ‘goodness,’ nor higher truth as Plato termed it, nor from a principle of ‘usefulness,’ as claimed by Bentham and other English utilitarians. Instead, it was the ruling people themselves, the flesh-and-blood noblemen, who created values. They simply felt good, and therefore they declared that they were indeed “good” in contrast to those with characteristics perceived as base, common, simple, and vulgar (Ibid. 10). From this perspective, language itself originates from the ruling powers as an expression of values. Words and names are the rulers’ means for corraling and taking possession of things and events (Ibid. 11). In fact, all words for “good” belong with the basic concepts of ‘noble,’ ‘aristocratic,’ and merits related to property. Much later the word “good” was transferred to the soul (Ibid. 12), and the notion of “good reading” implied that books should work directly on the human soul.

For the physiocrats, like Quesnay for example, only farming provided real, concrete value and wealth. If all work had created real riches, then all nations would want labor to increase. But work by the craftsman, the industrialist, and the tradesman was deemed “sterile”. They work only with already existent things. The cobbler assembles different parts and makes a shoe. Because the shoe is worth more money than the separate parts, it is easy to think that value has been created. Quesnay however, makes a difference between *creating value* and *adding value*. Industry adds riches together and that is all, and it does not contribute to the reproduction of wealth. Even a rationalizing thing like the printingpress is sterile from this perspective, for it only adds books and does not create them. (Guillet de Monthoux 1989: 40)

For Adam Smith (1776), there are two different meanings of value, one that pointed to utility in the value-in-use, and the other to the value-in-exchange. Interestingly, they need not be connected:

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philosophers provide discussion and insight into the question of value broadly in-between literature and economy, or, in the midst of the ‘literary economy’ (cf. Shell 1993/1978).

Nothing is more useful than water, but it will purchase scarce any thing; scarce any thing can be had in exchange for it. A diamond on the contrary, has scarce any value in use; but a very great quantity of goods may frequently be had in exchange for it.

Hence, to an economist, the value-in-exchange does not state whether diamonds are any “better” or “more important” than water (Stiglitz 1993: 98), just that they have more (monetary) worth in circulation on the market. In this way, value-in-exchange became privileged in economic theory, and thus, contested by critics. Famously, Karl Marx emphasized the value of a commodity is constituted by its social and material relations, especially by the value of labor. Although consumption was deemed important, economic theories have revolved mainly around the value of production.

### Towards Value in Relation

Of all the theoretical material available, two articles especially stand out in the literature on value because they tie in well with Nietzsche’s genealogical approach: “Value Theory as a Key to the Interpretation of the Development of Economic Thought” written by Richard L. Porter (1965) and published by *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* and Scott Meikle’s (2000) “Quality and Quantity in Economics: The Metaphysical Construction of the Economic Realm” published in *New Literary History*. These articles are by authors in different academic disciplines – Porter is in the Social Sciences and Meikle is in the Arts – which further advances the idea that the question of value may be best settled in the interstices of different academic fields.

According to Porter (1965), value should be used as a key to interpreting economic thinking over time. However, Porter himself departs from the Aristotelian tradition but treats value as a threefold construct: value-in-use (utility), value-in-exchange (value), and value-in-money (price), and he provides a lucid overview of these concepts, covering their different emphases, their primary assumptions, and their basic problems. This logic captures Porter’s view of the extensive multiplication of the infinite relations between goods. The basic conception of value is for him *both* a good-for-something and good-in-relation. Porter (1965: 46) himself says that it is impossible to remain within one order of analysis, especially when dealing with policy matters. We should be aware however of what we are doing. Taking the great variety of goods into account, Porter says, we need to establish some sort of relationship between them. That is, they enter into an implicit or explicit ‘value system’. Thus, in answer to the question of whether value should be seen as “good-for-something” or “good-



in-relation-to,” Porter holds that it is in fact both: value-in-use can only be seen in relation to other goods.<sup>60</sup>

Porter suggested studying value-in-use that refers to the final consumer, the human person and that person’s wants, before the utility of specific objects. Porter however trusts the effability of personal wants within a total value system, and also assumes that economic wants are satiable. One problem Porter discerns is the overwhelming difficulty of measurement and aggregation when welfare is increasingly grounded in the specific order of value-in-exchange: How can we possibly relate the impersonal social processes of exchange to individual value-in-use?

In his 2000 discussion, Meikle examines the shift over time from the basic assumption of incommensurability of things and activities to the now natural assumption of commensurability. He investigates especially how nineteenth-century theorists put the rich variety of things and activities through a thread mill of abstraction in order to render them theoretically homogenous. In economic thought, qualities have repeatedly been supplanted by quantities ever since. Above all, Meikle is concerned with the increasing uncoupling of economic concepts and everyday folk economics. Anthropologist Miller (2006: 1, 9) has a similar concern and suggests that it is better to ask what value actually does than what it is or how it is conceived.<sup>61</sup> He writes not of use value but instead solicits a study of the use of value.

At the very outset the different meanings of the word *value* present a variegated and paradoxical picture. As far as Porter (1965: 47) is concerned, Aristotle should have established value-in-exchange as the basis of analysis and then explored more fully the ramifications of the market model. Porter is aware however that the shift toward value-in-exchange brings consequences for welfare, with the main problem being the issue of sharing and distribution. How can social output produced through the social processes of exchange be properly distributed among the individuals having a relative share in these processes? According to Marx’ theory of value, it is not use-value or exchange that is the bottom-line abstraction; it is the value of labor, and therefore it is labor that renders commodities commensurable (Miller 2008/2006: 2). The main problem with Marx’s theory of value, holds Miller (Ibid. 3), is that it neglects an individual’s own values, thereby imposing a separation between economic value and other-than-economic values that will be detrimental, not conducive, to welfare.

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<sup>60</sup> Economist Alfred Marshall also holds value as a relative concept since it is the expression of a relationship between at least two things at a particular time and place. For him, however, value equals exchange value (Meikle 2000: 252).

<sup>61</sup> Here Miller urges the reader to compare this statement with Alfred Gell’s (1998) discussion on art.

## Value in Marketing

Classical 20th century marketing theory simply builds on the idea that consumers prefer those products that render them the most value relative to other available products. (Kotler 2000, *passim*) Competition at the market thus centres on the firm's 'value proposition'. With Michael Porter's (1980) notion of the 'value-chain', the firm's internal processes of production and cost-effectiveness were put to intense scrutiny. Scholars have also suggested a non-linear model of the 'value-star' where value is created in a process where several actors are jointly involved (Wikström et al. 1998). Hence, over time there has been a move towards speaking of "co-creation of value" between businesses and consumers (Cf. Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004a; 2004b; 2006), especially following the rise of scholarly interest in, on one hand, 'hedonic consumption' and 'experiential marketing' (Cf. Holbrook & Hirshman 1982); and on the other, services and the customer–employee interaction in the 'servicescape' (Bitner 1992). Indeed, in the search for a (postmodern) sense of community, products and services provide a 'linking value' among 'tribes' of consumers (Cova 1997). In the marketing and consumption tradition, a 'value system' denotes "a culture's ranking of the relative importance of values" (Solomon et al. 1999). In other words, no distinction is made between value and values.

Consumer researchers Holbrook et al. (1986) explained that *using* belongs with product consumption, and *choosing* with purchase decisions. In their view, these two are connected: using helps to determine choosing. One of the underpinnings is the difference between *utilitarian value* that operates extrinsic, aiming at some further purpose, and *aesthetic appreciation* that operates intrinsic, which is, enjoying consumption without any regard for practical use. They studied British housewives' reasons for using products and modelled a matrix with utility and aesthetic as the vertical dimension capturing usage, and the horizontal dimension tentatively described the characteristics of choosing, from highly routinized to one-shot decisions. Novels were placed along with products coffee, bread, liquor and perfume in the space of aesthetic grounds and routinized behaviour.

Morris Holbrook (1999) has proposed a matrix of The Typology of Consumer Value based on his definition of consumer value as "an interactive relativistic preference experience". This attempt has aroused some critique by Stephen Brown (1999), who argues that the act of pinning value to the ground in this manner will bring it down, stonedead.

Surely if value is about anything, it is about beauty, wonder, sublimity, transcendence, ineffability, spirituality and so on. [---] And we boil it down to a matrix? We can't put it into words but we can put it in a box. (1999: 163)

This critique against boxing in value becomes even more relevant when we are not looking to say what value is, but rather what value does (Cf. Miller 2000).

For Stephen Brown (1999), Holbrook's suggested matrix of consumer value makes for ample opportunity to debunk both the discussion on value and the (marketing) scholars' practice of creating matrices. He departs from everyday experience in suggesting that comparative value judgments are passed all the time, not only as preferences relating to a variety of goods, but also in-between persons. The whole issue about discussing, what values are valid and what are not, is wholly uninteresting and connected by Brown to the topic of compiling collector's canons in face of popular culture. A concept like 'quality' does not say what it is, but only what it is not, thereby it has an 'apophatic' character. Above all, we consumers sense value when we cannot get what we want.

Matrices, says Brown, raise monuments in an open and fluid world, monuments that are circumscribed with nuances by their creators but nevertheless transported into textbooks as building blocks for the truth. They rarely frame or organize or form classifications of empirical evidence, but rather constitute what is evidence and keep thought within an iron clad isolation cell. And yet, the value matrix raises the query if it has not devalued value. (Ibid. 164) (The plural of value not mentioned at all, cf. *ibid.* 160).

### Disaggregate Concept of Cultural Value

Throsby (2001) observes what may be a crisis in contemporary theories of cultural value, due to the complexity and elusiveness of the topic. The emergence of radical critique against traditional views and its ensuing success has evoked a defense for conventional economic modes of thought. Still optimistic about the theoretical prospects, he proposes a 'disaggregate' concept of cultural value that can entail the following aspects of any given work:

a) *Aesthetic value*; although rather elusive, could consider for example the beauty, harmony, form and other aesthetic properties and takes into account the influence of style, fashion, and taste ("good" or "bad" taste). b) *Spiritual value*; conveys above all understanding, enlightenment and insight. It may be interpreted in both a formal religious context, where the value is rather specific or in a secular context where the concept refers to humans' inner qualities. c) *Social value*; denotes a sense of identity, social belonging, and connection to place and the nature of society. d) *Historical value*; is an expression of a work's connection to history and its reflection of a life or society at the time of its creation, and how it creates a bridge from past to present, which emerges in a different light. e) *Symbolic value*, connected with cultural objects that exist both as repositories and conveyors of cultural meaning embraced by symbols, etc. f) *Authenticity value*, is connected with representing the real, original and unique artwork. This value is identifiable in its own right, and is additional to the above-mentioned types of value.

Value is, in Throsby's interpretation, both various and variable. Thus, the characteristics can be used in an assessment of cultural value by means of a range of methods. The possibilities are many, Throsby maintains: assessment could be conducted along a scale that can be fixed or flexible, objective or subjective, according to principles that are either absolute or relative, depending on the present case. The important thing, says Throsby, is that cultural value can be increasingly asserted alongside economic value. (Ibid.) In Hutter and Throsby's 2007 discussion, however, they emphasize that although both types of value operate in accordance with its own type of logic, "economic value shapes cultural valuation and cultural value influences price" (Hutter & Throsby 2007: 9). In other words, the economic value is bottom-line.

### The Cultural Value of Books

According to Frederick Van Der Ploeg (2004: 6), some types of value mentioned by Throsby could well be applied to books – ranging from *aesthetic value* to *authenticity value* via *social identity value* among others. Without any further argument, he cautions against a distinction from book's economic value captured in the concepts of use value, exchange value, status value, option value, etc. He mentions that bibliophiles are well aware of the *store value* of books, at least of some titles. Society as a whole will be more interested in the *option value* and *bequest value* where books are saved for future generations. (Ibid.) Bianchi (in Hutter & Throsby 2008: 253) notes that especially literature operates less with substitutability than many other arts, considering that increased reproducibility does not take away the joys of reading past and present works that complement each other.

The thought of value as "disaggregate" on one hand and as a connecting device on the other is rather problematic. Palm (2009: 289) claims widely separated concepts of value cannot be held as independent of each other. Throsby (2000) hopes to show the multi-dimensionality of the concept by disentangling or "deconstructing" cultural value in this way. Moreover, his colleague Terry Smith argues that certain characteristics are doubled so that opposites (e.g. 'thesis and anti-thesis') are simultaneously present in cultural value. For example, aesthetic value encompasses both harmonious beauty and un-orderly sublimity. (Throsby 2001: 30) Novels combine contrasting values of fiction and reality, of lies and truth, etc. (Bianchi in Hutter & Throsby 2008: 252) These observations may indeed form an argument for using a complementary perspective (Cf. Chapter II) here, not only on the relationship of economic and cultural value, but also within cultural value *per se*.

## Bridging or Overcoming Value and Values

Up until now we have dealt with ‘value’ and ‘values’ separately, based upon the notion of a premised divide between the two concepts. And yet, as shown by Craig J. Thompson and Maura Troester’s (2002) account, consumer values cannot be wholly disconnected from the specific industry context. Miller (2001) differentiates between those theories and practices that seek to use value to bridge the divide between economic and non-economic value and those theories that do not. The anthropological tradition recounted by Miller (*ibid.*) tends to lean on a relativist approach towards the creation and destruction of value, whereas Marx for instance, supports a universal stance. With Miller, Marx’s theory brings a bottom-line view of value, where labor is foundational to any other value. Miller claims the latter to be “bottom-line” theories of value in that they seek to establish a belief in universal value to which economic forms are necessarily bound. This approach tends to privilege abstraction, universals, and the individual before society and practice (*Ibid.* 7).

Miller (2001) suggests that we try to build a concept of value that will bridge the two elements of the economic and the other-than-economic or outside-of-economic. As an anthropologist, Miller explores this connection by observing how people and organizations use value everyday, and at the heart of it all is the issue of how its use can generate further value (*Ibid.* 9). Miller suggests turning an eye towards what value does, and not only what value is. He claims that what value actually does is bridging the theoretical gap between value and values in people’s everyday life use of value. This proposition taps straight into the larger discussion of whether value is universally applicable or relative, depending on the community and conditions. Miller suggests following closely people’s own ways of solving incommensurable things and thus how they transcend basic oppositions in their lives. In other words, people seem to find their own use of ‘value’ valuable.

Miller’s approach to the concept of value as a bridge between economic value and other-than-economic value in the everyday lives of people and organizations does indeed tie into the descriptions of the book as commonly impinged in-between commercial economy and non-economic culture (Cf. Coser, Kadushin & Powell 1982, Powell 1985; Thornton 2004; Bourdieu 1992, Schweizer 2001; Hjort-Andersen 2000; Van der Ploeg 2004; Gedin 1997). In his text “The Birth of Value,” Miller (2000) reflects upon this relationship and offers a new vantage point for value. For him, culture is neither the context of commerce nor is it its constraint. Far from it, commerce is often that which creates culture in the first place, and as such it is the source and not the opponent of value.

While acknowledging the relationship between values and value, Miller argues that we can actually create value and not destroy it. What is transported from values into value should ideally move back again, from value to values, and in this way, it could contribute to the welfare of society. It is in this context that

Miller places his hopes on the Swedish social democratic system, which he believes seeks to bridge the economic to the non-economic in order to found a society where commercial interests and peoples basic desires and needs are connected, operating together. Miller even uses the Swedish social democratic state as a case to demonstrate how the values of egalitarianism and welfare were not seen as antithetical to economic value within corporations. While he draws on Mauricio Rojas' (1998) research, Miller does not interpret 'the Swedish model' as failed, as Rojas does. Instead Miller believes that if the delicate balance between entrepreneurs, state, and citizens had been maintained, then many of the problems would not have surfaced.

The accuracy of Rojas' analysis of the Swedish state or of Miller's enthusiastic interpretation of Rojas's analysis is not under discussion here, but the case provides an interesting piece of the puzzle. In the context of the VAT reduction, Minister Ulyskog rejected the idea of any connection between economic value and readers' values. Pitting readers against the book business, Minister Ulyskog effectively separated values and value. It is debatable whether this is a sign of how the Swedish social democratic state has lost its touch – as Rojas or Miller point out – or how European governments increasingly side with consumers against producers in intensified consumerist politics as Burgess (2001) indicates. According to Miller's use of value, any governmental attempts to superimpose a new, moral value of readership – that is, an abstract value revolving around aggregated individual reading – will not be properly grounded in practice and in society.

It is interesting that Miller's theory on value taps into the same political context where the policy of cultural VAT on books was first opposed by the Government, then unwillingly accepted – not as support to the book industry though, but formulated as a (moral) imperative to the people to read more literature through increased book consumption. The effects on book consumption were later controlled and analyzed by an investigating commission, the BPC. And yet, the government's guidelines to the investigation committee avoided the question of value, and thus gave no clues as to why reading is good (cf. Peurell 2004).

With Miller (Ibid. 9) it should be possible to effectuate this movement and thus realize (new) value in people's values – in their diversity of desires and needs. And yet, there is no guarantee that it will be done. The relationship of value and values here may not be as harmonious as Miller would hope. Politics and power could force values into a disconnected form of value that does not return to the population. Moreover, the notion of people transcending basic oppositions may lead us to believe that the process conveys an increasingly abstracted and ephemeral notion of value. If we take inspiration from Nietzsche however, we may reinterpret this more in terms of 'overcoming' as if by struggle and power, which always are involved in issues of value. In this way, we can better under-

stand the nature of the different attempts at either influencing or disowning real-life practice of value.

### Value and Values in Literature

The question of bridging 'value' and 'values' begs further inquiry in the context of literature. In the business setting, scholars' interest in firms producing value has increasingly been shifted towards consumers as creators of value. Thus, with the emergence of literary theoretical traditions like reader response theory and reception studies, both readers and consumers have been acknowledged as a co-creator of value and values. Famously, Radway's (1985) study of Harlequin readers prepared for new ways to understand readers as active creators of meaning. In the literary context however, it appears that the publishers' role in creating literary value still needs to be emphasized and further explored. (Cf. Bourdieu 1992; Svedjedal 2009)<sup>62</sup>

Anders Mortensen (2009) claims the issue at stake has been whether 'literary value' is singular and objective, even universal, and set against 'literary values', permeated by subjectivist and pluralist notions. Specifically, the singular form is commonly held as capturing the particular value of literature in comparison to other forms of culture. Moreover, most people seem to hold that literary value is most related to economic value, insofar as it is held as adversary and fundamentally different to it.<sup>63</sup> Thus, it appears that literary value is charged with ideology in a way that literary values are not, says Mortensen. In a literary context however, both 'value' and 'values' are held as something good. "There are only good values in literature." (Ibid. 8)

The split between economic and aesthetic value in the 18th century is what literary theorist Barbara Herrnstein-Smith (1988) calls the creation of a 'double discourse of value' that have guided theory for more than two centuries. Elsewhere she argues for a radically 'contingent theory of value' (Ibid. 1983), one

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<sup>62</sup> Regarding value, Svedjedal (1996) writes that sociology of literature is not a valuating science as such, but rather a science about literary valuations. Because the collective's values are fore-grounded, it is not a question of an inherent, aesthetic value. And yet, scholars will have to evaluate literary originality and other aspects that introduce valuation even when striving for value-distance. The scholar's means to create a distance to his or her own subjective values is to investigate the contemporary reception of literary works. The study of literary value brings above all an analysis of the functions of literature and the changes in values and valuation.

<sup>63</sup> Mortensen's (2009) anthology departs from the proposal that the question of valuation appears in the attempted conjoining of economy and aesthetics by Adam Smith's work *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), wherein products are appreciated by consumers both for their use-value and 'beauty-value', but which instead lead to a split between economy and aesthetics with Smith's next work, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), where he privileges a de-aestheticized production based on use-value. This move meant that economics rid itself of aesthetics, and aesthetics in turn embraced a type of non-economic, 'pure' value.

that steers clear of supposed aesthetic objectivism and scholarly value-neutrality, and instead takes the socio-historical context into account, including matters of economy, when speaking of literature. She holds that a subject's experience of value belongs with his or her 'personal economy'. In other words, the experience of objects or events and the manner of their existence (including their boundaries), and of the properties and qualities within their specific category, belong with the subject's engagement with the environment and the conditions under which the subject interacts. The subject's self thus emerges as variable and multiple, due to the multiplicity of roles and relationships. (Ibid.) This view is thus a direct critique of the common notion that value is inherent in the entity. She reacts strongly against the view that 'literary value' should be the residue after one has removed the other kinds of value and interest – market value, use value, historical and political interest, etc. – independently of any active, practical, material circumstance. (Ibid.)<sup>64</sup> Literature then, is not a pure residue when all other types of value have been subtracted.

The overall interdependence of the contingent relationships is what Herrnstein-Smith (ibid. 13) calls "the economics of literary and aesthetic value". In this way, she seeks to reconnect literary value with economic value, because she holds the division between them is merely arbitrary. (Ibid. 1983) Even when seeking to define 'value', she observes that dictionaries will define it via the concept of material 'worth', which in turn is defined as pecuniary value. In both instances however, the concepts carry broader meanings that are not connected to material issue at all, but to abstracted relations of quantity and measure. (Ibid. 1988)

What Herrnstein-Smith seems to suggest then is a model where the economic connotations of value provide the core – or the bottom-line, if we speak with Miller – for the non-economic connotations of value. Herrnstein-Smith's theory of the contingency of value has had an enormous impact upon the discussion within Cultural Studies where the double discourse on value has drawn much attention. (Mortensen 2009) Mary Poovey (1994) however, has criticized the proposition of an economic base to aesthetic value, and argues that economics and aesthetics emerge at one and the same time.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, economists

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<sup>64</sup> In other words, "the 'essential value' of artworks consists of everything from which it is usually distinguished" (1983: 14). But what is left when these are taken away? she asks without finding any answer.

<sup>65</sup> Martha Woodmansee (1994) offers a slightly different interpretation to the subject matter. She has brought our attention to how historians of aesthetics and philosophers of art have neglected the various texts that foregrounded 'art' – textbooks, handbooks, author's forewords, manuals, reviews, performances, and exhibitions, etc. Hence, through this neglect one overlooks the concrete concerns that the writers at the time dealt with, seeking to intervene, influence and produce practice rather than explaining it, and thus centers instead upon abstracted notions of aesthetics and art. Hence, Woodmansee too can be related to the critical theory strand of scholarship and placed broadly within the contingency approach, but a distinguishing quality is that she empiri-



were equally dependent on aesthetics and sought to exclude it from their theories. This division has lately been questioned by business studies scholars, who argue that enterprising is an artform, and permeated by aesthetics (cf. Ramírez 1994; Guillet de Monthoux 1993; 1998; 2002; Köping 2003; Soila Wadman 2004; Austin & Devin 2003).

Instead, Herrnstein-Smith says it can be helpful to regard 'value' as the general concept for a number of different positive effects. Any of these, or them all conceived of together, may be taken as 'literary value' at a specific moment in time. These effects are generated and upheld by means of individual, social and institutional evaluative activities. Taken together, valuation thus occurs as a continuing process. Explicit valuation of a specific text always occurs in a social and/or institutional context, and the strength of that valuation depends upon the relationships in question. However, far from all evaluative activities are public, expressed, or even verbalized. (1988 in Mortensen 2009)

Herrnstein-Smith (1983: 31) ended her article by saying that for many people the canonical works of Homer, Dante and Shakespeare do not have value; they fulfill no individual or social function in their personal economies and lives. This fact could of course qualify the transcendent nature of the works' value, but has traditionally been used by critics as a symptom of the persons' cultural deprivation, deficiency or lack. As we know however, people find value elsewhere. This suggests that the possibility of performing gratifying functions – providing value, for short – is distributed across the "totality" of the various available works, artifacts, objects and events and continuously "realized" and "appreciated". If value is distributed, over things and events, and over people who in turn appreciate them, then in this way, Herrnstein-Smith actualizes a move from the topic of 'value' to that of 'values'. Indeed, values take part of the distribution of value.

Palm (in Mortensen 2009) seeks an answer to the question of what kind of qualities that generate the value of literariness – or in Palm's words, 'literarity' [*litteraritet*], here understood as the force or energy of literature.<sup>66</sup> He suggests six categories of elementary, constitutive traits by which the literary text operates: fictionality, poeticity, emotionality, interrogativity, performativity, and historicity. He cautions that not all of these characteristics are necessarily present or actualized in all literary texts; but in most cases they would emerge as operating in any description of literary character.

*Fictionality* designates the aesthetic force of attraction in a work of fiction, although fiction is notoriously difficult to define as specifically literary or artistic.

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cally acknowledges the prominent role of textual and paratextual elements in the debate regarding art, aesthetics and the market.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Chapter II for a discussion on the relation between being and qualities.

Drawing upon etymology of Latin  *fingere*, we learn that fiction is imagined, formed and presented, using the imagination of both creator and reader. Fiction is not just a mimetic reflection of reality, but the relation is rather in terms of “analogy, alternative, reaction, projection, model or counterimage [ *motbild*]”. The interplay between fiction and experience, writer and reader creates fictionality, which turns into aesthetic value. *Poeticity* is a concept to express the reception of the aesthetic functions of linguistic and literary style, structure and strategy whereby the content is conveyed to the reader. Hence, it is not limited to poetry as such, but comprises all kinds of elements pertaining to form in the eyes of the reader, such as genre, imagery, etc.

*Emotionality* captures the capacity to express, convey, stage, and arouse feelings, emotions and affects. Emotionality draws on the aesthetic senses and sensibility to evoke a literary experience: [” *att leva sig in, att leva sig med*”] and to be moved or gripped by emotion, to be captivated, to be fascinated, to feel with [someone, something], and to experience engagement that forms our human capacity for sympathy and empathy (Palm 2009: 294). How these emotions differ from emotions from real-life events is a puzzle, and so is the question of their value. Plato warned against them, and Aristotle in contrast held that they could be beneficial. Literature, says Palm (ibid.), cannot be read without emotion. *Interrogativity* concerns the element of wondering, exploring and questioning in writing and reading literature. It is about the existential side of human nature and of life that Plato and Aristotle called  *thaumazein*, ‘to wonder’, which is the drive of philosophy and that Palm connects with literature. It is actualized in the interrogative interaction between writer and reader, text and world.

*Performativity* designates the energy of the various mental and social processes needed for the literary work as both artifact and artifact to emanate, silent reading being the most striking example where both sides are brought to life. *Historicity* is a way to discuss the literary work in three temporal perspectives: at the time of project completion; as a fixed work that remains intact across time; and last, read and interpreted under unpredictable lengths of time. Indeed, historicity builds on the movement in time, and each understanding is inscribed in a conglomerate of individual and socio-cultural contexts.

These value(s) can be grouped in different communities of value [ *värdegemenskaper*], depending on their functions and modes of operating, and in accordance with different perspectives: the intellectual cognitive; the emotional ethical, and artistic aesthetic perspective. We find here for example *imagination value* through the use of words, and *pleasure value(s)* evoked in reading (cf. Barthes). Palm (2009) claims that apart from the constitutive value(s) of literature, there is also a type of added value(s) – a concept drawn from the economic field – and in the literary context, these are formulated, discussed and revised by mediators of literature [ *litteraturförmedlare*] such as readers, teachers, critics, and scholars.

Palm's contribution to theory is impressive in that he does not stand back to the challenge of balancing the value(s) of writing and reading, of static and dynamic qualities, and of constitutive elements and interpretive, contextual conditions. The categories he proposes are fruitful in that he describes not only that they are valuable or that they become value, but also what they do. In extension, this should provide us with an understanding of what value also does.

Marc Shell (1993/1978: 132) mentions that a literary work may establish its own value by bringing forth a smaller literary piece within itself, one that presents a vision of its own value, like for example in a play-within-the play, etc. He concludes from a few examples that the economic relations within them differ and therefore, it is most possible that literature "cannot truly establish its own esthetic or economic value" (Ibid.), probably because they cannot be exchanged for one another. Furthermore, Shell suggests that friends of literature could write what appears as 'non-literary works' about the value and economics of literature. (Ibid.) In this way, we encounter here both generative and encompassing powers of writing and literature that relates to value.

Palm says (2009: 286) that because literary values belong with the arts, they are not quantifiable – only qualifiable. Thus here we encounter the reversed scenario from what Meikle (2000) described: that economics has got rid of the qualitative differences in kind in order to attain a quantity of preferences. Yet, Palm (2009: 284) is aware that the very multiplicity and variance of literary value is prerequisite to the understanding of literature as valuable. And yet, any theory will be reductive or selective in relation to the multiplicity of literary ontology. (Ibid. 287) Thus the question is however, if literary theory could rid itself of quantity after all, especially in view of the main assumption of scarcity in relation to economy.

Literacy and reading were once connected to economic and legal values, but now they are increasingly constituted as economic operations and values *per se*. (See Chapter VII) Perspectives on linking the economic/cultural divide does not offer any help concerning the *reversal* of values, such as in the case of literacy and readership. There is a striking shift here that understandings of cultural or literary value do not seem to encompass. This means that we also will have to look into, and perhaps reinterpret, the notion of value as regards reading and the book, especially with a view to its consumption among people.

### The Link to Desire

Today within consumption theory, the concept of desire is often regarded as more profound than needs and wants – that is, the culturally influenced, particular means for satisfying a need. According to Russell Belk, Güliz Ger & Søren Askegaard (2003), desire is a powerful cyclic emotion and fundamentally insatiable. Desire is regarded as possibly "harmful" because it is excessive by

nature and entails a certain lack of self-control, which could bring about serious violations of basic norms. (Solomon et al. 1999: 94) Above all, it is not consumption itself that is desired, but rather the various social relationships that can be mediated through different experiences of consumption. Hence, not only the “Self” is important here, but the concept of “the Other” is absolutely vital to the understanding of desire (Solomon et al. 1999: 94).

This account reflects a Hegelian perspective on desire. Friedrich Hegel’s (1770-1831) presentation of desire has had a very thorough influence on philosophy and theory, partly because it has been contested and opposed to this day and yet managed to reemerge and be reformulated (Butler 1999/1987: 15). Hegel’s perspective on desire belongs with phenomenology. According to his view, the desiring subject is in pursuit of knowledge and must experience what it seeks to know. The subject belongs fundamentally with *the Other*, that which appears to be different than the self. When consciousness moves outside of itself it suddenly becomes aware of itself, so that desire’s consciousness is always self-consciousness. Desire then is with Hegel this paradoxical condition, that in pursuit of the Other, all consciousness really finds is itself and the necessity of relentless, self-reflexive movement (Ibid. 7f).

Discussing reading as consumption, it is posited by Marina Bianchi (in Hutter & Throsby 2008: 252) that a sense of contextual ‘otherness’ is created by encountering temporal contrasts in the text (such as repetition and delays for example), along with spatial displacement, such as when the novel portrays faraway places or in other times. This is what establishes the “never-ending stimulus” of reading.

The traditional link between consumption and desire, however, is mostly based upon the basic negative assumption of difference and lack. Importantly, for Deleuze & Parnet (2001/1977: 91), linking desire with negativity and lack could bring a serious misunderstanding of the misery of real lack.

Orsi Husz (2004) has observed that in forming the attraction of the department store as a place for dreams of consumption in the shift between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the ‘principle of completeness’ [*fullständighetsprincipen*] played an important part. The department store emerged as the place where ‘everything is found, and nothing is lacking’ (Ibid. 163). Providing ‘everything’ is an organizing principle that could gather together contrasting elements, and place them next to each other. (Ibid. 165) It rendered an idea of overview and created an image of abundance [*överflöd*]. (Ibid. 164) Continuing, we should not assume that desire is the sole cause of excessive behaviour without acknowledging that excess in itself could set desire in motion.

## Consumption as the Modern Bottom-line

The role of consumption in society has been under discussion ever since Aristotle formulated a theory on what types of acquisition is natural or unnatural, and especially since the famous claim of Adam Smith (1776): “Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer. The maxim is so perfectly self-evident that it would be absurd to attempt to prove it.” Whether this is self-evident or not, consumption has nonetheless been interpreted as the bottom-line of economy and society. In the new millennium, “[T]o live is to consume” (Borgmann 2000: 418), even to the point of consuming life itself (Bauman 2001).

And yet, up until the last century, consumption has wrongfully been viewed as an *epiphenomenon* to production, as claimed by Peter Corrigan (1997). It is only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it has become posited as a foundational characteristic of society, and rightfully so, Corrigan holds. According to Adam Burgess (2001: 102), most scholars do not develop any conception at all of *how* this phenomenon of consumption has been actively placed at the centre of our contemporary society and life.

With increasing market growth, Fuat Firat & Nikhilesh Dholakia (1998) note that in (Western) (post)modern consumer society, the market has become the sole locus for attaining legitimacy, and thus, no cultural or social movement has been successful in launching an alternative. Instead, they too are co-opted and put up for sale at the market. With Craig J. Thompson’s (2000: 131) outlook on the “postmodern marketplace”, he comments that the market is remarkably proficient at separating people physically, socially and culturally, and conversely, that only the marketplace can bring people together.<sup>67</sup> People both follow and resist the prescribed meanings that marketers provide us with, producing new meanings and practices, rescribing their roles in the process. (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007: 4) By studying ‘consumer tribes’, we can delve deeper into the “rotating cultural currents” that revolve around the tensions between consumption and production, culture and nature, communal and commercial life. (Ibid.)

Firat and Dholakia (1998) claim that with the growth of the economy of markets in undeveloped countries a triple economy emerges. At the centre, we find the primary sector of people constitute a minority in society, but strong on market skills and purchasing power. These people belong with the landowners, capital holders, top managers, professionals, politicians and celebrities. The second sector is at the fringes of the market economy, where quite a large share

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<sup>67</sup> According to Kozinets (2002: 23), consumer research theory has not sufficiently addressed the issues of social practices in consumer emancipation from the market. He wonders what those practices may be, and what motivations and social processes underlie them. Most importantly, he asks whether these types of communities are sustainable. (Ibid.)

of population does not control resources and instead are subservient to the market. In the third sector, people will not directly participate as consumers, but will at most serve the market. Their needs are of an entirely different character than those we find at the centre.

### The Citizen Consumer

John Brewer & Frank Trentmann (2006) suggests an approach to consumption that would not regard consumption as political expression, but rather acknowledge the politics of consumption. Political economy serves to channel and shape consumers and consumption, through political institutions, ideas and discourses. Here issues of different forms of citizenship, organization, production policies and regulations play an important part. In time, citizenship and consumption have come to interact and overlap, in competition or in symbiosis, writes Frank Trentmann (2007) in a special issue of *Journal of Consumer Culture*, and he observes that scholars have begun to inquire about the genesis of consumerist policy.

An important contribution is Burgess' (2001) article about the emergence of the European 'citizen-consumer'. He argues that it is not a bottom-up process that has led to the formation of consumer groups within the EU, but rather a top-bottom approach, whereby authorities created an alliance with 'the consumer' against corporate businesses at a time of intense market deregulations. The strategy was used less to (re)build legitimacy for the authorities among the citizens, Burgess suggests. He concludes that the strategy is highly problematic because Governments infuse anxiety into consumer culture and support mistrust. We recognize here how the Swedish government at the time of the VAT reduction openly voiced mistrust against the book industry and instigated anxiety over the citizens' welfare as consumers and 'weak readers'.

It is well known among consumer researchers that Scandinavia has a tradition of encouraging the institution of consumer bodies. (Burgess 2001; Cohen 2004; Aléx 2003) During the twentieth century, there has been an extensive discussion around consumer issues in Sweden, often with an expressed policy to investigate the population's general way of life in order to secure the welfare society by means of appropriate measures. Scholars within the field of Political economy have observed that Scandinavia was historically demarcated from the German lands due to its difference in rule. Unlike the Western continental Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Nordic countries never developed and institutionalized feudal states, or introduced centralized despotic rule, mainly due to lack of people with resources (Wittrock 2004). And yet, other scholars suggest that small and open economies, such as the Scandinavian countries, will have large governments that seek to provide social insurance against external risk by "nationalizing" a large share of consumption (Cameron 1978; Rodrik 1998).

Peder Al  x (2003) has conducted an interesting study that seeks to trace the development of normative consumer discourse in Sweden. He found that instead of supporting subjectivity among citizens, the state has continuously sought to foster the population by means of consumerism into a market-bound form of objectivity and rationalism. There was a widespread avid desire on part of states across the world to maintain control over what was perceived as the *political* dangers of the budding mass society. Collective pleasures across social groups were increasingly seen by the government as potential threats to society and national security. Against that background, the family unit seemed to be the perfect answer to the state. Thus, the emphasis on the household as a functional social and economic unit was not only an alignment with a tradition passed on by Aristotle, whose account of economic affairs began with the household. It was also a direct attempt to shape the social behaviour and organization.

And yet, we should take heed to Orsi Husz's (2004) caution that not all consumption in Sweden can be explained in terms of a top-down process where the state engages in socio-political and educational projects aimed at fostering rational consumers in opposition to the commercial actors who striving for increased hedonism among the people. The slogan, "science, purposefulness, and cultural taste", could well have been used by both parties. Indeed, both commercial actors and social reformers were interested in advancing society. (Ibid. 335)

## The Genealogy of Consumption

In the case of consumption, and especially mass-consumption, Burgess (2001: 102) observes that its genesis is continuously by-passed and overlooked by scholars.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Trentmann (2006) is looking for genealogical explanations for how, when, where and which actors actually came to regard themselves as "consumers" at all. Trentmann suggests decoupling three concepts that are often lumped together: the consumer, consumer culture and consumption. He suggests instead taking into account the material and discursive changes in their various connections. (Brewer & Trentmann "Introduction" 2006). Here we are

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<sup>68</sup> In recent years, we have seen a couple of Swedish thesis projects within Business Administration Studies that have ventured genealogy as method, Ulrika Sj  din's (2006) *Insiders' Outside/Outsiders' Inside: Rethinking the Insider Regulation* and Dick Forslund's (2008) *Hit med pengarna! Sparandets Genealogi och den Finansiella   vertalningens Vetandekunst*. Sj  din's genealogy draws mainly on Nietzsche and takes inspiration from Derrida's deconstructive approach to the concepts of Law and Justice. Forslund in turn departs more than Sj  din from Marieke von Goede's work on the genealogy of finance, and then develops a Foucauldian approach with a view to discuss the powerful means of persuasion. My use of genealogy will merely draw inspiration from Nietzsche and primarily center on the revaluation over time of reading, writing, and the book – with special regard to literacy and its relation to consumption.

reminded once more that some examples of consumption have simply been considered better than others. (Wilk 2004)

By looking at the genealogy of reading and the book, and specifically of literacy (Chapter VII), I will provide an entry to the genealogy of consumption and of its role in society – though not specifically about the genealogy of consumerist policy as mentioned by Trentmann – but rather the morality of consumption. We find here a parallel, if not an anticipating, turn from moral panic as regards any excesses on part of people to the view of increased consumption as an (economic) solution to the community.

## Consumption Research and Modernity

Most consumer researchers however too readily identify consumption and mass-consumption with modernity, so even Burgess (2001: 102) and Trentmann (2006). Trentmann is aware that humans have engaged in consumption of many different things across time, but insists on making the modern concept of reflexivity a criterion for consumer's identity. Also Don Slater (1997: 1) loosely frames his theoretical discussion on consumer culture in modernity, starting with the Enlightenment from which have emerged concepts and issues that are central to "modern intellectual life in general". Apparently, this is supposed to form the essential underpinning and its meanings and importance are simply assumed as self-evident.

The inclination towards modernity takes this concept too much for granted. According to Latour (1993/1991), 'modern' or 'modernity' is highly problematic. It brings a break in the continuous passage of time that establishes an archaic, stable past in contrast to an accelerating present. It also implies a struggle between the Ancients and the Moderns, where the latter are proclaimed as winners. (Ibid. 10) Proceeding, the concept of 'modernity' establishes an absolute division and asymmetry between humans and 'nonhumans', i.e. things, objects and beasts. Second, it centres on humanity at the expense of God, but retains the distinction between the real world and the transcendent. Moreover, it effectuates a fundamental separation between solid categories such as Nature and Society, Science and Politics, etc. This forms what Latour has called 'the modern constitution'.

Does not the research into the historical development of consumption undeniably rest upon this constitution? Here Peter Corrigan's (1997) book is helpful to us, for he has provided us with an overview of research into the case of England. He first mentions Grant McCracken (1988) who saw politics as the *primus motor* of consumption in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, revolving around the royal court, starting with the Elizabethan court in England where the landed gentry got involved in competitive forms of consumption and emulation. Neil McKendrick et al. (1982) rather speak of economics as the driving force with



middle class movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the emulation of upper-class taste and way of life. Advertising and marketing here played a key role and women now emerged as the primary consuming gender. Colin Campbell (1987) turns to the era starting in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and highlights the importance of increasing literacy. He tells us that novels were one of the most vital means at the time for spreading the ideas, attitudes and values of Romanticism, which he presents as the main driving force of social change at the time. This brought a new mode of reading – reading for experience, entertainment and sensation, rather than for moral instruction, advice and improvement, as was done in ‘pre-romantic’ times.

When Campbell (1987) mentions reading as a fact of consumption, it is primarily connected to consuming the prevalent ‘modern’ ideas of that time against the backdrop of the expansion of print culture and the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, it is only when reading takes on hedonic characteristics in ‘late modernity’ that Campbell recognizes reading as consumption. In this context, it is important to take heed to the suggestion that literary fiction, rather than being merely subjected to consumption, indeed was a driving force into consumption. (Ahlberger & Lundqvist 2007: 16) In other words, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century novel actually functioned as driver and inspirational advertisement for many of the new products in the newly industrialized society. Thus it both conveyed and prescribed ideas of new consumer practices and a hedonic lifestyle suddenly rendered attainable (Ibid.)

Campbell’s approach as regards the meanings of consumption for the actors themselves is acknowledged in Trentmann’s (2006: n.7) search for the genealogy of the reflexive consumer, but Trentmann claims that while ‘expressive goods’ had been vital to the Romantic ideas, the actors at the time did not regard themselves as consumers. Moreover, Trentmann (2006) questions the perspective that privileges the role of hedonic consumer goods and services in research into the consumer. He maintains that it was not on the market this shift in identity towards the consumer was played out, but rather in battles over taxation through the language of citizenship. In Victorian Britain where this shift is most readily discernible there was a struggle concerning property rights to common utilities such as water, gas and coal, and foodstuffs such as bread and sugar. Thus, ‘consumer’ does not refer to a rational subject with infinite needs and a range of preferences, but to the “bounded figures” in specific material and political contexts.

### Non-modern Approach

With Latour’s (1993) critical outlook however, humans and societies have never been “modern” in any real terms. Indeed, “[M]odernity has never begun.”(Ibid. 47) Simultaneous to the birth of humanity, (and I shall add, the ensuing classifications of mankind as Consumers, Experts, etc), we have had the birth of the

equally important ‘nonhumanity’; and these things, objects and beasts are an interconnected part of society and continuously multiply. Latour (2006/2001) also connects the concept of modernity with attempts to separate between facts and values. Hence, modernists seek to make a sharp distinction between how the world is and how it should be. Also with the genealogical approach, this distinction is not possible. Facts are rendered facts simply because they are valued as facts. The question of politics is pervasive.

In our search for the genesis of consumption, other prevalent and ‘non-modern’ forms of consuming (such as reading) are often disregarded and thus need to be aligned into our studies if we are to take a ‘nonmodern’ approach. Indeed, reading and writing can be seen as human practices parallel to consumption and production (De Certeau 1988/1984).

Furthermore, with further regard to ‘nonhumanity’, we shall take into account the importance of beasts and crops in our genealogy of writing and reading. Of course, Nietzsche has dealt with the relationship between man and beast, but is less concerned with their co-existence than with man’s degrading submission of his beastly nature to Christian slave morality. In the following, it shall suffice to say that reading, writing and the book have brought important consequences for all things (human/nonhuman; animate/inanimate, etc), interconnected as they are. We shall also recognize the importance of the birth of physical objects such as the various types of books that make new, hybrid modes of reading and consuming possible.

Under the banner of modernity, ‘mass-consumption’ is separated from ‘consumption’ regarding either quantitative or qualitative concerns, which of course implies some sort of fundamental division between quality and quantity. And yet, there is a posited cause and effect relationship between them, insofar as large quantities are inevitably connected with lower grades of quality.<sup>69</sup> What concerns us here is not primarily the distinction or even whether they reflect any true values, but rather the question of how mankind deals with quantity and quality in practice and also the anxiety that follows in its path.

## Morality and Consumption

At the turn of the new millennium, consumption and morality have increasingly become a scholarly topic for discussion (Cf. Borgmann 2000; Csikszentmihalyi

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<sup>69</sup> In the case of mass-market paperbacks – often held as epitome of modern popular consumer culture in the 20th century – John P. Dessauer (1989: 71) points out that the US editions of mass-market paperbacks in the range of 100,000 – 200,000 may be large in general publishing at an average, but are in fact indicative of a relatively small audience. Hence in relation to the whole population they are hardly qualified as mass product (Ibid.), especially compared to other products and media.

2000; Miller 2001; Wilk 2001). The concept of 'morality' is understood in two ways according to Nietzsche (1998/1887, see Clark's foreword): in a wide sense and a narrow sense. The wide sense is equal to the concept of 'ethic' and encompasses any system of values and codes of conduct that we have internalized and that will shape behaviour in relation to other people, mostly in terms of constraint. The narrow sense is for Nietzsche mostly connected to Christian morality (Ibid. xviii). In this way, we have before us a "pre-moral" time, in which actions were judged by their consequences and given either a value or disvalue; a "moral time" when actions are mostly judged by their intentions; and, hopes Nietzsche, a "non-moral" time when humanity has passed through morality and overcome it, or rather, it has "self-overcome". This time could also be termed "post-moral" because it follows upon the moral time (Ibid. xx).

Consumption is a moral issue in itself, argues Richard Wilk (2001) because it entails the problem of distributive justice in view of conflicting interests in a community (self/group) and different forms of satisfaction (immediate/delayed). It has sprung out of the human condition of being in relation to the material world. In this way, moralism is inevitable and necessary, and not arbitrary because they emerge as patterns in a socio-historical context. Some kinds of consumption are rendered good and others bad. But choices are not easy, says Wilk. Economist Deirdre McCloskey (2006: 454) comments that houses do not fill up with goods because consumers are stupid and sinful, but because we often make mistakes. We cannot know the goods' potential beforehand, so we indulge in optimism and buy goods anyway. Many goods that we do buy are not even worth the price. And as the opportunities for optimism mount up, so do the goods as we pile them up in our homes for as long as we have the room. According to McCloskey, this type of behaviour is not sinful and having a lot is not immoral for it does not take from the poor.

Consumption can be working positively and negatively at the same time, says Wilk (2001). What remains is that it is subjected to moral debate regarding its motives and outcomes. And this is how it should be, says Wilk, because consumption affects other people. And in a global context, the consequences appear far, far away, which does indeed call for a joint discussion on morality. In conclusion, Wilk agrees with Miller that human life is grounded in materialism, but all forms of materialism are not the same.

The critique against the excesses of consumer society regards the consequences for culture – the environmental effects, the social ills and the psychological problem of living life at the market caught in-between the freedom and the moral obligation to consume. With Csikszentmihalyi (2000: 271), the cycle of economy now depends on incessantly increasing demands, and consuming has become a patriotic act, even if it leads to higher debt. It is seen as the singular solution to preserving the community. From that point of view, it has become a "vicious cycle" where we cannot compensate the negative effects with an equal amount of value. Albert Borgmann (2000) relates the moral problems of con-

sumption – disengagement and debilities – to technological patterns in society’s development. He holds that the pervasive paradigm of consumption in an age of overabundance renders wants limitless and insatiable, leaving humans to want increasingly more for less effort until our bodies and mental capacities are in seriously ill shape.

Miller (2001) charges at well-situated Western scholars moralizing over consumption being materialist, capitalist and anti-environmentalist under the banner of general “Americanization”, when in fact the real problem is real poverty and real lack. Moralistic critique only serves to enforce what they themselves criticize, namely to dehumanize and fetish the consumer. Instead, he calls for an ethics driven by the desire and fervor to fight poverty. “What most of humanity desperately needs is more consumption, more pharmaceuticals, more housing, more transport, *more books*, more computers.” (Ibid. 228, italics added) Similarly, both Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and Borgmann (2000) place their hopes in the future engagements with the pleasures of “the culture of the table, the culture of the word, the culture of the arts, for athletics, and for philosophy and religion”.

Miller (2000), taking a dialectical stance in his anthropology of consumption, holds that people and their social relationships are enhanced by their encounter with objects. The contemporary plethora of goods provides us with opportunity to formulate ourselves, and develop sociality. This is not to say that consumption is intrinsically good, says Miller, for in dialectics, all things are both good and bad, and he holds that politics should build on the opportunities for welfare, and counter the negative consequences.

This emphasis on dialectics is for Latour (1993/1991) a way to further widen the perceived gap between subject and object just to assume that the gap is bridged by envisioning movement in-between the poles. Thus, despite its critical awareness, dialectics is the most ‘modernist’ of all, says Latour, and proposes instead that development and proliferation appears at the locus in-between the two poles. This means that the welfare of these hybrids of humans and nonhumans are of vital concern to both politics and science alike. In a non-modern world, we are all connected. Hence, a moral answer to the question of the role of consumption at the nexus of society and nature is to allow for ordinary consumers and citizens (Latour keeps them apart) to become co-researchers.

### Consuming as Eating

According to anthropologist Richard Wilk (2004), a whole range of moral views on consumption, especially around moderation, is brought forth by the metaphor of *consuming as eating*. The metaphor is based on human bodily experience turned into a prototypical scenario for all consumption. (2004: 17) With Wilk,

the sequential motion is as follows: *Hunger* points to *finding and preparing*, which leads to *chewing and swallowing*, which in turn causes *digesting*, which eventually ends up as *excreting*. Hence, we expect that which we consume to be finished off when we are ready. At the least, consumption destroys and devalues the original form. In fact, there is a boundary created between the productive sector dealing with the refinement of “virgin” materials from the consuming sector, where objects are discarded or rejected. (Wilk 2004: 22)

Another boundary lies between the view of human life connected primarily with the material world (materialism), or with the ideational world (idealism). In the context of consumption, this boundary is resolved by transforming ideas into something consumable. According to Lakoff & Johnson (2003/1980: 148), the metaphor of “IDEAS ARE FOOD” is ever-present and pervasive in social thought. The advantage of the metaphor is that we can get a way of speaking of psychological processes that we have no direct means to conceptualize, Lakoff and Johnson hold.<sup>70</sup>

The IDEAS ARE FOOD metaphor falls back on two other, more basic metaphors: the MIND AS CONTAINER, by which a similarity is established between body and mind and the CONDUIT metaphor, whereby ideas, seen as objects, can be channeled from the outside to the mind as a container. Although, the “IDEAS ARE FOOD” metaphor as posited by Lakoff & Johnson privileges the mind over the mouth too much for my liking, the metaphor aptly portrays ideas as nourishing and that they can be “digested, swallowed, devoured, and warmed over”. (Ibid.) As we will see, from my perspective, this metaphor emerged in close connection with the everyday practices of reading as a form of eating and imbibing.

### The Art of Rumination

According to Nietzsche (BGE: 263) however, we should not go about reading with “eyes and hands that go touching everything, licking, groping.” In his preface to *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1998/1887), Nietzsche claims that reading needs to be practiced as an art (1998/1887 GM Preface: 7). For him (2003/1895: 194), the art of reading holds a special noble place in what could become foundational for an erudite culture in the making. He seems to call for a reverent form of reading, one that he cannot find among the “so-called educated people” or “the newspaper-reading intellectual demi-monde” (Ibid.). To read through something and try to decipher it is simply not enough. Nietzsche seems to think of reading along the same lines as Peurell (2004) of the Swedish Cultural Council does; Peurell calls “quality reading” what he believes the

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<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Lakoff & Johnson use capital letters for all of their metaphors – a visual way of saying that METAPHORS ARE CAPITAL, which in turn, is reminiscent of Shell’s observation that all metaphors are economic and entail exchange.

Swedish state is anxious to monitor and affirm in the face of reading's presumed decline. Unlike the state and the former Minister of Culture, though, Nietzsche (2003/1895: 194) refrains from establishing a modern morality of reading for humans that we might expect.

Admittedly, to practice reading as an art in this way one thing above all is necessary, something which these days has been unlearned better than anything else – and it will therefore be a while before my writings are “readable” – something for which one must almost be a cow and in any case *not* a “modern man”: *ruminating...*

Nietzsche's intended reader does not belong with ‘modernity’, but belongs closer with the beasts than the moderns would accept. Nietzsche however did not coin the expression of reading as rumination. It is a tradition with roots since the Middle Ages at least.<sup>71</sup> In English, the word ruminating has been used ever since the 16th century, notably after the advent of print, and its primary meaning according to the OED is “to revolve, turn over and over in the mind, to meditate deeply on.” Famously, Nietzsche would seize upon the digestive system as a parallel for our mind – as indeed Herder had done before him – and introduce indigestion as a harmful condition for the mind. (Cf. Pasley 1978) With reading as rumination we are presented with a prescription for healthy readership. Interestingly, the reader emerges here as a hybrid between cow and man. This sheds light on how the practice of reading, writing and the book emerge from a close relationship between nature and the culture of mankind.

## Consummation

An alternative perspective on consumption that perhaps could fit well with reading as practice is offered by Morris B. Holbrook (1987) and Richard Normann (2001 in Vargo et al. 2008), who has suggested that we regard consumer research as the study of *consummation*. If to consume means “to destroy”, “use up” and “waste” (Ibid.), no wonder that consumption carries negative connotations. To consummate on the other hand, means to “complete” or “perfect” (Ibid.). According to the dictionary, to consummate holds two main meanings: 1. “to bring to completion; finish; 2. to make (marriage) actual by sexual intercourse” (Webster's: 163 Ibid.). The lexical definition thus brings forth not only completion, but also of a form of activity that is sealing another activity.

The new field of inquiry that Holbrook envisions would emerge as one that “takes consumption as its central focus and that therefore examines all facets of the *value* potentially provided when some living organism acquires, uses, or disposes of any product that might achieve a goal, fulfill a need, or satisfy a

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<sup>71</sup> Book historian Armando Petrucci describes three types of reading in the early Middle Ages: reading silently, reading aloud, and *ruminatio*, reading *sotto voce* (Hamesse in Cavallo & Chartier 1999/1995: 104).

want.” (Ibid: 130, italics added) According to Holbrook (Ibid. 128), consumer research would thus lead to the following key points:

Value is what a living organism experiences and it occurs when a goal is achieved, a need is fulfilled, or want is satisfied; with such achievement, fulfillment or satisfaction, *consummation* is attained, and if not, consummation is thwarted (which is equally interesting);

The concluding point is that “the process of consummation (including its possible breakdowns) is therefore the fundamental subject for consumer research.” (Ibid.)

Moreover, among other things, Holbrook also envisions that the humanities can contribute to the study of consummation, not only by bringing in comic strips, novels and advertising as has been done previously, but also by the broadening acquisition to include time expenditures on “free” goods such as the arts; the extension of usage to withhold the appreciative response; thirdly, the deepening of the concept of disposition and the durability in consumption. It would also include the potential “breakdowns” of consummation. (Ibid. 131)<sup>72</sup> It is also important to make the point that consummation does not necessarily drive at some instrumental aim, or external result. As we will see shortly, this feature connects the consummation form of consumption with practice rather than with doings that will bring a concrete result.

To my knowledge, Holbrook’s call has gone rather unnoticed throughout the consumer discourse (although Normann may succeed in bringing it into the service-logic discourse – see Vargo et al. 2008). Jerome B. Kernan’s (1987: 133) reply to Holbrook’s call is not uninterested, but cautionary. What is it that Holbrook prescribes and why? What is really wrong with the plurality of consumer research and what is right about the hegemonic study of consummation? What is the evidence that would persuade us to assume such a definition? Obviously, Kernan fears that such venture would simply be “chasing the holy grail”.

I agree with Kernan’s critique in that perhaps Holbrook was too inclusive and too totalizing in his endeavor to bring all consumer researchers together under one banner. And yet, there is something in the concept of consummation that is attractive, especially as relates to the art and logic of books and reading. If we also take into account what I described in Chapter II – that no relationships and objects are never fully contained, nor completed (Cf. Plotnitsky 1994) – then we are aware the value of the book will not be fully completed or perfected in our use. For every added consummating reading, the book will be summed up in new and different ways. Even so, the eventual breakdowns of consummation remain of vital interest.

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<sup>72</sup> Notably, human behaviour is not privileged in Holbrook’s view. In effect, this means that the new discipline would embrace “most forms of human, animal and perhaps even vegetative consummatory behaviour”.

## Turning Towards Practice

In the social sciences, aside from the literary turn (cf. Chapter II) there have been many other important “turns” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: ‘the linguistic turn’ within philosophy and the humanities, when structuralism dominated the scene of thought and rendered language as an agent in the structuring of the world; ‘the cultural turn’ starting in the 1960s emphasizing primarily the social processes of meaning, and ‘the interpretive turn’ whereby also symbolic systems were deemed important, inspired by anthropologists in the 1980s. At the brink of the new millennium, sociologists discerned a “Practice turn” in theory. (Dosse 1999/1995; Schatzki et al. 2001) The social sciences at large have converged with a tendency towards pragmatism, by which speaking is also an action. In this way, *relations* precede structures, and *situations* prevail over positions. Research is increasingly oriented towards individual actions and interactions framed in a context. (Dosse 1999/1995: 86)

The practice perspective has become increasingly important for the understanding of consumption (De Certeau 1988/1984; Holt 1995; Warde 2005). Important forerunners in this area are Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Lyotard, and Charles Taylor. (Warde 2005, referring to Reckwitz 2002 and Schatzki 2001) It is rather strange however, that Warde makes no mention of Michel De Certeau, who in his work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988/1984) discussed practices mainly in light of consumption. De Certeau’s inspired and insightful writing on the practice of reading has much informed the development of research into Book History (Cf. Chartier 1995/1992), and into its envisioned hypertextual future (Joyce 2003). Some scholars within business administration have built further on his concept of spaces of consumption (Styhre & Engberg 2003), and spaces for play in the area of organizational entrepreneurship (Hjort 2005).

A basic meaning of consumption practice is the different ways in which consumers consume (Holt 1995). For Warde (ibid. 137) consumption is not a simple practice in itself, but is a moment in almost every practice. Consumption is for him defined as a process of agency over which the agent has some extent of discretion: a process where people engage in appropriation and appreciation of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, importantly whether purchased or not, for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes. (Ibid.) For De Certeau (1988/1984), the binary set of production and consumption could well be substituted with the corresponding set of writing and reading, regarded as a “more general equivalent”. Indeed, De Certeau (ibid. xxi) has observed that the very economy itself encourages an enormous, even hypertrophic, development of reading.

In the following, I shall primarily combine Warde’s and De Certeau’s theories of practice as regards consumption. Admittedly, my empirical work for this study was conducted before Warde’s article was published, which explains that



I have not followed his sketched design for research. For an expanded account of the social organization of practices, I will rely on Etienne Wenger's (2000) article on communities of practice. I will also draw on Book history, for it has some experiences in the area of approaches to research into reading practices.

### Philosophical Underpinnings

We must first distinguish between 'practices' (*Praktik*), and 'practice' (*Praxis*), according to Warde (2005: 133, quoting Reckwitz 2002). An example of 'practices' (*Praktik*) is a routinized behaviour that comprises several elements that are interconnected: bodily activities, mental activities, the use of objects, background knowledge of understanding, know-how, states of emotions and motivations (Warde *ibid.*) In this sense, theories of practice are neither Individualist nor Holist in their approach, but will emphasize social organization. (*Ibid.* 140) He informs on the other hand that practice in the singularis (*Praxis*) is a term for describing the human action as a whole, as opposed to theory and thinking (*Ibid.*)

Turning to Aristotle, we learn of three forms of activity or forms of human life: *Praxis*, *Thēoria*, and *Poiēsis*. *Thēoria* is the highest of them all, Aristotle holds, because it extends beyond mere description and captures knowledge beyond the bounds of subject and time. (Ramírez 1995: 26) (Then to speak of 'practice theory' is really to abandon *Praxis*.) Both *Praxis* and *Poiēsis* deal with the individual activity in a singular situation, but the value of *Praxis* lies within activity itself, whereas the value of *Poiēsis* lies only in its outcome or result (such as products). Aristotle held *poiēsis* as the lowest form of life, common to all people, and that we share with beasts, whereas *Praxis* is held in high regard as it is effectively the paradigm for all human life form (Ramírez 1995: 16). Indeed, Aristotle could be described as a philosopher of *Praxis* (*Ibid.*) The difference can be further elicited if we consider an important passage in the Nicomachean ethics, where Aristotle [1140a] maintains, "making and acting are different" (*poiēsis kai prāxis estī hēteron*) and emphasizes that one form does not comprise the other. For De Certeau (1988/1984: xii) however, practices involve a form of "making" that connects it explicitly with *poiēsis*. It is not manifested through its products, he says, but in the *ways of using* the products that go with the dominant order of economy.

Ramírez (1995: 8) explains that Aristotle understood the practical in a rich and nuanced way, compared to modern use.<sup>73</sup> In Swedish for example, there is no specific distinction between acting [*handla*] and making [*göra*]. He then suggests translating *poiēsis* with a noun, [*ett göra, görande*] because it is an intransitive verb

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<sup>73</sup> In Marx's philosophy of action for example, he refers without distinction to "making" in the workers' sense (Ramírez 1995: 21)

– one is always making *something*, whereas he translates *praxis* with the noun action [*handling, handlande*] as it is a transitive verb – one is acting this or that way. Regarding activity in this substantial way, we can perhaps get a better grasp of how practices, whether drawn from *Praxis* or *Poiesis*, could be understood as belonging with both entity (noun) and performing (verb) (Cf. Schatzki 1996 in Warde 2005). Practices consist of coordinated entities, but require performing. Performing in turn requires a practice. (Ibid. 134)

## Perspectives and Definitions

Interestingly, both Reckwitz (2002) and Warde (2005) speak of “agents” throughout the paper, which can be interpreted as taking a systems approach to practices. In the case of cultural practices, Ann Swidler (2001 in Schatzki et al.) writes that if practices are part of unified systems, this means one part implies rather much about other parts of the system, specifically if these parts reflect a singular, underlying logic. It remains to explore whether some practices are more dominant than others or whether we are swamped in practices. For example, the capitalist structure and logic has been ascribed as being deeper, more fundamental and powerful in terms of endurance, pervasiveness and influence, and hence given precedence to other practices in terms of social organization. If we consider multiplicity and contradictions among various structures instead, then we have another problem, “the reinterpretation of structures may lead to its own dead ends” (Ibid. 79). Swidler suggests that some practices enact constitutive rules of social life and hereby manages to anchor other practices, specifically if they are at the centre of antagonistic relations.

Recent theories of practice introduce a new pair of concepts that define practices: *doings* and *sayings*. (Cf. Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005) Practice consists of doings and sayings that are linked in terms of three major components: 1) Understandings, 2) Procedures, in other words, how the practices are carried out, actualized and sustained, and 3) Engagements. (Warde p. 134) This definition of practices is a simplified version of Schatzki’s definition that would also be suitable for the study of consumption. The main differences between the authors is that what Schatzki regarded as explicit rules for procedures, Warde will take as the actual performances of practices, in which the individual takes part. Schatzki also draws on a “teleoaffective” structure for practices, including ends, purposes, projects and tasks as teleological elements, and beliefs, emotions and moods as affective elements.

In Ramírez’s (1995: 10) reading of Aristotle, ‘to say’ belongs with *Poiesis*, because one always says *something*, whereas ‘to speak’ belongs with the *Praxis* of language. This means that *speaking* is the use of language in practice, and not sayings. For De Certeau, however, it does not suffice to say that speaking belongs with knowledge of language (Ibid. xiii); it is the practical use of it and operates on it. Adopting a specific interest in the act of speaking, and of enun-

ciation, De Certeau maintains four things; speaking both operates within and *realizes* a linguistic system; speaking brings an *appropriation*, or re-appropriation, of language by its speakers; speaking establishes a relation to time and space in the *present*; and speaking is inscribed in an interrelated web of places and relations, suggesting a contract with others and the world. These characteristics of speaking are also comprised within other consumption practices such as cooking, walking, and reading. (Ibid. 32)<sup>74</sup>

Warde (2005) claims his emphasis on engagement is broader than Schatzki's teleoaffective interest in that not only structural elements are included. For example, it is not so much the structure for personal decision-making that will determine consumption, but rather engagement or commitment in the practice. Similarly, De Certeau (xvii) also speaks of engagement but calls for a differentiation of, on one hand, consumers' activities and engagements that are effectuated by the product system, and on the other, the room for consumers to engage and maneuver by themselves.<sup>75</sup> In French, the word *engager* means to set in motion (engage a mechanism), which emphasizes *gage*, meaning pledge, or token which is engaged in a promise, agreement, or indeed, an engagement. (Kamuf in Derrida 1992/1991: 13) This shift towards engagement will also elicit the participant, perhaps even collective, forms of 'undertaking' that consuming entails for people.

Warde explains that engagement or commitment will play a part in differentiating between insiders, regulars, tourists, and strangers to a specific social world; as well as between levels of capabilities and competences: knowledgeable or ignorant, professional or amateur, generalist or specialist, traditionalist or radical, etc. This differentiation will help to understand to what extent agents participate in development and reproduction of a practice, Warde holds. People learn differently and so we should study how understandings, procedures and values of engagements are acquired and adapted (Ibid. 138f).

Warde however, does not mention Etienne Wenger's (2000) research on 'communities of practice' that explicitly deals with the question of social learning and engagement. Social learning comprises the elements of social competence and personal experience. Wenger then holds that we participate in different social learning systems by means of three distinct modes of belonging: through engagement first of all, imagination, and alignment. Engagement, according to Wenger (2000: 227) will direct our experience of who we are, and it revolves mainly about "doing things together, talking and producing artifacts". In engag-

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<sup>74</sup> In view of the discussion in Chapter II on the complementary relation between activity and thing, let us not exaggerate the differences, Speaking can be connected with speech, and 'doing' with 'deed'. (Similarly, in Swedish, *göra* is connected with *gärning*, cf. Ramírez 1995: 8)

<sup>75</sup> The French word *engager* is commonly translated as to involve, to commit, and rarely as engage, says Peggy Kamuf, Derrida's translator. (Kamuf in Derrida 1992/1991: 13)

ing with each other and the world, we learn from the responses we get what is doable.

Warde speaks of “*values of engagement*” (p.139, italics added) and “commitment to the value of the practice” (p. 145), almost in passing, and I shall take this as the very central element of practices. Recall that for Miller (2006), investigating individuals’ own values is paramount if we are to steer clear of Marx’s neglect of such issues. Considering that Miller’s perspective posits interplay between people’s own values and value, from readers’ own values of engagement in the practice of reading we shall learn about the value of reading and the book.

### A Note on Taste and Habit

Before we venture further into perspectives and definitions of the theory of practice, we should make mention of two other concepts, *taste* and *habit*, that are often associated with cultural practices. For example, in Sweden there at present five regular surveys on “the habits of reading”.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, though taste and habit are associated with practice, they also stand in contrast to the engagement and multiplicity emphasized in the practice perspective.

David Hume’s (1711-1776) essay “Of the standard of taste” (in Mortensen 2009: 341 f) makes a distinction between the sensibility of passion and the sensibility of taste. Both render a deep sense for what is beautiful and what is ugly in life; it heightens receptivity and thus expands the space for happiness and misery. And yet, Hume recommends that one restrains the sensibility of passion and cultivate the sensibility of taste. Only in rare occasions do we have power over the fortunes and misfortunes in life, says Hume, but we can master however what books we read, what entertainments we engage in and what social life we cling to. With the cultivation of our taste, we will exercise our reason [*förnuft*], decreasing the risk of falling prey to our passions. The feelings they evoke are not inclined to ‘business and interest’, but will induce serenity, acceptable melancholy and reflection. They will help to discriminate among books and people in order to find what is worthwhile. Thus, they retain our sensibility towards the tender beauty of life and art, love and friendship.

After Hume it is generally held in debates that taste is neither just subjective, nor objective, but an intersubjective phenomenon with a bit of both. (Mortensen 2009: 18, see also Meynell 1997/1986) Among economists however, the notion of taste has undergone a process of abstraction and trans-

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<sup>76</sup> These are *Mediebarometern* (1979); *Kulturarbarometern*; *Barnbarometern* (1984); ULF-undersökningen (1974) and SOM-undersökningen (1986). Erik Peurell at the Cultural Council has made a critical report into this wide array of statistical surveys on the state of readership and how the results are communicated in the media. “*But then to what is it then that we want to use the reading habit surveys? What is it really that we want to know? And why do we want to find it out?*” (Peurell 2004: 29)

formed into the concept of preferences (Meikle 2000). In the context of consumer research and practice theory, Holt (1997) mentions specialized taste as being part of assimilating into a world of consumption, but also part of an emotionally demonstrative behaviour in socializing, and as such, an element in consuming as play. Sensory taste changes with the setting of a practice; a hot dog even tastes better when watching a game at the baseball park. (Ibid. 6) In this way, taste is not overriding practice, or decisive of it, but is an inherent element among many.

As for habit, Porter (1965: 45) describes it in terms of some “rationality of irrational behaviour”, because at best, habits are formed in accordance with a degree of rationality, so that an individual can perform actions without thinking, as if habits have become a “second nature”. Some decades later, *habit* involves according to Holbrook et al. (1986: 52) a standardized, voluntary response to a recurring situation. Hence, habit is different from mechanical and conventional forms of routinized behaviour. In this sense, one could say that habits differ from practices because practices build much upon convention. As Warde (2005: 140) says, theories of practice often emphasize practical consciousness, tradition, habituation, routine, and tacit knowledge. Moreover, one could say that practices are less response to a structure, than social organization and activity in itself.

Aristotle posits *Praxis* on the side of human activity and basic form of life, and describes habits and skills (*héxai*) as that which is acquired after long-time exercise in a specific activity. (Ramírez 1995: 8) Translators point out that ‘custom’ and ‘accustom’ could be a better expression, because it does not refer to a simple automatic response (Ackrill & Urmson, in Aristotle NE: xxvii), but rather a ‘state’, which they describe as a relatively permanent disposition (ibid. xxviii).<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the words ‘custom’ and ‘customer’ are related, implying a relation between culture and the market. Hence, in the following, I shall make use of the expressions ‘accustomed’ and ‘little accustomed’ when speaking of readers. This does not resolve the problem; rather, it remains sufficiently open to empirical study.

## History and Social practices

As a practice, reading is deceptively simple, Book historian Adrian Johns (1998) observes. Reading seems so self-evident and obvious that one may astound that

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<sup>77</sup> Baudrillard (1996/1968: 94) offers another perspective on habits within his theory of a system objects. He holds that habits and objects are intimately joined together in everyday experience: every habit centres on an object and this object becomes the basis for a whole network of habits. These habits are not forming continuity as often is thought, but rather the opposite, forming discontinuity and repetition. If the flow of life with its continuous and linear time provokes our anxiety, then we can master it by breaking it up and to create recognizable patterns by arranging these elements into series.

it has its own history (Johns 1998: 385). Indeed, as Warde (2005: 139) writes, practices do have history – which he explains as a trajectory or path of development – and just as the practice itself this history will also be differentiated. Practices will take forms that are conditioned by the institutional arrangements that belong with time, space and the social context.

To explain that practices are ‘social practices’ is really a tautology (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005: 135). Indeed, practices are social at base-level, but also denote a certain type of behaviour, which entails both a coordinated entity of practice and its performance. While practice theory downplays the importance of individuality, Warde (2005: 144) says it does not put an end to explorations of individuals and their specific modes of consumption. The individual is a point of intersection among many consumption practices and shaped by commitment and volume. “An individual’s pattern of consumption is the sum of moments of consumption which occur in the totality of his or her practices.” (Ibid.) Indeed, the much-revered figure of “the consumer” evaporates, and attention is directed towards the organization and moments of practices. (Ibid. 146)

Much research has dealt with the means for social differentiation on basis of accessibility to and assimilation of specific practices (cf. Bourdieu 1979). De Certeau (1988/1984: 53) has argued against Bourdieu’s logic of practice on the basis that it links practices too tightly with a collective principle of administration, such as the family or the group, and on the other hand with the notion of the proper place. Issues of family relationships, along with space and time, are of course important but not the same in each case. De Certeau (1988/1984: 53) holds that reading is a practice that organizes “discontinuities” and heterogeneous operations and their nodes (Cf. Baudrillard on habits).

De Certeau’s concept of practice differs from that of Foucault and Bourdieu. According to De Certeau (1988/1984: 49), all of Foucault’s studies about practices are played out in – or at least given – a place of its own, a proper place, where the panoptic machinery operates. Similarly, Bourdieu’s studies all concern strategies with implicit principles and explicit rules. In contrast, De Certeau holds that it remains to bear in mind those practices that have not been equally “privileged” by history, like for instance reading.

Bourdieu’s further work however is criticized by Warde for losing sight of the organization of practices, focusing too much upon the different dispositions and tastes – captured in his concept of *habitus* – for taking part in practices and rendering them with meaning. If Bourdieu had focused upon dispositions, Warde prefers to speak of “positions”. As Warde points out, disposition and taste are played out outside the actual realm of practices. Hence, these as explanatory powers are put into question, and Warde then emphasizes the reversed case instead: that practices are internally differentiated in themselves which in turn will generate disputes about taste. Practices do have differential

value, mainly because they bring different kinds of ‘rewards’, internal or external to the practice itself (Ibid. 143).

Of course, as shown by Bourdieu, some practices render greater external social rewards than others. Nevertheless, the linkage to the content of practices is arbitrary, Warde (p. 143) argues, because there is no universal standard to which one could judge one superior to another. This ties in well with our discussion on value and values. Moreover, practices vary independently among groups, according to Warde. This is actually taking a step away from Bourdieu’s field approach, by which groups are seen as continuously contesting and competing with each other.

Chartier has proposed that we need to distinguish between different reading competences at a particular time. This suggests however that we direct our attention away from the reading practice to the characteristics of the reader. According to Dosse (1999/1995: 374), competence could be situated on the side of the actor or in the situation, but these generally tend to adjust to each other, which means that the old structure versus actor debate is surpassed. According to the descriptive turn within social science, the situation plays the strongest part in directing behaviour and also determines its justification. (Ibid. 160)

Reckwitz (2002) criticizes Schatzki (1996) for not bringing up the role of “things” in practice theory. He regards this as a culturalist way of downplaying the full relevance of practice and argues that doings necessarily are *doings with things*, and hence, so are most practices. Of course, to read is always to read something. The interest in social structure within cultural theory could be replaced by an interest in artifacts in practice theory, argues Reckwitz (2002). Within practices, particular items (or artifacts) are interconnected and determining elements of a practice and are deployed or consumed as conduits for its performance (Warde 2005).

Texts will necessarily belong with certain discursive and material forms, and therefore, reading practices and what text is read should remain distinct from each other, argues Chartier (1995/1992: 17). Distinct perhaps, but not altogether separated. Certain texts belong with certain practices, and they in turn may be complementary. And as observed by Reckwitz (2002), practices change with the development of media technology and materiality. Extending further, we cannot discuss literature or books in a consumer context without at least giving a thought to the activities that have brought it into being: editing, publishing, etc.

Palm’s proposal of a double ontology of artifacts/artifacts is interesting in so far as he attempts to relate thing and activity to each other, pointing to their interconnectedness in literature. It is symptomatic that Palm as a literary scholar does not give any deeper consideration to the material side of the artifact, and consequently, he does not speak of “books” at all. Although there is an interest-

ing aspect in Palm's way of speaking of the literary work as completed [*fullgjord, fullbordad*]. Given Plotnitsky's (1994: 11) complementarity perspective by which a relationship is never fully completed, but always retains an interactive heterogeneity, we can reinterpret the role of reading: for through the performativity of the arti(f)act (cf. Palm 2009), the activity of reading is also completed, but never fully contained, entirely meaningful or even wholly intelligible. In view of the discussion on consumption, this could mean reading is transformed from consuming a material artifact into consummating an arti(f)act.

We must not forget however, that there are many things readable: shop signs, brand names, ads in the street, texts on sweaters, mobile phone text messages, Internet chats, and subtitles on television and on film, text-TV, instructions or dialogues in computer games – the list can be extended much, much further. For this wide array of material for reading is different in scope and so intricately intersticed with a variety of relations to others and to the self that we cannot explain it as a simple function of the reader or of the text itself. Also, these texts may never be consummated. Indeed, practice may be the only way to distinguish reading at all. Against this background, the national surveys on readership should perhaps be complemented with questions in order to better capture the widespread reading outside of established literary genres.

### Boundaries of Practice

Warde (2005: 146) admits he has not addressed the question of determining boundaries of practices: how to distinguish one practice from another. According to Wenger (2000), boundaries are important within practices and arise, from a wide range of sources: from history, from ways of language and communication, from engagement and enterprising. In the context of a community revolving around a practice, such reading, the boundaries are commonly fluid. In this way, organizational boundaries are different: although hard to spot, they build on well-established, perhaps even formal, social affiliation.

De Certeau (1988/1984: 122ff) has observed that stories often mark out boundaries of different kinds as a means to achieve delimitation. With De Certeau, stories bring together two opposite and intersecting movements: one that sets foundations and limits; one that transgresses them. The first operates by founding a place and its delimitations: theaters of actions, as it were. This foundation of a story is *fragmented* – diversified and heterogeneous; *miniaturized* – grand projects (such as the nation) are brought down the scale to the familiar or individual unit and then multiplied; and they are not specialized yet mixed together, which finally makes them *polyvalent*. It is this quality of polyvalence that makes it possible for stories to circulate and yet change in accordance with the groups met in circulation. Narrative activity is busy relating to the outside, marking out boundaries, continuously developing, although it is fragmented and multiform.



The movement that challenges limits in stories is above all captured in the figures of the *bridge* and the *frontier*. The bridge will make two opposing elements distinct from each other and yet weld them together. It will break enclosure and isolation but also destroy autonomy. This figure of the bridge is very important to us, not least because of Miller's frequent use of the expression of bridging value to values. The frontier on the other hand, denotes an exteriority that is different yet directly connected. In the story, the frontier is a third element, it is a space in-between. In this space, both progressive appropriation and successive displacement occur. It also carries a mediating role. The story ceaselessly marks out these frontiers, multiplies them in the interactions between characters and they concern places, ways to be, and movements.

Certainly, the book can retain coherence, and yet generate multiple meanings in different contexts (Cf. Griswold 1987). If we further connect with our discussion on value, I want to maintain that with the book we are able to contain value, and distribute value across settings. We can gain a further understanding of how the book could bridge the conception of value to that of values (Cf. Miller 2008/2006)

### Practices and Multiplicity

One striking feature that characterizes practices is multiplicity. Practices will continue to increase by multiplication and diversification. (Warde 2005) Referring to philosopher Henri Bergson, there are two types of multiplicity, very different from one another. The first is qualitative, fusional and continuous, whereas the other is discrete, homogenous and numerical. Both these forms of multiplicity have bearings upon matter (such as the book), but at different times. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987/1980: 483f)

This should mean that there is a tension between, on one hand, reading books as continuous and qualitative, and on the other, reading as referred to by the number of books consumed, one by one, and one after the other. Here we are reminded of how Baudrillard (1996/1968: 104, n. 34) makes a clear distinction between true pleasure and serial satisfaction. True pleasure, he holds, transcends mere satisfaction. It is a pleasure-in-pleasure. By contrast, serial satisfaction does not entail this kind of relationship or experience; it is either missing or sadly unfulfilled. Here, satisfaction is only achieved by linear succession, and repetition is what compensates the unattainable totality of true pleasure. As an example of this condition, Baudrillard turns to the world of books:

People stop reading the books they buy, then they proceed to buy more and more. Similarly the repetition of the sexual act, or a multiplicity of sexual partners, may serve indefinitely as an ersatz form of love as exploration. Pleasure in pleasure is gone, only satisfaction remains – and the two are mutually exclusive. (Ibid.)

For a contrast to this rather glum view, we could turn to Warde (2005: 142) who says that satisfaction of wants can only be attained in practice. Moreover, the expansive force harbored within in practices, driving at increased diversity and multiplicity, in connection with the general move towards simultaneous and multiple forms of consumption, will in turn be generating an increase in demand, especially for things complementary and new. Moreover, each and every practice involves a new set of items and accessories and people usually engage in several practices at one and the same time. This plethora of things generated by indirect demand is what Warde calls 'paraphernalia'. Indeed, the increased diversity of commitments has an enormous economic potential, not least because those who are affluent are most likely to engage in many practices.

If consumption with Aristotle had been driving at some end, belonging within the natural order of needs, then we have witnessed an elevation of consumption, from what everybody does for basic survival, to something that is a valuable action in itself. Consumption however, is not a practice in itself, Warde says. Consumption occurs within practices, and for the sake of practices (Warde 2005: 144). In this respect Warde (Ibid.) maintains:

An individual's pattern of consumption is the sum of the moments of consumption which occur in the totality of his or her practices. If the individual is merely the intersection point of many practices, and practices are the bedrock of consumption, then a new perspective on consumer behaviour emerges.

This new perspective will entail new ways of explaining contemporary identities and the role of consumption, says Warde (ibid.). Multiplicity and plurality are at the heart of the matter. People's different engagements along with the sheer volume of practices could partly account for contemporary patterns of consumption. For example, what has been described as the fragmentation of identity is a consequence of the social organization of practices: in the tendency towards sequential and simultaneous engagements in diverse practices across a wide range of heterogeneous social networks (Ibid. 144), or social circles (if we speak with Coser, Kadushin and Powell 1985).

## Places and Spaces

Following De Certeau, Alexander Styhre and Tobias Engberg (2003: 121) maintain that consumption is above all a spatial practice. De Certeau (1988/1984: 117) makes a distinction between the concepts of space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*). If place belongs with a distinct location, a configuration of positions, and with what is "proper", then space is more ambiguous. Space is composed by an intersection of mobile elements: time, speed, and direction. Space happens as an effect of the different practices and operations that occur. In other words, space is a practiced place. (Ibid. 117) For example, the street is a place at the hands of urban planners, but for pedestrians, the street is a space for walking.

Similarly, De Certeau holds that the written page is a proper place for an order of co-existent words and signs. Indeed, the practice of this specific place produces the space in which the reader reads it (Ibid.)

It is the same with the reader: his place is not *here* or *there*, one or the other, but neither the one nor the other, simultaneously inside or outside, dissolving both by mixing them together, associating texts like funerary statues that he awakens and hosts, but never owns. (Ibid. 174)

Reading then has no place of its own, only space. The distinction between place and space parallels De Certeau's (Ibid. 36) distinction between strategy and tactics. Strategy entails a will or power that can be isolated from the environment. It postulates a place of one's own from which one can manage external relations, such as when a business or army targets customers or enemies. This use of place is a way to over-come time; to get an overview and visual control; to build upon a certain power of knowledge. Unlike traditional management literature, De Certeau posits an opposition between strategy and tactic. Strategy belongs with the powerful, and tactics with the weak. A tactic operates in isolated actions, takes advantage of sudden opportunities and can deploy tricks if necessary. It is without power and lacks a place of its own. Hence, tactic is a way of poaching on someone else's territory. Therefore it cannot build up positions and keep what it wins. Instead, it makes clever use of time. Place or time - that is what distinguishes between strategy and tactics.

The spaces of consumption are constructs: material assemblages of artifacts, signs and symbols. They are also highly monitored spaces, where the consumers' movements and activities are put to careful scrutiny and analysis. Indeed, spaces of consumption have become both domains of liberation, and of repression. As argued by Styhre and Engberg, these spaces have moved from the periphery to the centre stage of the organized economy.

### Changes in Practices

Reading practices reveal little innovation, according to Petrucci (1999/1995), if compared with the behavioural reading code that was established in the 18th and 19th centuries with roots from the early modern Europe. Factors like social class, age group and level of education can probably account for a large share of the tradition, Petrucci holds. The only innovative approach to reading was put forth by a young girl below twenty years of age: her favourite reading position was lying flat on a rug. Petrucci asks himself, since there is nothing new under the sun, how can we seek to capture the new *modus legendi* of young readers? This is a very important question. Petrucci need not worry however.

As Warde (2005) says, practices are dynamic and contain in themselves the seeds of continuous change as people do not cease to borrow, adapt, copy, improvise and experiment. Hence, practices warrant consumers from the unso-

licated blandishment of producers and promotional agencies. In De Certeau's perspective, the tactics of consumer practices will always evade strategic influence of producers. I do not agree with Petrucci however, that we have sufficiently covered the reading practices among people. If we are to believe De Certeau's view of reading as a tactic, and the reader as a poacher in somebody else's territory, then we will discover new reading practices with every new place we find ourselves in, and every space that we are moving across.

Swidler (2001 in Schatzki et al.) maintains that habitual repetition is not necessary for the creation and establishment of new practices; instead practices need to enact new patterns in public for everyone to see that change is acknowledged by everyone. Hence, putting practices to public display may have the capacity to first create and then anchor new constitutive rules (or logic if we speak with De Certeau), especially in the case of socially important but informal relationships.

We must not refrain from continuously investigating the manners and modes – or the art and logic in view of practice theory – of reading as consumption practice. First of all, it is about finding the proper methods to investigate reading practices that will allow for further empirical explorations. As we will see, for Nietzsche, the issue of methods was the most important of all. Secondly, we must never believe that the qualities and value of these practices are known beforehand. We should also allow for the possibility of a reversal of values.

### Closing Reflections on Theory

In the introduction to this chapter, I augmented literary theorist Jonathan Culler (2000/1997) in order to frame theory as endless, unbounded and interdisciplinary. Culler specifically connects theory with reading, and particularly with 'constant upstagings' that are contested in the encounter with other theorists. At times, theory presents itself as a diabolic sentence condemning you to hard reading in unfamiliar fields, where even the completion of one task will bring not respite but further difficult assignments. (Ibid. 15) In practice, there is a distinction between two groups of works: those 'have to read' kinds of works, and those safe to forget. Theory evokes the desire of mastery, observes Culler, and explains that mastery is futile:

But theory makes mastery impossible, not only because there is always more to know, but more specifically, and more painfully, because theory is itself questioning the presumed results and the assumptions on which they are based. The nature of theory is to undo, through a contesting of premisses and postulates, what you thought you knew, so the effects of theory are not predictable. You have not become the master, but neither are you where you were before.

In any kind of engaging with theory however, the overriding value of theory is as follows: reflecting on one's reading in new ways; having many different questions to ask, and a greater sense for the implications of the questions asked. (Culler 2000/1997: 16) In this sense, theory leads on to the important issue of method, which will be explored in the next chapter.

## V. On Method

*There are no scientific methods which alone lead to knowledge!  
We have to tackle things experimentally*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*: 432

*This chapter ventures questions of methodology and methods of interpretation and proceeds to present the empirical approaches and data in more detail.*

### Introduction

The different philosophical views on practice cannot be easily transposed into empirical studies, says Warde (2005: 135). Theoretical accounts show a tendency towards idealization, abstraction, and do not pay enough attention to the social processes in the production, sustaining and reproduction of practices. The meta-theoretical assumptions are often such that they to a very high degree presume a commonality of conventions, a shared sense of understanding, and widespread consensus. Such conditions are highly unlikely and just could not be met, Warde (ibid.) holds.

Practices are not at all marginal, says De Certeau (1988/1984: 41), but it is rather our studies of that are marginal in relation to the phenomena that we study. Considering that practices consist of both doings and sayings, Warde (2005: 134) suggests that analysis should be directed at both practical activity and its representations. In other words, the event generates its own representation, which then becomes a part of it that cannot be dissociated from the event itself.

Warde (Ibid. 147) suggests that the issue of hierarchies of practice has become an empirical issue. The empirical questions to be raised, according to Warde (2005: 149), are what (types of) practices are prevalent, what range of practices individuals engage in, and, what the typical combinations of practices are. We need to know more, Warde (ibid.) argues, about how different practices affect each other, because theory makes no mention of it. With Warde (Ibid. 144), the important issue concerns how, for the individual, moments of consumption map on to one another. I agree it is an important point, given the before-

mentioned sequentiality and simultaneity of practices. Here we also need to acknowledge that reading practice *per se* entails a number of different inter-related practices. In order to grasp readers' different practices for reading, we need to reframe them, and divert our attention from tracing points of change in the history of individual readership to mapping reading practices in the contemporary social field. Better still, they could be treated complementarily. All in all, Warde (147) says this broad scope suggests a comparable need for breadth in method and interpretive techniques.<sup>78</sup>

### What is Method?

According to the dictionary, method is understood as “a procedure or process for attaining an object” (Webster’s u.a. 1422). In common vernacular usage, an appropriate phrasing is ‘the way to go’. However, these definitions bring a certain reification of method, whereby and the dynamic and (re)iterating qualities of research risk getting lost. Nietzsche (2003/1895: 194) regarded method as one of the essential and most important issues of all times, and also the most difficult – considering that habit and laziness work strongly against it. In science there is often a recurrent use of one and the same method, which according to Bruner (1990 in Dumez 2006: 4) will merely lead to a ‘methodolatry’ that will only serve to generate and multiply ‘neat little studies’. Similarly, Alf Rehn (2002) speaks of a certain Methodism that is essentially a “moral economy of method”.

In other words, one can say that Bruner and Rehn address the reproductivity that Deleuze and Guattari of royal science posited. With a more nomadic approach to science we need instead to reinvent the forces, movement and multiplicity harbored in the concept of method. Inspired by Bay (1998), I regard method not as a given path or shortcut to a predefined goal. “Method is not a way but rather a way of moving, of avoiding settling down, or reaching a certain destination.” (Bay 1998: 32) Hence, it is by use of methods that we move ahead, and avoid jumping to hasty conclusions.

### Researching Reading Practices

When it comes to investigating those elusive practices, De Certeau (1988/1984: 53) is highly critical of tables, statistical surveys, and linear schemes – those scientific operations that would belong with what Deleuze and Guattari termed “Royal science” (Cf. Chapter II). Here research adopts observational distance and centre upon some particular, specifiable properties and seeks synthetiza-

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<sup>78</sup> These in turn could become the conditions for developing a program of research that depart from theories of practice, says Warde (2005).

tion, even totalization, of practices, framed as homogeneity. Scientific method, says De Certeau (ibid.), effectively conceals the very power that makes it possible in the first place, and also the procedures of repression and withdrawal. In turn, the practitioners will comply with the investigators and provide the requested data. In this way, they too partake in which results in the concealment of their real everyday tactics, their very heterogeneity above all, and the practical differences among those will remain in the dark.

De Certeau (1988/1984: xiv) emphasizes the necessity of determining the procedures, bases, effects and possibilities for (consumers) operating and adapting to their own interests within the dominant cultural economy. He shuns statistical investigations altogether because they only serve to grasp the material of these practices, but not their form and their manner of phrasing. It proceeds to count what is used, and not the ways of using things. Hence, statistical inquiries seek only to find the homogenous, not heterogeneity, and by means of a fragmentising analysis, the method loses sight of that which it seeks to represent. (Ibid. xviii) The statistics captures readers and captivates so-called non-readers, materials for reading (literary genres), and quantities of reading (time spent reading), whereas reading (practice) remains elusive.

Importantly, most statistical methods also exert moral powers. Frans Lundgren (2003) writes that when statistic data first was put to use in Sweden in the 1830s and 1840s, it was gathered and made publicly available in an overview of the condition of the nation – all in order to generate a general sense of citizenship. (Ibid. 102) Hence, statistics was used as a tool in the public debate to identify societal problems and provide authoritative and solid answers to these problems. (Ibid. 105) In fact, the primary benefit of statistics was not primarily connected with epistemological concerns but rather to the issue of *representation*. Statistics was a way to disclose and visualize matters that have previously been hidden. The promise of quick access to truth and easy visual surveillance made statistics into a very attractive genre. Moreover, the invention of photography provided additional, visual examples that would enforce and impress morality in the sense of the viewer. (Ibid: 113)<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The use of statistics is often associated with the Positivist school of science. Unlike the usual descriptions of Comte's positive philosophy, described as rather cold and de-humanized, positivism in fact emerged as an enormous 'spiritual movement'. (Comte 1979/1844: 63) He believed that the non-selfish and benevolent emotions that belong to the human nature had not had free reins under the reign of theological thought. He held that this thought was essentially individual and in contrast, the positive philosophy sought to establish connection between people and a strong sense of social solidarity among them, for the betterment of society, both in spirit and in practice. (Ibid. 61f) The positive school sought to strengthen contemporary centres of power while at the same time lay upon them moral duties that increasingly correspond to the real needs of the people. (Ibid. 64)



Research into practices could indeed make a case against programmatic research agendas. Book historian Roger Chartier (1995/1992: 17), who took inspiration from De Certeau's conceptualization of reading practices, admits that from the beginning, the aim of Book history was to measure the uneven and unequal spread of books across social classes and groups. This approach was based upon an assumption that differences in cultural practices reflect *a priori* social conflicts [*motsättningar*], whether on a macroscopic level (the one ruler versus the ruled ones; the elite versus the populace) or based on other socially differential elements (wealth, social classes, living conditions, professions, etc). Moreover, Book History aimed at describing the cultural groups that belong with specific types of texts. Then it appeared from empirical studies that these groups more often than not shared the same texts.

In time, therefore, Chartier (Ibid. 19) suggested that we turn the perspective around, departing from texts and then to readers. Firstly, we should strive to understand how the very same text is accessed, handled and understood in a variety of ways. The different kinds of uses of a joint material will be what create social differences in the first place. Secondly, it is important to recover and reconstruct the networks of practices that will influence the variety of ways in which one gets access to texts, and especially those practices that are extinct. Thirdly, no text exists independent of materiality. The variety of textual forms will necessarily affect how texts are understood in everyday life.

### Designing the Study

Chartier's renewed approach to the research into reading practices has inspired me to design my interview study with regard to the different relationships between books and reading. This ties well in with the view that practices belong with specific things (Holt 1995, Reckwitz 2002). Hence, I have not created focus groups to reflect statistical variables or represent different socio-economic groupings. Rather, it is the variety of relationship to books and reading that have guided my selection of groups, not least because different types and forms of books also belong with a variation of business practices. In other words, connecting with Miller (2000), I acknowledge the relation between the book business and readers' values. Moreover, different books and forms of books also carry varying grades of public interest and support.

Wilk (2004: 16) notes that the concept of consumption in everyday language falls within what Lakoff calls a 'radial category', and at the centre there is a prototype and that other related categories draw on their relationship to that prototype rather than to each other. Hence, the category of consumption is also graded, in that some examples of consuming are perceived as "better" examples than other. Although issues of literacy and reading books have caught more interest in consumer research in the last decade, and even held as a more general equivalent to consumption by De Certeau, reading is not exactly the proto-

type of consuming. But if we instead speak of reading books, then reading canonized fiction like Strindberg and Dostoyevski is often taken as a “better” example than reading the latest Harlequin novel, often described as mere consumption, or listening to an audio book.

Concerning the consumption relationship between books and interviewees, I had decided at an early stage to view it in terms of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’. These concepts enable us to reflect around the relationship in terms of proximity and distance, and the various roads in-between in reading practice, without having to create top-bottom structures or hierarchies between different groups of readers, or passing value judgments about those who read literary fiction, and those who rather not read books at all. Put shortly, in the context of interviews I chose not to use the concepts of centre and periphery in terms of cultural or societal power. That said, power has of course a very strong impact on the topic of books and reading, and we will return to this issue in the genealogical chapter VII where we, for example, will find that many centres of power have sought to restrict access to books and reading. In case of conducting interviews however, the concept of centre and periphery do not entail any top-bottom power or gradation, either of books or of people. Still, it provides a means for discussing what consumption is central or not in people’s everyday lives.

When designing the sample selection of my research project I placed at the centre readers of literary fiction (novels), a genre that according to the publisher Per I. Gedin (2000: 248) constitutes the very soul of the book trade. Whether or not this is true is of course debatable. By placing it in the centre however, we can bypass the question of whether it is ‘high’ art or not that entails a vertical order. Admittedly, the novel has not always been considered “golden fiction” like the front-cover of this book shows; it was long deemed a “low” form of literary art compared to poetry and drama (see Littau 2006; Starker 1990). Regardless of which, I think it safe to say that literary fiction is of central importance. For example, the BPC discourse revolved much around reading fiction (Peurell 2004; Eriksson 2007).

Further away from the ‘centre’ we find other genres, other forms of books, as well as other ways of reading. Farthest away, perhaps even beyond the periphery, we find what is commonly called ‘non-reading’ [*icke-läsandet*]. Although phrased in negative terms, usually indicating a sense of lack or deficit, here ‘non-reading’ is best understood more broadly for it will constitute ‘centres’ in other contexts and with regard to other phenomena and factors. We will continue this discussion on ‘non-reading’ in Chapter IX, where I will rather use the expressions of being well-accustomed or little accustomed to reading books. And yet, there is a tension between the revered Book (with a capital B) and ‘non-reading’, between its centre and periphery:

Yet, every ‘periphery’ shares with its ‘centre’ a special kind of relationship, which may be one of diffusion or imitation but may also be one of aspiration, of mov-

ing in closer. Again, producers of knowledge become at the same time consumers and vice versa. As a result, activity at the 'centre' ultimately depends on someone in the 'periphery' acknowledging that there is a centre and taking up its activity, while the 'periphery' would cease to exist without the attraction of a 'centre'. With the 'periphery' proliferating, the 'centre' is also likely to become more distributed. (Nowotny et al. 2001: 75)

Thus, the relationship between 'centre' and 'periphery' is not static in any way; it is everchanging and multifaceted. As Nowotny et al. point out, it is not just an outward movement; it could also be the case of the periphery moving inwards, towards the centre. We can easily recognize the parallels to the diffusion of consumption revolving around conspicuous centres (Cf. Veblen 1898); and yet, we must acknowledge the in-between space between 'centre' and 'periphery'. Diffusion does not simply depart from a centre; rather, diffusion flows in the middle, within the relation, in different directions (Deleuze & Guattari 1988/1984: 435).

## Empirical Data

The empirical data for this research project is very rich. Already the notion of *data* entails a multiplicity; it is the plural of "something given" (cf. Latin *datum* Webster's u.a. 577). This thesis comprises four main elements of empirical data in all: respondent letters, interviews, visual images and oral narratives. I will now describe each set of empirical data, starting with the Nordic Museum inquiry lists and respondent letters, then moving on to the interviews and the experimental visual data. This is the order in which the empirical data will be presented later, from chapter VIII through XIV.

### Respondent Letters to the Nordic Museum Inquiry Lists

As part of a national inventory in the beginning of the 20th century, the method of using questionnaire lists emerged as a way to collect data about a vanishing folk culture. New museums and institutions were created around the centres of those data collections, and ever since the 1920s the Nordic Museums among others have sent lists to a pool of informants [*meddelare*] in different parts of the country (Westergren 2003: 5). A special list, Nm 228, was created around reading and writing habits just before the millennium 1999/2000 and it should probably be understood as an attempt to document a vanishing reading culture. As we have seen, there was a widespread anxiety that books and other expressions of print culture would disappear in the new media landscape for the benefit of the digital alternatives that were even deemed pure substitutes, according to some.

The inquiry lists are distributed by post to the regular stock of informants, i.e. those who have replied to at least 3-4 lists. (Waldetoft 2003: 9) The NM 228 list about reading and writing habits encompass around 200 letters, of which I have read 74 very closely, starting with KU18475 – KU18566, by which I reached a satisficing point. With this selection I had got a fair representation of informants that reflects the general body of respondent letters. Of the 74 letters, 59 were written by women and 15 by men. Those figures corresponds exactly with the estimation of the Nordic Museum informants as having 80 per cent share of women informants, most of them born in the 1940s or earlier. The oldest woman in my study was born in 1906 (KU18556) and the youngest 1982 (KU18477). The men in my set of letters do not display the same spread in terms of age, just as Klein (2003) has noted. They were born between 1912 (Sture Hazard, KU18537) and 1950 (Gert Lindell, KU18508). Hence, younger men are missing. Klein (2003: 77) wonders whether the absence of male informants – not least in their 40s or 50s – is a sign of the low status of inquiry list writing.

The respondents live in different parts around the country. Possibly, some counties are more represented than others; for example, Småland is found more often, while Norrland is rather unusual. Maybe the slightly uneven spread belongs with the fact that respondents often are recruited directly through different museum activities and magazines (including weeklies and membership sheet-spreads) and indirectly through different social networks. Differences in media habits and social interaction could help explain the production and reproduction of demographic and geographic differences among the respondents.

The inquiry list method is lauded for its subjective individuality, and sometimes criticized because of the rather lop-sided composition of the group of informants. New groups of citizens have yet to become part of the stock of informants. And yet, according to Westergren (2003: 6), the future for inquiry lists seems bright and there are many possibilities to use the material. Klein (2003: 80) for instance, suggests ethnography of readership (cf. Boyarin 1992) or social poetics (cf. Herzfeld 1997). Richette (2003: 127) views the collection of material as an event in time and space and advocates an approach that allows for contextual critique. Moreover, Richette holds that the inquiry list material is a genre in its own right. An intricate problem is how to present the material as personal experiences and not as representatives for a group. (Waldetoft 2003: 13) On the other hand, the material is a rich starting-point for our understanding of values etc., among individuals and in collectives. (Klein 2003: 83) I find it a clear advantage that the respondents have not been asked questions directly about economic concerns as relates to reading and books. In this way we can gain access to readers' own portrayal of their reading practices.

I have used Excel sheets and entered notes in columns and listed the informants' names, codes, year and place of birth. Also about how the selected respondents became literate, whether they have become readers; values and atti-

tudes towards reading; experiences of books; reading practices; time and space; social context (family and friends, etc); gift-giving; everyday life context; economic aspects; and power. The purpose was not to trace any particular causal relationships, but rather to take hold of my material by creating a map in order to get an overview of my material. The map opened several entries into my material. It was no longer a winding path of serialized accounts, but a composite multiplicity. The map has been a support to memory by making it possible to follow both individual life histories and specific themes. In other words, I have been able to navigate the material longitudinally and latitudinally.

In the inquiry list NM. 228, there was also a question whether the respondents wish to be mentioned by name. I have entered their response for ethical reasons in my excel-sheet in order to comply with the respondents' wishes. Rather few informants ask to be mentioned by name, and I have done so only in case they expressly wish so. Those who wish to remain anonymous or say naming does not matter to them I refer to by use of the listed code of accession. And when I quote them, I also make notes about gender and year of birth.

I have entered many passages from the letters verbatim in a Word document - passages that I have felt are relevant or especially illuminating. This work has been demanding and time-consuming, but also incredibly exciting. Excerpts of these passages will be quoted mainly in Chapter VIII.

As Jack Goody (1990/1977: 128) claims, *writing* offers other cognitive processes than orality due to the distance invoked. By means of “backwards scanning”, for instance, the writer becomes aware of the formulization and forms of communication and can eliminate inconsequence in writing (Ibid. 49f.) Ong (1999/1982: 119) speaks of writing as a solipsist action. Against that background the inquiry list is the most individualistic source I have had access to – and yet of course, the inquiry list informants are often involved in a relationship with the Nordic Museum which is readily observable in their letters.

The way the questions have been phrased have of course influenced the respondents; some even use the same structure and headlines as in the Museum's letter. Often I have regarded this as a positive thing, rendering new ideas and reflections. I find it rather serious however, that phrases such as “The power of words” and “The key to a world” are permeated with valuation as they are distinctly drawn from a capital Reader's literate horizon. For someone who is not used to books and reading, these sentences could be operating as excluding devices. Admittedly, those who choose to become respondents seem to enjoy writing. They appear to actively write letters or perhaps a diary; some write insändare to the newspapers, and a few write as part of their profession. Many are particularly interested in history and folk history and they regard the respondent letters as a chance to contribute to ethnological research into history.

With Deleuze & Parnet (2001/1977: 1) however, the aim of questions is not to answer questions correctly, but rather to get out of them. Hence, I agree with

Westergren (2003: 6) that it is not only the solid and splendid *answers* to the posed questions that have proved most valuable in working with the respondent letters, but also the capers, sidesteps, and personal expressions – that which some have called “the scrap”. Another term is *micro stories*: “short, well-rounded episodes with a clear beginning and end and often a complicating point”.<sup>80</sup> These can also emerge as condensed self-presentations that contain details of an intimate or symbolic nature. (Cf. Stahl 1989, Klein 2003: 82) Some of these sidesteps were included in my report to the Book Price Commission. In this present book, I will use the inquiry list material not primarily as subjective representations in contrast to the aggregated national surveys, but rather as a way to connect with singular experiences, as amplifications of the problems, contexts and forces that are connected with reader’s use of reading and the book.

## Interviews

In the present study I have conducted interviews with sixty-eight informants about books and reading, both groupwise and individually. In case of group interviews, refers to the method called “focus groups” employed within marketing (Catterall & Maclaran 2006; Kvale 1997; Morgan 1996). The term generally denotes that the interaction in the group is directed towards a subject chosen by the interviewer, whose task it is to ensure the right atmosphere for an open conversation among the group members. In the individual interviews, the informants could bring up sensitive subjects that would be too personal for group discussion. The interpretive data could render complementary contributions to the broad, national surveys on readership. This was in fact a prerequisite to my collaboration with the BPC.

What has distinguished my use of the group interview from the traditional focus group is that I have primarily gathered groups that are made up from people who already know each other, so-called friendship groups (Catterall & Maclaran 2006). A loose interview among friends is nearly the opposite of standardized telephone interviews with singular individuals. One clear advantage is that the interviewer gets access to additional perspectives that pertain to the social situation of practices.

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<sup>80</sup> This term is quite similar to the particular Italian tradition of *micro-storia* in history with names like Carlo Ginzburg, Eduardo Grendi, Giovanni Levi and Carlo Poni. With Micro-storia, attention is turned towards microrealities and microcosm, case studies, valorizing of the critical situation on the margin: strategies and interactions on part of the individual and collective representation. (Dosse 1999/1995: 229f)

## Sample Selection

I first set out to investigate the circle of interested, voluntary readers, especially those who are expressly interested in literary fiction [*skönlitteratur*] from general publishers. This type of literature is mostly sold through bookshops, including Internet bookshops, and in publishers' book clubs. The readers interested in literary fiction could be found in reading groups (or book circles, as I prefer to call them), and therefore, these soon became some sort of centre for my investigation into readers' use of books.

Then I approached the mass-market book, because it is situated at the border between the traditional book trade and the newspaper and magazine trade and thus it relies on other distribution channels. For example, the Harlequin mass-market paperback can be characterized as a hybrid of book and magazine. It is mainly found in the shelves next to the weeklies, and should one want to engage in a more regular relationship with the books, one could order books in a way more similar to subscription than a book-club membership. In accordance with the Harlequin model, the reader signs up for a specific genre and a fixed set of books are sent home in monthly packages. This model stands in stark contrast to the principal thought within book economy that each published title is a unique product, and hence the consumer must make a new choice for each singular title (Eg. Hjort-Andersen 2000: 29). Another reason for approaching the mass-market book and its readers is that the value of romance reading has been seriously contested up to our days. Since long, there have been complaints of too high consumption and excessive reading of romance books. Of course, this gives an interesting angle upon the aim to increase reading across all groups, and across all genres.

I also took on board the audio book, which was also comprised by the VAT reduction, just like the traditional printed book. The audio book is a relatively new form of book and due to its communicative and technological features it borders on other forms of industries, for example radio and the music industry. I was especially curious about how the readers value it in relation to the printed book and how reading practices are influenced from visual reading to listening. For similar reasons I sought contact with people who read electronic books. Apart from the fact that e-books have radically different (digital) standards than the printed book, it was not comprised by the VAT reduction, primarily due to European tax policy regarding down-loadable services.

As regards the mass-market books, audio books and e-books, I had no access to existent groups of readers. Therefore, I have conducted individual and group wise interviews where the interviewees are not previously acquainted. In order to get into contact with readers, Harlequin and Bonnier Audio were very helpful and gave me lists with names, addresses and telephone numbers of members in their respective book clubs. E-Pan (now fused into Norstedts Förlag) and E-lib posted my call for informants on their websites over a couple of weeks at the beginning of 2004.

In the next step, I turned once more towards existent groups of people, this time towards those who had no direct link to books. Setting qualitative interviews against a shared social context, I saw the opportunity to delve deeper into a series of statistical truces about reading. For one, it is commonplace to say that women read fiction and men do not (Antoni 2004; Carlsson in SOU 2005), and I was most interested in views on male and female reading practices, within a joint social setting. A second statistical truce is that reading practices belong with one's upbringing; in order to become a reader, one's parents must be readers. Hence, I wanted to meet with a group of women with young children regarding their roles as parents and the relations of reading and book consumption between mother and child. A third common assumption is that reading practices are formed at an early age and stabilized in higher education. (Antoni 2004, Carlsson in SOU 2005) Interestingly, many young people stop reading books when they finish school. (Barker & Escarpit 1973) Therefore, I also sought contact with young adults, around twenty years old, and who did not take part in any education. They have a short history of a disposable income of their own and are about to form their individual reading practices outside their childhood families and after schooling.

In the next step, I turned once more towards existent groups of people, this time towards those who had no direct link to books. One such group was "The Monday Gang" [*Måndagsgänget*], which was formed by five married couples around their sixties and who meet up separately women and men for evenings with different activities and themes, although not related to books and reading. It has become a statistical truce to say that women read fiction and men do not (Antoni 2004; Carlsson 2005). I was most interested in the Monday Gang's views on male and female reading practices, and especially within a shared social setting.

I also met with a group of women with young children regarding their roles as parents and mediators of literature. For it is also a statistical truce that reading practices belong with one's upbringing; in order to become a reader, a person's parents must be readers. I was curious about the relations of reading and book consumption between mother and child. It is also quite well-known that many young people stop reading books when they finish school. Therefore, I also I sought contact with young adults, around twenty years old, and who did not take part in any education. They have a short history of a disposable income of their own and are about to form their individual reading practices outside their childhood families.

Moreover, I wanted to meet with a group with little experience of book reading as adults. I engaged the students in a project where they were to interview friends or families who read books very rarely. The results from this project was referred to in my report to the BPC (Schultz Nybacka 2005), but I have not used it in my thesis as it is a secondary material that I cannot vouch for personally in terms of research methodology, etc. After discussions with two scholars



in my reference group, Ulla Carlsson (Nordicom) and Lennart Weibull (SOM-institute), recommended that I should make contact with a workplace, where I would find employees with whom it would be possible to discuss views on books and reading practices. A great idea! Unlike interviews with consumers however, I would need more formal access to a workplace.

I found it highly problematic to decide which organization to approach without acting upon simplistic prejudice about who are “readers” and who are not. After discussing the matter with the Commission’s Head Secretary, Hans Sand, he urged me to make contact with a group of members of the union trade *Landsorganisationen* (LO), an important voters’ base for the Social Democratic Government. I consented because it could complement the other groups in my study in terms of both geography and sex. I had observed that the male metal worker had become a symbol for national ‘non-reading’ in the ongoing discussions of the BPC, and this symbol was strongly stereotyped as male, uneducated, non-verbal small-town and wholly uninterested in books and reading, perhaps even directly negative towards them. I was very curious whether this image would hold for further scrutiny.

Last but not least, I wanted to interview people with other languages than Swedish as their mothertongue and who could voice their concerns and relations to books and reading. They have the possibility to read books in several tongues, but face the problem of limited supply, different degrees of accessibility, etc. Also in this case, I have approached a workplace, my local lunch restaurant at Stockholm University.

A rule of thumb posits that most research projects consist of four to six focus groups.<sup>81</sup> The most common justification for this number is that the data eventually becomes “saturated”, that is, when little new information is added. The more diverse participants and topics, the more groups are usually required in order to achieve saturation, Morgan (1996) suggests.

In all, I have conducted interviews with seven different focus groups, all during 2004:

☞ Three different book circles in Stockholm and Lund in the range of thirty to sixty-year-olds, one all-male, one all-female and one mixed group. I got access to the groups by “snowballing” my own circle of friends. The group interviews were held in the homes of the members.

☞ Two mixed focus groups audio book listeners in Örebro with five participants in each group, ten in total. The youngest was a ten-year old boy who joined with his mother. Access was granted with the help of Jesper Monthán, then President at Bonnier Audio, the leading audio book publisher in Sweden,

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<sup>81</sup> Scholars using multiple segmentation design (according to age, sex, marital status, geography, socioeconomic status) may well conduct up to around different 50 groups. (Morgan 1996)

and the participants were drawn from their book club membership directory. The interviews were held in a small, backstage conference room at the Örebro City Library.

☞ One mixed group of friends (five women and four men) around 60 years old from Dalsjöfors outside Borås. The interview was held in the home of one couple. I got into contact with them through their daughter who is a friend of mine.

☞ One group of five women in their 30s, living in Stockholm with small children. They all belong with the same circle of friends and I made contact with them through a friend of mine who also was included in the group. The interview was held in a small seminar room at the Stockholm University School of Business.

☞ One large group of metal workers in Sandviken. I came into contact with the group through Kjersti Bosdotter, who was the trade union's representative in The Book Price Commission. She put me into contact with Åke Dansk at Metal Department 135 and he arranged for the group interviews to take place in connection with a two-day course. The group interview with 15 men and five women was held in a large, public meeting hall in Sandviken. I also interviewed nine of the participant men individually or in groups of two or three in the lunch restaurant at the facilities.

As regards the massmarket books, audio books and e-books, I had no access to existent groups of interviewees. Therefore, I have conducted individual and groupwise interviews where the interviewees are not previously acquainted. In order to get into contact with readers, Harlequin and Bonnier Audio were very helpful and gave me lists with names, addresses and telephone numbers of members. I wrote letters that explained my errand and sent it to around twenty members in the respective clubs. The names were selected in accordance with different criteria that would simplify the process and which I had discussed with my contacts within the companies. As for Harlequin readers the criteria were limited to geography (Stockholm) and a high level of consumption with Harlequin standards, which turned out to be a minimum of 200 purchases. For audio book listeners I went for geography and picked a specific city, Örebro, which is the 7th largest in Sweden in terms of population. (Statistics Sweden 2005: 82) The mean income in Örebro is slightly less than in Sweden at large (Ibid. 351f).<sup>82</sup>

After a couple of weeks I followed up with a telephone call. Most successful was my call for audio book listeners in the city of Örebro, with around a dozen accepted invitations to participate in a focus group. Due to sickness, the final number was ten – three males and seven females between the age of ten and

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<sup>82</sup> The mean income from employment and business in Örebro is SEK 191 669, compared with 203 257 in Sweden at large, and 240 633 in Stockholm.

65. My call for readers with a very high consumption of Harlequin books was less fortunate. Most said no immediately. Eventually three persons accepted: one woman in her thirties, one woman in her sixties, both interviewed individually at Stockholm University, and one man of 85 who I interviewed at his local restaurant.

As for readers of e-books, the company E-lib featured my call for interviewees on their website over a couple of weeks. Two persons contacted me: one man and one woman, both avid e-book ambassadors between 50-60 years, and I interviewed them individually in small seminar rooms at Stockholm University. As regards the interviews with young adults and adults with another mother-tongue, only two interviewees were available from each group at the time for the interview. I interviewed two young Gothenburg women in their twenties at the Gothenburg train station, and I conducted individual interviews with a married couple working in my local restaurant.

It has been my ambition to meet with people and with groups from across the country. The purpose here is not to provide a set of readers, representative of the whole population, but rather create conditions for discussing different perspectives and relations to books and reading. All places had a bookshop and library nearby, and most were close to a college or university. Many communes in Sweden do not share these features. Indeed, many of the interviewees had grown up in other parts of the country and had left because of their choice of education, work, or marriage; in some groups they were in a clear majority. Perhaps they are more prone to accept invitations to participate in a research study? One could also speculate that these people may possibly be more open to change than those who have stayed, and this could have some influence in how they react to new phenomena and changes in their environment.

Nearly every second member from each group was interviewed individually. For example, in the case of the metalworker group, I interviewed nine of the participants, all men, individually or in groups of two or three in the lunch restaurant on the premises. The two audio book groups however, were exempted due to logistical problems and my limited time in Örebro (a stay less than 24 hours). Some members in the other groups fell ill or had to cancel their interview appointment and were not able to re-book it within the period of empirical research (ending December 2004). Thus, the additional interview study is not wholly "complete" if we by this should mean a total set of systematic, individual interviews with all group participants. In my study, this form of completeness was never required. The empirical work continued up to a satisficing point in the hermeneutical process where I sensed that most important topics

were covered and additional interviews with members from that same group would not bring many further insights.<sup>83</sup>

### Views on Interviews

With Steinar Kvale, the interview perspective is inter-relational, which is expressed by the word itself and its roots in French ‘*entrevue*’, which Kvale (1997: 9) describes as “in-between two view-points”. From what seems to be a phenomenological perspective, Kvale (1997: 13) tells of a semi-structured life world interview which is defined as follows: “an interview with the purpose of getting descriptions of the interviewees’ life world in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena”. It is about “understanding the world from the point of view, develop the meaning of people’s experiences, render their life world free before the scientific explanations”. (Ibid. 9) Hence, aside from a phenomenological approach, Kvale seems to hold a rather romantic view of interviewing, which according to Alvesson (2003: 94) is the opposite pole of the ‘new positivist’ approach that entails that the context is suppressed and facts are (re-)emphasized.

Björn Bjerke (2003: 233f) mentions three metaphors regarding the researcher’s role pertaining to the interview situation. The first is the researcher as a *traveler*, who embarks on a journey in order to get knowledge along a clear set string of destinations (unlike De Certeau’s more nomadic notion of the traveler). The achieved knowledge is sorted and compared to previous experience, often in relation to categories posited in advance. The reports are carried out upon returning home, and the extent to which the report accounts for real and true conditions, is the overriding criteria for success. This type of research belongs to the classical mimetic tradition, where the researcher seeks true, objective and unambiguous type of knowledge.

The researcher as *miner*, on the other hand, regards knowledge as subterranean mineral and it is the interviewer’s task to bring it to the surface. Perhaps it could belong with the sedentary, abductive/retroductive approach to science mentioned earlier. The *dialogic* interview (or the deep interview) thirdly, is the interviewer as *co-creator*. It is a matter of subject – subject relationships, rather than subject-object relationships. This form of interview experiences views and attitudes, emotions and knowledge. This approach calls for skill, sensitivity, concentration, interpersonal skills, discipline and focus on part of the interviewer. None of Bjerke’s metaphors however, allows for recognition of the participants’ competences.

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<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the concept of completeness can of course be problematized from a philosophy of science perspective (as will be done in chapter II in connection to the discussion on science and literature

Given the implicit power structure and power play of the interviewing situation (cf. Alvesson 2003: 100), I was acutely aware in my empirical study that I may come across as a *controller* of readers after the VAT decrease rather than someone doing research about books and reading. I believe that this is especially sensitive in the case of research about cultural practices or any other topic subjected to a specific morality. Most people would certainly have an idea of what they *should* read to be regarded as fine readers. And if you ask them *what* they prefer to read they would respond what they consider are most in line with what is expected of them. (Bourdieu in Reeser & Spalding 2002) Quite rightly, Rancière (2006: 11) reacts against questions that are formulated as a snare. For example, members of the popular public may be asked to respond to an opinion such as “I love classical music, for example the waltzes of Strauss”. And if the worker [sic!] will lie [sic!] by saying yes, he will be revealed as ignorant of the fact that Strauss “does not deserve” to be presented as composer.

We need not resort to these approaches by which the researcher becomes not only a hunter or gatherer of empirical data but indeed a *captor* that ensnares and betrays its informants. As interviewer, I have had the ambition not to pass judgments on what is “good” reading and what is “bad”; rather, such judgments should be problematized, especially if we are to take a real interest in readers’ own values. To allow for people to express themselves can be difficult enough:

It is very hard to ‘explain oneself’ – an interview, a dialogue, a conversation. Most of the time when someone asks me a question, even one which relates to me, I see that strictly, I don’t have anything to say. Questions are invented, like anything else. If you aren’t allowed to invent your questions, with elements from all over the place, from never mind where, if people ‘pose’ them to you, you haven’t much to say. (Deleuze & Parnet 2001/1977: 1)

Thus in order to render an interview even possible, it must allow for the interviewee’s inventive escape. “The aim is not to answer questions, it’s to get out, to get out of it.” (Ibid.) Then a nomadic sciences’ approach to interviews calls for *following* rather than leading on part of the interviewer.

### Interviews in the Study at Hand

For the study at hand I have had a semi-structural approach to interviewing, using an interview guide (see appendix). Similar to my mapping of the Nordic Museum respondent material, I have asked questions around the ways in which the interviewees became literate, and if they remember how they have become readers (or not). Other questions include the social relations around books and reading, book gift-giving, etc. I would also ask about changes in book consumption, especially due to the VAT reduction. The result to that question was reported to the BPC (see Schultz Nybacka 2005), but is not a specific issue in

this thesis. Rather, it belongs with the overall background and context of the study.

The group interview with the metal workers in Sandviken got a slightly different character, more as an open discussion about what it means to read. How does one know what reading experience a book will give? What is the experience of reading? Does one read when one is happy or sad? Is reading something “classy” [*’fint’*] or not?

The interviews were typically around 1, 5 hours long. There was plenty of time to cover a wide range of topics regarding reading practices, anecdotes, favourite books, etc. Indeed, the interview could go on longer if the interviewee wanted to. I desired an atmosphere that would allow for an openhearted interview. Books and reading are intimate matters and could hold a key to a person’s most innermost thoughts and feelings and some avid readers were keen to discuss books and reading from a personal history perspective. One general insight from these interviews is that books really do have organizational powers in people’s lives.

Interestingly, the longest interviews were with the three Harlequin readers and lasted up to three hours, revolving around both light and serious topics: everyday matters, life and death. Remarkably, in two cases, the Harlequin interviewees spoke of their strong emotions vis-à-vis literature and life, and they came to think of recent funerals and they suddenly began to cry. I felt strongly with them, getting tears in my eyes too. Thus, interviewing is also emotional work in which interviewer and interviewee attune to each other, with all the sensitivity one can muster.

### The Use of Focus Groups

Focus groups are often combined with other qualitative and quantitative studies in a variety of ways, and Morgan claims that despite the technical, epistemological and political differences between the methods, the general results and conclusions are often the same. Even though focus groups do not encompass as large number of participants as large-scale survey samples do, the findings of previous statistical studies are mostly confirmed. Admittedly, this should concern mostly the “factual” side of investigations and not the “softer” aspects (Morgan 1996).<sup>84</sup> For example, my interviews with a small population could

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<sup>84</sup> Regarding the couplings of surveys and focus groups, research by Folch-Lyon et al (1981) disclosed a strong convergence between the results of a focus group study with 300 participants in comparison to a 2000 respondent household survey. Although this assessment arguably was subjective, as pointed out by Stycos (1981), the general conclusion on the comparative value of focus group research remains throughout other studies. (Ward et al 1991; Saint-Germain et al. 1993)

confirm the twenty percent increase in book buying that was suggested by the rise in the book trade sales.

In comparison between the two methods, surveys are better able to elicit yes/no answers about specific behaviours or given attitudes, whereas focus groups can bring up general attitudes and are not as limited as surveys regarding sensitive topics. Essentially, there is a trade-off between depth rendered by focus groups and breadth provided by surveys. (Morgan 1996: 138) And yet, focus groups have been criticized for being “quick and cheap” compared to individual interviews. It is clear that cost is comparatively low, which of course is a strong argument for winning ground in qualitative research. (Catterall & Maclaran 2006) Although the economy of research and method should not be underestimated, my primary motive for using focus groups was my interest in the social aspects of reading practices.

The use of friendship groups have according to Catterall & Maclaran (2006) been criticized by some scholars on the assumption that clients do not approve people and because they do not disclose as much of themselves as in a group of strangers. Allegedly, friendship groups could actually encourage self-disclosure, especially among women. In any case, the expected negative effects on the quality of data is not as negative as previously feared (Catterall & Maclaran 2006 referring to Fern 1982; Nelson & Frontczak 1988)

Morgan (1996: 143) claims that if the research concerns gender differences, for example, one might conduct separate interviews with groups of men and women. Even in the case when behaviour does not differ between the sexes, “discussion still may flow more smoothly in groups that are homogenous rather than mixed with regard to sex”. However, this designed type of smoothness must be cautioned. Interaction and group dynamic is one of the benefits of focus groups. (Catterall & Maclaran 2006; Halkier 2010) Furthermore, Corfman (1995 referred in Catterall & Maclaran 2006) maintains that homogeneity within groups is not so important for the quality of data as previously assumed. Indeed, should not conflicting views be of real interest to research of a given topic? For example, when studying gender differences, could not these presumed differences be allowed to not only be visible in statements, but also in interaction and perhaps even in dynamic tension. In my view, it is neither the participants, nor the group discussion that should be smooth, but the (nomadic) interviewer, following the dynamic flow.<sup>85</sup> Scholars with a phenomenological approach to focus groups would describe it as being open to consumers’ own terms and whatever views dynamic emerges. (Catterall & Maclaran 2006)

In the case of interviews among a group of friends, the conversational circle (cf Kvale 1997) already exists; it is a matter of getting access to it, getting into it

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<sup>85</sup> As portrayed by Stephen Brown (2006: 331) the use of focus groups can also be discussed in critical terms, especially when applied in a political context.

and then seeking out tactics to stay there. Sometimes, when the voices are raised to an indiscernible murmur, I have intervened and asked them to tell me what they have been discussing. The additional perspective of friends in a group is especially valuable when studying attitudes and practices that pertain to culturally sensitive issues. Friends or spouses will not allow each other to convey all-too-idealized images of themselves in the stages that Chrzanowska (2002 in Catterall & Maclaran 2006) describe as, forming storming and norming. For example, in a mixed group, one man said: "Right now I read.", whereupon a female friend quickly replied incredulously, "Do *you* read, Olle??" Hence, I could not mistake this happenstance reading for a regular practice, which could easily have occurred in a traditional focus group where people are not acquainted.

### Handling the Interviews

The interviews have been recorded with a digital recorder and I have typed out or made notes of parts of the very rich material. I have gathered the empirical results thematically, while aiming at the deeper lever patterns underlying the narratives with a view to the meta-theoretical concerns of the study.

Every time I work with interviews I am stricken by the value of the informants' own words. I often find that I want to quote much too much. Kvale (1997) warns against stockpiling quotations on top of each other. In my view, the desire to stockpile respondents' quotes just follows the additive, redundant force of oral culture (cf. Ong 1990/1982). Framing quotations with interpretations and analysis do not have an absolute value in itself, but depends on whether they can say something "more". Just think of Sköldböck and Alvenson's (1994) conceptualization of richness in (research) points [*poängrikedom*] and how it transgresses the empirical data.

Deleuze & Guattari (1988) offer yet another view; they regard quotation upon quotation as expressing heterogeneity and productive assemblages, among other things. However, Ong (1990/1982: 153) is right in arguing that the transcription of oral speech transforms the openness of oral conversation into a scriptural closure. Written statements and thoughts will appear as if they were enclosed and unimpressionable in themselves. Writing will lead us to believe that whatever it is about is finished and completed. (Ibid.) All that remains from the inter-view is what is put up for view. Hence, the inter-relational quality of the discussion can no longer be discerned.

### Limitations to Interviews

Research by means of interviews also brings specific limitations. Kvale (1997: 264) gives ten critical angles on interviewing and I will mention here those that pertain to my study. The method is too *individualistic* and does not make allow-



ances for the social embeddedness. Even though most of my interviews have been conducted in groups, there is a danger that each expression is interpreted as a separate statement and not as a contribution to a collective process. It is also permeated by idealism in that human experiences usually belong together with a material world. The interview situation is also too *cognitivist* and *immobile*, it does not consider the body at all. Likewise, it is too intellectualist as it does not take the emotional aspects of knowledge into account. Kvale specifically mentions the lack of empathy, but I find empathy very important, especially when the topic is personal and sensitive. Perhaps a better word still is mutual *sympathy*, considering that interviewer and the interviewee co-function or forms a temporary symbiosis (Cf. Deleuze 2001/1977: 52), where one attunes to each other.

## Images and Oral Narratives

Concerning the representation of my research, how would I be able to convey the insight that reading is not only an abstract operation of understanding as with Chartier (1995/1992) but a *spatial* practice that creates relationships to one-self and to others, especially when I too use written words in my account - words that require reading? Leah Price (2004: 318) speaks of a “complementary challenge” in researching reading: to establish a critical distance from a field of research whose message is also its medium. As my comprehension of the informants’ reading practices was based on my own pre-understanding of reading, I could not get out of my own images and pre-conceptions, let alone pass on to others what I had experienced in the interviews. How could I possibly bring a practice to life beyond reading itself?

Previously, scholars who study reading have often had to rely upon whatever miscellaneous data is available. For instance within the field of book history, Jonathan Rose (2001) lists “memoirs and diaries, school records, social surveys, oral interviews, library registers, letters to newspaper editors, fan mail, and even proceedings of the Inquisition”, a range of multiple sources that according to Leah Price (2004: 313) transform book historians into veritable “magpies”. Obviously, there is a strong ethical implication in this transformation, where the dividing line between gathering, trespassing or even thieving becomes blurred. With the material that I present in this chapter, I seek to challenge those methods that may exert undue moral power over readers and seek to reduce reading to simple categories of entity and form. It is my belief that we may escape, to some extent, the problematic of imposing morality if we engage readers in the process, allowing for them to *generate* a material themselves.

A researcher within organization studies, Inger Gravesen (2002), proposes what she calls “painting exercises” [*måleriövningar*] as suitable for accompanying methods such as case studies, interviews, etc. I decided to use the method in order to get a visual expression of contextualized reading practices. Gravesen

(2002) emphasizes that she uses visual input as a *complement* and not as a primary source of data. The method brings together elements from focus groups and in-depth interviews, but is more experimental and open-ended. The sessions are led by a “process leader” whose task it is to guide the group and yet refrain from steering the group discussion. The sessions will result in two forms of empirical data: paintings and oral narratives that both belong together. In other words, this method will serve to capture both doings and sayings, just like Warde (2005) recommends for studies into consumer practices.

The oral narratives that are given by the participants are different from interviews because they revolve specifically around the images. The narration is also part of a presentation or exhibition for all participants, rather than a conversation with the researcher only. Gravesen (2002) says that during the presentation, the other participants should be allowed to pose questions, and not just the process leader. The group dynamic will play an important role in how the narratives develop. In my experience, the narratives display a wide array of qualities, realist, comic, but also metaphorical and poetic qualities.

### Pilot Study

In order to chisel out a form for the drawing sessions that would render me the material that I desired, I staged a pilot study. The participants were contacted via a good friend of mine, Joakim, and his friends, five in all: three women and two men ranging from the age of 33 to 43 years. The pilot study took place one autumn evening at the School of Business, Stockholm University in 2003. First I gathered the group for a cup of coffee, some sandwiches and an open discussion around books and reading in the kitchen of the student administration staff. Each and every one had a chance to speak of their personal reading habits, and one man confessed that he is an unaccustomed book reader. When everybody felt more comfortable and safe we ventured a walk in the staircase in the building where a small-sized seminar room was the final destination. I had laid the table with drawing pads, oil crayons, opaque water-colours and brushes. There were cheerful laughs as the participants realized that they were to draw and paint. One woman said, “You should paint, yourself, too.” “Should I? Well yes perhaps I should.”

I quickly decided that I would indeed join in. I thought it would be very valuable to taste the dish that I was so eager to serve my participants. I found it quite difficult, in fact. I had to struggle with my scholarly, more theoretical interests, wrestle them down and encourage playfulness instead. Also I had to let go of my own (rather wanting) aesthetic sensibility to form, matter and balanced composition and engage in drawing in an utterly un-aesthetic – although certainly not anesthetic! – *mode*. From a strictly personal horizon, this struggle rendered the session with strong involvement and at the same time: capitulation. On part of any judgment, foresight or evaluation, I simply had to surren-

der. After that my drawing hand truly started to enjoy the session and the captured reading practices assumed expressions of their own.

The participants in the pilot study (including me) first had to draw pictures of when they read and where: those situations and places where they use books. For this time I left the tape recorder running during the whole session. I also experimented with the *map* as a tool: I asked the participants to draw a map of their life with books and reading. In that way I hoped I would lead the participants away from the thought of art and artworks because that would be pressing; and connect instead with researchers and philosophers who speak of mapping in relation to epistemological and methodological terms (cf. Olsson 1991; Deleuze & Guattari 1987/1980) The task was sufficiently ambiguous to render a whole specter of interpretations (or not), but unfortunately it was too abstract. The mere suspicion that I nurtured an *idea* and not only a wish evoked more pressure on the participants than necessary. They did not quite know what to do, but were a little bit hesitant and apprehensive. Anyhow, time flew and we all got rather tired after having drawn two pictures. I decided to cut the session before we arrived at the last stage with a collectively drawn picture.

## Rethinking the Session

Before continuing my work with the painting sessions I chose to scrap the map as tool. I figured that it was my task to draw the map of reading, not theirs. Instead I chose a layout where the participants take a number of steps which in turn leads to three images: one individual and two collective. The design is a rethought and recast version of Gravesen's disposition.

### 1. Before the session

It is important not to mention anything about the session beforehand in order to spare the participants from becoming overly worried about the task. People can easily experience stress when they are expected to perform tasks that they are not accustomed to. Hence, I invited the participants to a "session" or a "workshop" around books and reading. In hindsight I think the word "workshop" created a certain apprehension to some who felt the pressure of being "creative" and performative.

### 2. Open discussion

Before the drawing session I tried to create an open atmosphere. I wanted all to be given the opportunity to speak and I hoped that the group should be able to discuss different kinds of positions and perspectives. The introduction has been laid out in different ways depending on the assembly and their relations and interests. Notwithstanding the problems of posing questions (cf. Deleuze 2001/1977), in the pilot study I asked if reading books is good, if one becomes

a better person to read. In the session with members from two book circles I wanted to behold what would pass in-between them, so I invited them to interview each other and share their thoughts and experiences of their respective groups. Their curiosity of each other set the pace and by their questions I could map what they themselves conceived of as especially exciting about book circling.

### **3. Present situation**

The participants were asked to draw themselves in the situations when and where they read today. That also entailed to make a simple representation of the environments where they are and to disclose those artifacts that they feel are important for their reading. What really belongs with the reading situation? When the participants are ready they will make a presentation of their drawings. First, the other participants will be allowed to ask questions, and secondary, the researcher can ask for further explanations, elucidations, etc. Gravesen (2002) stresses that the “process leader” must be careful not to present any views or interpretations of the material to the participants.

### **4. Future reading**

In the next step, I asked them to draw a collective image of their future desired reading. Well aware that the future is “impossible” (Cf. Caputo 2001), I still ventured the concept as a way to discuss and project reading and desire outside of the present. In this context, I regarded the concept of ‘future’ as “imaginative anticipations, rather than foresight calculations”. (Nowotny et al. 2001: 39) Indeed, using ‘projective techniques’ is helpful when studying consumers’ desires empirically. (Cf. Belk, Ger & Askegaard 2003)

### **5. The ways to get here**

In the last step, I asked the groups to discuss and express a collective image their view of what is required for them to attain their desired mode of reading. When asking about the “ways to get there” I did not have *cause* and *effect* in mind, but rather methods and modes that would be aligned with the specific art and logic of this consumer practice.

## Methodological Concerns and Risks

Gravesen (2002) emphasizes that the “process leader” must place trust in the method and to the participants. One must not get depressed if they lack of enthusiasm or are filled with doubts. Otherwise the group may think that the task is impossible to pull through. After all, it is a rather unusual task is bestowed upon them. During this part of the process it is most desirable that each and every participant can influence the process. Everybody must be able to feel

comfortable with the painting. And if the group disagrees around something they will have to come up with a solution that feels fine for each and every one. When the group is finished drawing, they can dress the painting in words. Even here it is important that the “process leader” avoids imposing views on the story, but only “lure” it to emerge. If several groups participate, the presentation can take place together. In that way a fruitful discussion can break out among the participants and the material will gain additional dimensions.

Before moving on to a brief description of my experience of working with the painting sessions, I must issue words of caution. The method is not entirely without risks. Some participants may not understand the purpose of the session and others may be skeptical about the tasks at hand. The process leader needs to be very empathic and have a sensitive ear to what is going on in the group. Gravesen (2002) warns against recording or documenting the work in progress of the group. The method requires that the researcher respects that the meaning of the images primarily is decided by the participants themselves. The researcher must not impose his or her views on the results. In that sense, Gravesen employs a result-oriented, rather than process-oriented approach to the sessions. The integrity of the participants must be protected against the presence of the researcher and a close overview and control of the process at work. Respect for the participants and the outcome is at heart of this method.

Another risk comes with the fact that the outcome does not come across as the kind of empirical material we may be used to. I was unfortunate to be helped by the janitor at my department in moving my workplace to another office shortly after presenting my report to the BPC. The janitor did not know that the rather funny-looking drawings and paintings were actually part of my empirical material. Without consulting me, he promptly threw away what he could find and carried it off to the central garbage station, from where it was loaded onto a lorry and forever lost.

## Experiences

Notwithstanding any risks in connection with experimental scholarship, my gathered experience from the visual sessions is that it is an unbelievably rewarding method of generating an exciting and rich material. The drawing and the images render access to additional perspectives, to sayings and stories not yet told. For in some interview situations it can be directly unethical to force those informants who are more silent to speak, to charge them with questions or withhold the chatterboxes. With a sheet of paper everybody is given equal amount of territory to fill out and the differences in how they go about it will be food for thought.

I was prepared for more resistance on part of the participants, more suspicion against the task. I was surprised and a little conflated that so many accepted the

drawing session candidly and even having great fun. In sum, all participants have accepted the task, some without grumbling, but most of them with delight. One participant in the pilot study enjoyed herself so much that she was in fact drooling! Even those who had not drawn since school (a couple of men in Dalsjöfors) just let go of themselves, drawing with joy. The first two images, the individual and the collective image of the future created a lot of energy and laughing in the groups. But drawing on the creative forces is also exhausting: everybody was very tired after the third image, although they were served as much coffee as they cared to drink.

In the session with the book circle members I discovered after the first image that I had been unclear about asking of them to draw themselves. Some participants had just drawn the props or the context that they require for reading. I refrained from pointing out my mistake of consideration to the participants. The first image is especially sensitive and I did not want to put the entire session at risk by establishing a morality of doing right or wrong, good or bad. And in this way, the participants were given a large territory for their exposition that rendered several interesting images outside of personal subjectivity. I am rather amazed at the ease with which they could let go of it!

Instead I believe that the multiplicity and dynamics of reading were more easily captured, especially in the collective drawing, than if they had been tied to the task of creating images of their Selves. It was not simply a matter of obliterating their bodies and achieving higher degrees of abstraction, but rather of doing way with the subject along the lines of Nietzsche, allowing *doing* to be expressed instead of *being*. It is striking how the method really can get rid of inhibitions on part of the informants, allowing for expressing themselves, even to the extent of expressing and exhibiting their experience outside of themselves. Drawing allows for a multiplicity of perspectives and aspects to appear on one single sheet of paper.

### Exhibiting the Materials in Words

An oral narrative perhaps runs best in a beautifully redundant, oral account. A visual material is perhaps best beholden by the eyes and a touchable material is perhaps better grasped by hand. With all this richness given, the drawings from the sessions would better be presented in a performance, after all. The hand can guide the story across the page, and with the relentless speed of speech we can light up flares of thought that will sparkle for a little while. But the moment we shall fix the visual in abstract writing, let the colours of the drawing be encased in black and white, the researcher runs the risk of digital numbness.

Sherry and Schouten (2002) have proposed that poetry may be used and crafted in consumer research; imagery may be evoked, interpreted and elicited until it resonates with the scholars' inner emotional experience. However, to let the

scattered QWERTY alphabet capture the visual composition,<sup>86</sup> the tune of the story in a linear series of words, is to let something pass away: the immediacy and the concurrence expressed by the painting. Only a writer of true caliber can manage such a difficult task. Therefore, I temporarily fold before Plato and admit that my writing cannot surpass the material at hand. But that does not mean that it is without value, on the contrary. Especially, since I have drawn from the drawers' multitude of reading practice and experience. I have used their accounts and words – often verbatim, but not as verbose. The most important elements are retained in the text: ordinary everyday phrases being next to lucid metaphors. They are complementary.

## Commentary

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (1994: 358) hold that good qualitative research is rich in points [*poängrike*]. This concept tells that research “has *certain* grounding in empirical conditions and at the same time it clearly transgresses what empirical material (primary interpretations) is capable of saying. In other words, news value becomes important.” The writers encourage creativity as regards research rich in points, both in terms of empirical material and the manner of interpretation. It is about advancing the multiplicity of the material, using it as a springboard and transgressing consensus opinions.

Good research in accordance with the criteria of richness of points [*poängrikedom*] thus enables a qualitatively new understanding of actual excerpts of the social reality. It breaks with previous thinking, in at least some point. The reader is encouraged to think and to rethink. Research rich in points problematizes. At least an inkling of an insight [*aha-upplevelse*] should thus be imprinted in the reaction of the common reader. (1994: 360)

Whether this is too much promised remains for the reader to see.

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<sup>86</sup> QWERTY is the name of the standard keyboard used for typewriters and computers. Interestingly, as Jared Diamond (2003/1997) tells, this keyboard is not designed for quick and easy typing, but rather the opposite: to slow down writing. The most used letters in the alphabet were scattered across the board so to avoid the mechanical letters from getting caught up in each other.





## Part II: Theoretical study of the book, reading and literacy



## VI. The Being and Doing of the Book

*A reader finds little in a book save what he puts there.  
But in a great book he finds space to put many things.*

*Joseph Joubert*

*A book is the only place where you can examine  
a fragile thought without breaking it,  
or explore an explosive idea  
without fear it will go off in your face.*

*Edward P. Morgan*

*I'm in love with the book,  
in my own way and forever  
(which sometimes leads me, paradoxically,  
to find that there are too many of them  
and not at all "not enough");  
I love every form of the book  
and I see no reason to give this love up.*

*Jacques Derrida (2001: 16)*

*In this chapter, we will discuss the definitions, characteristics and modes of a book at the nexus of object and activity, or in view of practice theory, of artifact and practice.*

### Introduction

Any consumption practice such as reading belongs intimately with object at hand (Cf. Holt 1995), and each object varies in kind (Meikle 2000). There are many ways to define and describe the nature of the book: as a regular product, a special case of cultural product or experience good, etc. The book has been lauded for its longevity and flexibility over time: its simple form has accommodated such wide range of works of different character, from the Bible to the latest glam-bestseller. It is rather incomparable in its "consistency of appearance" (Luey 1994). And yet, the book is difficult to characterize; it remains elusive, especially its mode of being. Facing the digital developments, the very nature of the book needs to be rethought, says publisher Sarah Lloyd (2008) in

a manifesto for the future. The view of books as discrete units or products is no longer self-evident, says Lloyd.

Regarding the use of books, Snow (1964/1959) commented that books in the form of novels, history, poetry and plays are “bread and butter” for literary persons. Considering the common trope of consuming as eating (cf Wilk 2004), Snow’s imagery suggests that these kinds of books are easy consumables. Scientists on the other hand, often tell Snow they make use of their books as tools. Considering this instrumental use, Snow ponders what type of tool is a book? “Perhaps a hammer? A primitive digging instrument?” (Ibid. 13) The question is left without a definite answer.

This chapter considers different definitions of the book at the nexus of object and activity. Attention is paid to the tension between material and forces as relates to the book. In other words, it is not only the *being* of the book that needs to be explored, but also its very *mode* of being.

## Literature and the Book

When the Swedish Government phrased the Directive (2002: 2) to the “Commission for book price issues, et cetera”, they did not outline a world of books and what have you. Above all, they spoke of literature and reading:

Improved conditions for literature and reading are for the Government a question of high priority. The aim of public efforts in this area is to stimulate a varied edition of quality literature, and to increase the access to and interest for literature in all groups. (SOU 2005: 12: 143, my translation)

What the Government means by ‘literature’ is not specified, and then considering the Book Price Commission’s choice of name, it remains unclear whether literature and books could or should be used as synonyms. In many contexts, literature is held as synonymous to “fiction”, both in the area of cultural policy (Peurell 2004), and in contemporary accounts of the book’s role in society (Steiner 2009).

In the Swedish book business, the term ‘general literature’ [*allmänlitteratur*] comprises three groups of works sold to the public on the general market, namely fiction and non-fiction, along with children’s literature. In this way it is kept distinct from the branch of teaching materials [*läromedel*] and other genres that are sold through non-market channels. (Steiner 2009) When the SCB were to conduct their price measurements of books, including the category of what they termed educational literature [*kurslitteratur*] that does not belong to general literature, they resolved the puzzle by comprising “all literature of commercial importance that are published by Swedish publishing companies” (SOU 2005: 12: 60) Thus we learn that ‘literature’ is not only a category within the arts and aesthetics, but is effectively tied to the idea of commercial interests and an open market. Moreover, the relation between literature and book is very close, but

not quite synonymous after all: not all published books belong to general literature, but most works within general literature are published as books.

The VAT decrease encompassed a wide array of printed or bounded materials: books, brochures, booklets, newspapers, magazines, picture-books, sketch-books and paint-books for children, notes and maps as well as certain programs and catalogues. Any of these products that are recorded by voice on a tape or any other technical media were also encompassed by the decrease, on condition that they are an exact oral representation of the printed text, as well as goods in sign language, Braille or similar ways used by people with a reading disability. (SOU 2005: 12: 144; SvF Annual Report 2001: 16) Below is listed an extensive, but not exhaustive, number of types of books.<sup>87</sup>

Table 1. Types of a book from A to Y (Collins Thesaurus, 2002: 123)

Album	Casebook	Encyclopedia/ae	Manual	Score
Almanac	Catalogue	Exercise book	Miscellany	Scrap book
Anatomy	Catechism	Formulary	Missal	Service book
Annual	Coffee-table book	Gazetteer	Monograph	Sketch book
Anthology	Comic book	Gradus	Notebook	Song book
Armorial	Commonplace book	Grammar	Novel	Speller
A to Z	Companion	Graphic novel	Novelette	Statute book
Atlas	Compendium	Grimoire	Novella	Storybook
Autobiography	Concordance	Guidebook	Ordinal	Telephone Directory
Baedeker	Confessional	Handbook	Peerage	Textbook
Bestiary	Cookery book	Hymn book	Pharmacopoeia	Thesaurus
Bibelot	Copybook	Jotter	Phrase book	Vade me cum
Bible	Diary	Journal	Prayer book	Who's who
Biography	Dictionary	Lectionary	Prospectus	Word book
Breviary	Directory	Ledger	Psalter	Work book
Brochure		Lexicon	Reader	

<sup>87</sup> To this account we can add books commonly known in the business context. Taking a look in *Oxford Dictionary of Business and Management* (2009), we have of course the 'book of prime entry', which is a "book or record in which certain types of transaction are recorded before becoming part of the double-entry book-keeping system"; common examples are the day book, cash book, and journal. Continuing, we have the 'books of account', which denote "the ledgers, journals, and other accounting records in which a business records its transactions". If we are talking about a 'limited company', the records must display with detail the company's position at any time. The terms 'long book', 'short book', and 'open book' are used as synonyms to 'long position', 'short position' and 'open position' (See also "Statutory books"). (Ibid. 68)

	Dispensatory	Log book	Reference book Register Road book	Year book
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Although the VAT decrease does not condition the content of these products, there is a clear demarcation between material for reading (and/or writing) and material for entertainment purposes, marketing devices and stuff fulfilling simple administrative, or social, functions. The limit was drawn at products fully or mainly used for advertising purposes, globes, maps printed in relief, printed postal cards with personal greetings, printed forms and documents not primarily with the purpose of real reading. Other products that were excluded from the decrease were CDs that besides speech include games, search functions, links, *et cetera*, and so-called E-books. The reason why e-books were not encompassed by the decrease was that the Government has interpreted the EU Directives for Value Added Tax in a way that e-books may not be regarded as a product, but rather as a form of service that cannot be exempt from higher VAT rates. (SvF Annual Report 2001: 16)

### Book Definitions

The official UNESCO definition of a book is a “non-periodic printed publication of at least 49 pages exclusive of the cover pages, published in the country and available to the public”.<sup>88</sup> Formally, the institution of the ISBN – *The International Standard Book Number* defines what counts as a book.<sup>89</sup> In Sweden, the ISB numbers are distributed to publishing companies by the Royal Library. Interestingly, due to the abundance of books, the ten digit-numbers are running out. As from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, the ISBN consists of 13 digits in order to cover the ever-increasing flood of books that are produced worldwide. Many times this means that books will have double codes: one ten digit code, and one 13 digit.

Commonly, historical definitions often revolve around the book as a material phenomenon, an object that carries written signs. (Svedjedal 2000: 19) Etymologically, most explanations for the origin of the word for book stipulate its materiality. Greek *biblos* means papyrus; Latin *liber* is the word for wooden

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<sup>88</sup> www.kb.se

<sup>89</sup> The ISBN system is used within 170 countries across the world and the ten-digit number has up until now consisted of four elements: the group number (language, countries, geographic region); the publisher identifier; the title identifier; and the check digit that is linked to a fixed arithmetic process. At the prospect of exhausting the available numbers, from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, the ISBN contains 13 numbers (by adding the prefix 978, and later 979).

baste, and *Codex* means a block of wood (Ibid.).<sup>90</sup> Regarding the Germanic word ‘book’, it is generally claimed that stems from the base of ‘beech’. The word is commonly held as coming from the observation of the Roman practice of using specific writing tablets. Dictionaries have noted that the Anglo-Saxon *boc* and the beech tree (Old English *bóc*, *béce*, Old Norse *Bók*) share the same base [*bokíz*] and claim that it is probably so because runes were first carved on beech (Webster’s: 84; Wessén 1985, italics added). But according to the *OED*, we encounter problems when reconciling these early words, because *bók-s*, ‘writing-tablet’ is “the most primitive of all”.

Even Derrida (2005/2001) emphasizes that the word *biblion* did not initially designate ‘book’ but simply the writing paper. In other words, it covered only the substance of a support for writing, and not the ‘oeuvre’ itself. Over time, *biblion* were generalized and designated to describe all other supports for writing: such as letters and tablets. The words used in early organizing of material books also give underway that they need to be stored. *Bibliothèque* denotes the slot for a book, their deposit place; *Bibliophylakion* is the warehouse or deposit for the archives of writings, books and non-books; and *Bibliopoleion* is the bookstore. Further, Derrida (Ibid. 6) draws attention to how all these places built on the activity of depositing, captured in the verb *tithenai*, which means ‘to put’. *Tithenai* entails making something stable and immobile, as in a statute, statutory and state. So depositing and putting in this framework does not only refer to ‘gathering together’ and ‘immobilizing’ of books in the library, but also to the relation of book and state, and to the institutional, juridical and political dimensions that revolve around the book.

Of course the book holds an individual, material existence in terms of space and economic value. It also signals where its borders are: where it starts and where it ends. The main problem is that despite the book’s supposed unity and self-containment, it has an elusive character. Indeed, the book belongs according to Foucault (2002/1969: 37) to those concepts alongside the literary work that immediately need to be put out of function. McKenzie (2002/1984) also held that the concept of “physical object” will not comprise the book, which is a “friskier” and more “elusive animal” altogether. (Ibid.) Thus, the book cannot be grasped as a contained entity, a singular form or category with a unitary history. What is perceived as a book then relies on an intricate set of meanings and relations of social practice and conventions that are subjected to transformation over time.

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<sup>90</sup> Biedermann (1993), on the other hand, explains that papyrus was called *biblis* after the Phoenician town where papyrus was traded.

## Book Qualities

The difficulty of asserting what makes up the value of a book and what a book consist of is especially clear in the aftermath of the VAT decrease. Statistics Sweden adopted a hedonic method in order to measure the price changes and sought to capture a number of book characteristics that would be relevant to establish the relationship between price and quality. These characteristics were presented at a special seminar dedicated to the adoption of the hedonic regression method: “The quality of books and its influence on prices” held at Statistics Sweden in 2004.<sup>91</sup>

The categories of *Band Type*, *Subject*, and *Actuality* were already registered in the Statistics Sweden database. Of the following important characteristics, each brought a specific difficulty: *Literary quality* was listed as number one, but was deemed difficult to measure; *Author* was difficult to classify, and information about *Edition* was difficult to obtain. The Royal Library then helped to code the categories of *book size* (number of pages, weight, height, width, thickness); *trade/professional*; *illustrations* (type, number, quality); *protective cover*; *paper and text quality*; *binding*; *other*; *translation*; and *country of print*. Most of these variables however are tied to the material specifications of the book as object and hence render a certain product-oriented approach to the definition of the book. The only variable that took the notion of a market into account was the *Top list/ marketed title* listing. And yet, according to John-Erik Forslund, (2003), books are characterized by ‘horizontal quality’ rather than ‘vertical quality’. This means that books that are of interest to some are not necessarily of interest to others, whereas ‘vertical quality’ means that all can agree upon the quality of one product in relation to another.

As stated in the seminar, the quality is represented by a number of characteristics that express both what it is that the consumer values and what gives rise to costs for the producer. The model prescribes what these characteristics cost. (Source: SCB Hand-out, p. 2) Band type, protective cover, weight and trade/professional are the most significant variables as regards price. Number of pages, format, subject, CD, country of print, binding and top list placement also have some influence on price. Of little or no importance are illustrations, picture/text/paper quality. (Ibid. p. 4)

Book trade representatives however, maintained at the time that few of these variables could capture that books vary much as far as publishing activities and production go. Some books, especially non-fiction, are the result of much work, not only by the author, but also at the hands of the editor. This work is decisive for the quality of a book, the trade representatives maintained.

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<sup>91</sup> For an account of the different types of variables used for fiction and non-fiction, see the BPC final report (SOU 2005: 12) and for a full version, consult the final 2005 Statistics Sweden report.

Similarly, novelist Gun Sundström (2008) has observed that if agricultural products are food and chicken products are eggs, then books are “publishing products”. They are certainly not writers’ products [Cf. Stoddard in Chartier 1995/1992].<sup>92</sup> Below are listed the different parts of a book, and they all require different shares of an author’s and publisher’s care.

Table 2. *Parts of a book, (Collins Thesaurus, 2002: 123)*

Acknowledgements	Endpaper	Illustration	Recto
Addendum	Epigraph	Index	Rubric
Afterword	Epilogue	Interleaf	Running head
Appendix	Errata	Introduction	Slipcase
Back	Flyleaf	Leaf	Spine
Back matter	Folio	Margin	Tail
Bibliography	Fore-edge	Page	Title page
Binding	Foreword	Plate	Verso
Blurb	Frontispiece	Postscript	Wrapper
Chapter	Front matter	Preface	
Contents	Glossary	Prelims	
Corrigenda	Gutter	Proem	
Cover	Half-title	Prolegomenon	
Dedications		Prologue	
Dust jacket or cover			

We have to acknowledge this plethora of book elements in order to understand the book at the nexus of artifact and publishing practice. Books can also be published in different formats and versions (hardback, paperback, collectors’ version, etc.). Because texts are made into books and books can be reproduced over and over again in different versions, publishers can recoup profits over time (Van der Ploeg 2004). The practice of “repackaging” books has become more common in recent years. It is either a form of reuse and re-edition of a title, or a simultaneous publication of the same title in different packages, such as less expensive hardcover binding [*kartonnage*] and paperback. (*Förlagsboken* 2001: 200) After the original book has been published, and then appeared in many different guises, such as audio book (including the audio pocket), e-book,

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<sup>92</sup> In this regard, it is perhaps understandable that scholars, facing the electronic challenge, substituted the journal name *Book Research Quarterly* for *Publishing Research Quarterly*. Beth Luey (1991) explained that the shift was not so much distrust in the book than a vote for confidence in publishing activities.



etc., there are apt opportunities to create product-line extensions, tie-ins and spin-offs that take hold of a special characteristic of the text. (Feathers & Woodbridge 2007)

Within the industry, even books that are not yet written are up for sale at high prices; this practice of advance payment is used to settle the author's value on the market (Gardiner 2000). Hertel (in Svedjedal & Furuland 1997: 205) however, terms them "non-books" as they do not yet exist. Organization scholars Coser, Kadushin & Powell (1982) reserve the term non-books for the literary mass-market genres, as they would count more as commodities than other, presumably real, books.

Hence, to complicate the issue even further, the question of literary genre cannot be ignored in the case of books. Genre has become the concept with which we deal with issues of literary modality, specifically in connection with certain thematic configurations (Genette 1980; see also Aurelius & Götselius 1997: 9). For example, when the SOM institute at Gothenburg University investigated types of books are read, they did not pay much attention to the material form, except from a small comment upon the paperback format, but listed instead the type of genre: "Novel; Crime/thriller; Children's/youth book; Science fiction/fantasy; Poetry; Autobiographies/biographies; Book about society/politics; Hobby/leisure; Non-fiction/studybook; Other content genre". Of all these genres, novels and crime/thriller account for the largest share with 22 % and 18 % respectively (SOU 2003: 76: 39f). Book industry actors continuously introduce new subgenres and categories in order to provide prospective readers with shortcuts to finding the right title among the millions that are published each year. Readers, however, may also react negatively if they perceive that a work has been wrongfully placed in a specific genre. (Steiner 2010)

## The Book as Cultural Product

According to the marketing discourse, products are understood as comprising offerings that belong to basic types such as goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties, organizations, information and ideas. The central tenet of a product is essentially an offering that will satisfy *needs* and *wants*. The consumer's estimation of the products' capacity to bring satisfaction is what constitutes *value* (Kotler 2000: 11). Some fifty years ago, the product view was not readily applicable to books. When the British Restrictive Practices Court ruled against the introduction of a free book market in the UK 1962, it stated:

A new book cannot be recognized as something which will certainly satisfy some known public appetite or need as can an orange or an egg. Nor can it be recognized as a device which will solve some known problem, as might be the case with some new tool, drug or mechanical invention, or as an improvement on some article already in demand as might be, for instance, a new model of a popular motor car. (In Barker & Davies 1966: 4)

Decades later, the scene was different. The Swedish book market was deregulated already in 1970 and the British system of the Net Book Agreement (NBA) collapsed in 1995 and set the market for books free.

The attempts at capturing those elusive entities such as books (cf. Foucault 2002/1969) in a description have often turned to the concept of ‘cultural products’ (sometimes termed as cultural good, cultural vehicle, or creative good). For Bourdieu (in Reeser & Spalding 2002/1985: 669), the ‘cultural product’ shares the same characteristics with other products, but is coupled with a certain belief in the special value of the product. Importantly, that belief must also be produced. Hence, cultural products should entail a double production, if we connect with Bourdieu’s (1992) question of who creates the creators. Many times this work is carried out by the industry agents: publishers, etc., but institutional conditions could also help to establish that belief.<sup>93</sup>

By counting books to that category of products that are encompassed by a special VAT rate is a way to establish books as a cultural product. When people experience a cultural product a whole set of assumptions, expectations, concerns, problems, references and associations is evoked and this set is shared by a particular social group. These presuppositions will then select, highlight and suppress certain characteristics of the product. Similarly, the product will arise, trigger, organize, reflect, challenge and talk back to the person using the product (Cf. Griswold 1987). Hence, the notion of a certain “cultural affinity” between people and products is vital in this context.

Recent research has come to grapple with an increasing complexity and multiplicity as concerns products. For example, products are more often bundled together so that multiple items jointly render customer satisfaction. We already know that products either complement or substitute other products. Certainly, economists acknowledge some substitution among book titles; say between crime novels before the summer holidays, unless of course, you are a fan of a specific author. In other words, there are no perfect substitutes, and substitution is also limited: for a trip to Spain, only travel guides of Spain will do (Hjort-Andersen 2000). But we also have to take into account other product categories, because new products tend to enter a dynamic inter-category relationship, and buyers engage in cross-category decisions (Shocker, Bayus & Kim 2004).

Tripat Gill (2008) suggests that products that are formed by taking a base product and adding new functionalities from other categories could be termed ‘convergent products’ (CP). Depending on whether the base is utilitarian (instru-

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<sup>93</sup> Drawing on the case of books, cultural economist Van der Ploeg (2004) suggests that cultural goods at large benefit from technological progress. Moreover, because books are reproducible cultural goods, he holds that they belong to autographic art, that is, they are easily reproduced without differences in quality, in contrast to allographic art that is more unique. As for reading, Bourdieu (2002/1985) maintains that it “obeys the same laws as other cultural practices”.

mental /practical) or hedonic (experiential/pleasurable), the added functions are either congruent or incongruent with the overall associations. As it seems, both kinds are strengthened by the addition of hedonic elements (Ibid.). Some products however, display an impressive perseverance, despite the emergence of new products (Shocker, Bayus & Kim 2004). For instance, as a generic category the printed book shows extra-ordinary perseverance, and it has been both reincarnated and rejuvenated with the emergence of new technology. This ability for continuous reinvention and survival is what Svedjedal (2000) terms ‘the Gutenberg effect’.

Like most cultural or creative industries, the book industry has been held to be product-oriented (Björkegren 1992), which entails an assumption that consumers prefer the products with the best quality relative to price. Kotler (2000: 17) warns however, against a product-orientation in marketing because one often gets entangled in a blinding love affair with the product on the basis of its features, qualities and performance. It is easy to forget for whom the product is intended and what need or want it must satisfy, which, of course, is what a marketing-orientation is all about. In other words, with a product-oriented outlook, one looks in the mirror instead of looking out the window.

To conclude, if a consumer should expect a book to render satisfaction, marketers could claim that it is indeed a product. Given the above-mentioned definition, however, what is *not* a product? The conception of product and satisfaction of needs have become so wide so as to lose all meaning and value. (Albert 1992: 7) Narrowing down a bit, the notion of publishing product is perhaps a suitable description, but only as long as we acknowledge that books were made long before the publishing emerged as profession or function in society. Paradoxically, since the concepts of publishing product or cultural product depart from the product view, they will strengthen the economic discourse, regardless if it is seen as an alignment with ordinary products (Cf. Bourdieu 1985), or as the rare exception to market rules (Cf. the cultural economists). The economic view is still held as the bottom-line. Moreover, “cultural products” tend to lump together different forms of the arts in a way that does not pay sufficient attention to the differences among them.

Concepts that build on the basic definition of product have lost grounds with the specific context and conditions that influence its meaning. Hence, we should not just use product as a simple label, but investigate its coming into being. According to the *OED*, the basic meaning and primary use of the word product is mathematical. It is “the quantity obtained by *multiplying two or more quantities together*” (italics added). The secondary meaning is “produce, fruit”, in other words “a thing produced by nature or a natural process; also in collective sense”.<sup>94</sup> Harbored in the concept of product then, is not so much an entity

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<sup>94</sup> As example, the *OED* mentions a quote by H. MORE (1712): “He [man] is the flower and chief of all the products of Nature upon this Globe of the Earth.”

that will render (future) satisfaction, as marketing scholars argue, but rather generative multiplicity. Considering Gutenberg's invention of the leaded print-type, this mathematical meaning of product – a multiplying form of generation – has rendered the printed book as the first mass product known to mankind in the first place.

### The Book as Experience Good

The most specific characteristic of the book is that it can accumulate time, thoughts and feelings and capture it in a material thing. (*Förlagsboken* 2001: 109f) With Barker & Escarpit, books “remain essential tools for preserving and diffusing the world's store-house of knowledge” (1973: 151). For Baverstock (1993: 15), the published book is more than the sum total of its constituent parts. Once the text is packaged in the book, filled with thought and feelings, this thing can then get a unique character that radiates and will attract other people's feelings. (*Förlagsboken* 2001: 109f) Indeed, Baverstock (1993: 15) questions that the published book is a product at all, but rather a package. The real product would then be “the ideas, or message contained within the covers”.

According to some marketers, the consumption experience overrides the product that is purchased (Holbrook 1996). Upon the question of what publishers really sell, Ahlmark & Brodin (1979: 277) list a number of motives that warrant for book sales:

- ☞ Information
- ☞ Personal development
- ☞ Experience of beauty
- ☞ Understanding (for other people, cultures, etc.)
- ☞ Comfort
- ☞ Escape from reality
- ☞ Entertainment
- ☞ Passing of time
- ☞ Marking of group belonging
- ☞ The joy of possessing beautiful things

Of course the list could be much longer (Ahlmark & Brodin 1979: 277). In any case, the book can be characterized as an *experience good* (Van der Ploeg 2004: 5) and as such, it can only be evaluated after consumption (Towse 2003); every book (title) is unique. (Ahlmark & Brodin 2000: 13) Above all, these elements could all complement one another. And as Brown (1999) points out, surely products also belong with experience, even if only as a daydream.

The concept of “experience good” highlights the service or function performed and the reader’s part in the process. Here, experience is understood as a richer and deeper concept than simple ‘satisfaction’. It tends however, to be less nuanced when dealing with matters of valuation. In the proclaimed age of ‘experience economy’ (cf. Pine & Gilmore 1999; Nielsén 2006; Algottsson & Daal 2007); most accounts treat the ‘experience good’ as something positive in general, and hedonic in particular. As such, the book experience seems to rely more on the value of pleasure of the text (cf. Barthes 1975). Other interpretations of experience as experimentation, non-knowing and risk (cf. Nietzsche; Deleuze & Parnet 2001/1977) are downplayed.<sup>95</sup> In this way, the experience good definition appears does not resolve the problematic of valuation, but effectively remains one-sidedly within the market-side of the definition.

### The Book as an Information-based Service

Arnold Bennett (1908: VIII) once claimed, “Literature exists for your service”. In fact, this ongoing debate ties in with a current thread of discussion within the research community on the nature of marketing. Stephen L. Vargo & Robert F. Lusch (2004) suggests that there is a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive logic, one that will build on service provision rather than product exchange. The old heritage from microeconomics had privileged transaction of tangible goods, and value was regarded as embedded up until the 1980s. The current interest lies mainly in intangible resources (especially skills and knowledge), and processes, which is the term for “doing things for and with”. Moreover, relationships have emerged as departing point, with an emphasis of co-creation of value, and exchange is often indirect.

Whether the service-dominant logic shall be a new paradigm or not,<sup>96</sup> services are as differentiated as ever. Peter Hill (1999: 439 in Lovelock & Gummesson (2004: 34) suggests a definition of *information-based services* that are different from both goods and services in that they can both be recorded and stored:

Intangible entities originally produced as outputs by persons, or enterprises, engaged in creative or innovative activities of a literary, scientific, engineering, artistic, or entertainment nature [...] Originals are entities that exist independently

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<sup>95</sup> For example, in *The Gay Science* (paragraph 51), Nietzsche writes: “I favour any skepticism to which I may reply: ‘Let us try it!’ But I no longer wish to hear anything of all those things and questions that do not permit any experiment.” In Nietzsche’s view, experimenting attempts to create something – something that “*does not yet exist*: a set of forces capable of *acting upon* and *modifying that which exists*”. (Klossowski 1997/1969: 127) For Deleuze, experimentation is not limited to individuals; on the contrary, politics too is active experimentation, because we cannot know beforehand which way a line will turn. (Deleuze & Parnet 2001/1977: 137)

<sup>96</sup> See invited responses to Vargo & Lusch by Day; Deighton & Narayandas; Gummesson; Hunt; Prahalad; Rust & Shugan (2004).

of their creators and the medium on which they are recorded. They can also be recorded on more than one type of medium [...] Once an original has been recorded, it is possible to produce as many copies as required [...] When the original is copied onto a blank disc or tape, nothing material is transferred in the process. [...] The original is not consumed or used up.

This quote gives an appropriate description of the terms and conditions for creative, intangible products. The weakness of the term is the matter of “information-based”. According to Walter Benjamin’s (1936) critique of the concept of information it is characterized by dealing with what is understandable and verifiable. As opposed to storytelling, information deals with that which occurs in our proximity, and it only has value when it is new. (Gripsrud 2002: 275) Albert Borgmann (1999: 1) holds that there are three basic relationships between information and reality: information can illuminate, transform or displace reality. Information *about* reality is given in reports and records, without which human experience swiftly erodes into forgetfulness and ignorance. Whereas information *for* reality are modelled by the recipe, that serves to instruct the making of reality. Plans, scores and constitutions typically belong to this type of cultural information.

Hill's definition could however provide the European Commission with an argument to make a permanent exception from the rule that audio books and e-books should be taxed at 25 %. As phrased by Evan Schnittman (2008), having online access to the information *within* books is a different thing from reading full books online. For reading that requires an immersive experience – where readers themselves enter the book and not just draw things out of them – print will still be important. Following the development of *Google Book Search* (GBS) and Microsoft's Live Search Books (LBS), Schnittman raises the complicated issue of pricing these titles made available on-line; what essentially is the value for access? Adding to this concern, we should ask, access for whom? According to Van der Ploeg (2004), the qualities of non-exclusivity and non-rivalry of these types of goods or services may render them the character of a ‘public good’. From this perspective, he argues that weightless e-books should even be more likely to warrant government subsidies than printed books. This is a good point in view of cultural policy and democracy, although it serves to point out that not everybody in society has easy access to computers or other e-book computer hardware.

### The Requirement of Literacy

Apart from audio books, most books (including e-books and hypertexts) are set apart from many other cultural products and information-based services because they demand *literacy*. Most scholars would agree that literacy is a very difficult concept (Cf. Havelock 1986; Pattison 1982; Lind & Johnston 1990). A common term is ‘functional literacy’, which denotes a basic ability to take part

in the economic and civic life of a community (cf. Mackenzie 2000: 219). Ethnologist Ulf Hannerz (1990: 14) argues against the use of literacy as a metaphor for other cultural phenomena (television literacy, film literacy, etc.) on the basis that different symbolic systems require different levels of learning and training. In other words, it is really a matter of socialization. Following Hannerz, then, we should distinguish between those art forms that require textual literacy, and those that do not. Literacy is of course a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for reading books.

During the last decades, literacy has increasingly become a topic within consumer research. Melanie (2001) notes how literacy influences consumers' responses to persuasion and their decision-making skills and affects. Literacy shapes how consumers cope with meanings of products and brands, as well as giving impact upon consumers' health in terms of choice of food, disease, and fertility rates. Important questions raised by Wallendorf are how literacy is affected by technology and whether the relationship between marketing and literacy is supportive or not in society. At heart of the matter lies a concern for consumers with low levels of literacy that are held especially vulnerable in the marketplace. Natalie R. Adkins & Julie L. Ozanne (2005) speak specifically of 'consumer literacy': "Consumer literacy is conceptualized as a social practice that includes reading and writing skills but also involves the ability to manage one's identity and leverage personal, situational, and social coping skills." For instance, depending on their experience of social stigma consumers with low levels of literacy do not know their consumers' rights or engage as much in extended problem solving, as literate consumers commonly do. (Ibid.)

For future research, Adkins & Ozanne (2005) propose more studies into generational differences of literacy, and literacy in a second language. Literacy is part of a problematic paradox: although language belongs with the collective (Pattison 1982), it has to be conquered individually (Furuland 1997: 33). For Pattison (1982: vi), literacy is foremost the consciousness of the problematic of language as a force of human affairs, and secondarily, the technological skills (such as rhetoric and writing) by which this consciousness is expressed. In that way, literacy is used in different ways in different cultures and societies - as we will see in the next chapter - but it is always connected to the issue of power.

## Extending the Book

The prerequisite of literacy however, does not suffice to distinguish how we can characterize the book. One type of book has also appeared on the human body, published in the form of a t-shirt with the Swedish poet Kristian Lundberg's poem "You shall even be unclad this", by *Sanatorium* publishing company in 2005. (Brunner 2005-10-27) Accordingly, the published t-shirt has been given an ISBN and sent to the Library for archival. This book is available in sizes Small, Medium, Large and Extra-large and the publishers' web page supports

the slogan “A book to carry closest to the heart”. And in a nature reserve in northern Kullaberg, Sweden, there is a 150-ton colossus of stone and concrete situated just by the waterfront. It is a book named *Arx* (1993) by the artist Lars Vilks and supported by the publishing company *Nya Döxa*. It is painted with the figures 1-352 that denote the page numbers. The author says, “A completely new product saw the day of light: book page with a seaside view; many buyers wanted a page which sided the sea.” (Vilks 2003: 21)<sup>97</sup>

Despite the array of things listed above and the more restricted set that were encompassed by the VAT reduction, the Minister for Culture did not specifically demand an increase in the use of notes or maps, or the use of paint-books among children. Neither did she expect people to visit *Arx* in Kullaberg or wear the Lundberg poem. We have now seen that the formal definitions of a book, such as UNESCO’s and the ISB number, etc. do not hold in practice. For when we speak of reading books, we seem to mean printed and bounded works at the most, and especially fiction (Peurell 2004; Reeser & Spalding 2002/1985).

Outside of the literary sphere, we have of course business ventures that make use of the word ‘book’ extending well beyond literary institutions. For instance, Apple has since 1991 had a range of laptop or ‘notebook’ computers named PowerBook (1991-2006), iBook (1999-2006) and MacBook (2006-) complemented by their lines of iPods (2001-), iPhones (2007-) and iPads (2010-) and the latter may well revolutionize digital reading (Lloyd 2010). And famously, the social network “Facebook” set up by Mark Zuckerberg and friends at Harvard University 4 February 2004 and six years later, with a remarkable exponential growth, it encompasses around 400 million active users worldwide. They share up to 25 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) each month. Around every second user logs in on any given day.<sup>98</sup> The Facebook mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected”.<sup>99</sup> With the new interface Open Graph API, one can share anything on the Internet; and conversely, any web page can have all the features and widgets of a Facebook page.<sup>100</sup> In effect, Facebook is a type of book that can encompass the whole Internet.

Thus, a book can retain coherence, and yet generate multiple meanings in different contexts (Cf. Griswold 1987). Perhaps it would be helpful to describe it

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<sup>97</sup> In 1995, six years before the VAT decrease on books, Vilks sold the pages at a price of 100 SEK each and the buyers were given a certificate that confirmed the purchased property.

<sup>98</sup> <<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>, accessed 23 June 2010.

<sup>99</sup> “Facebook and Zynga Enter Into Long-Term Relationship”, Facebook press release, <<http://www.facebook.com/press/releases.php?p=162172>, accessed 23 June 2010.

<sup>100</sup> Thanks to students Martin Lindholm and Christoffer Svård, who directed my attention to this fact.



as a boundary object. According to Wenger (2000: 236), the value of a boundary object lies in being able to take on multiple forms and strike up and maintain connections between different sets of practices. Moreover, while crossing boundaries, boundary objects do not necessarily come through successfully. Just as they are interpreted in a variety of ways, they can also be misinterpreted. If we further connect with our discussion on value, I want to maintain that with the book as boundary object, it is able to contain value, and distribute value across settings. Through the definition of the book as boundary object, we can gain a further understanding of how the book could bridge the conception of value to that of values (Cf. Miller 2008/2006)

Facing the digital challenges, Publisher Sarah Lloyd (2008: 31) suggests thinking about content more than product; “we will need to think of ‘the book’ as a core or base structure but perhaps one with more porous edges than it has had before.” In other words, the boundary of the book is increasingly challenged and opened up for experimentation. Moreover, Lloyd proposes that publishers cease to regard the book as an end-station of a production chain;<sup>101</sup> instead, it ought to be seen at the centre of a network. With the advent of the Internet, reading has been enhanced, appearing across disparate networks, being increasingly “recorded, aggregated and interlinked” (Ibid. 33f). Moreover, the “networked book” will need to find its new shape. (Ibid. 35)<sup>102</sup>

### Booking the Book

What counts as “book” then, depends not only on the frame of reference, but also on its modes of operating and as a manner of valuation. In our further explorations, however, let us not forget that the word ‘book’ is both noun and verb. We need only to consider the historical practice of booking land to understand this relationship between thing and activity. The noun ‘book’ denotes according to the *OED*: “A writing; a written document; esp. a charter or deed by which land (hence called *bócland*) was conveyed.” The earliest use of the word in this meaning is noted in 872, and several times in the 9<sup>th</sup> century up until 1876. The verb ‘to book’ was derived from the noun and as the earliest historical use the *OED* mentions “To grant or assign (land) by charter”, as from 966. That is even more than two hundred years before the second meaning that appeared in 1225: “To enter in a book; to record, register”. (Ibid.)

Today the meanings of the verb to book range roughly from “to record”, “to engage ahead of time” and “to record charges against on a police record”.

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<sup>101</sup> See for instance Thompson (2005; 2010) for an account of the linear book supply chain and publishing value chain.

<sup>102</sup> Lloyd (2008) refers here to Bob Stein (2006) *The Social Life of Books*. LibraryJournal.com. <(http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6332156.html)

(OED)<sup>103</sup> Hence, these meanings are connected to different situations. The first meaning is connected to memory and is associated with accounting in a wide sense. (Moreover, it seems to relate to the logic of the list that Arnold Bennett suggested as a means to become a reader.) Secondly, “to book” is also *to stretch* into the future, across time and space and temporarily *occupy a slot or place*. Thirdly, the word is related to disciplinary events in connection with disobedience and transgressions against the law. These meanings cannot be disregarded in our explorations of the book. The activity and practice of booking is related to the book as an object or artifact. The concept of book is of a double nature, activity and thing; and though it is subjected to institutions, it is also an institution in itself.

And yet, not very long ago, both scholars and practitioners believed that the concept of ‘book’ would no longer fully capture the complexities of producing texts and other related activities. In 1991, Luey (1991: 3) asked herself how many textbook publishing activities are restricted to books, how many booksellers only sell books and how many libraries take in only books? This is less a “lack of confidence” in the book’s future, she says, than a belief in the activities of publishing, whatever medium. Luey quotes Ernest L. Boyer [1980], who once wrote, “the book is not going to be replaced... it will have company.” This suggests that books belong with complementarity, and moreover, that its universe will expand.

Derrida (2001: 9) observes that in the case of ‘the book to come’, it will not be what it once was; it will be a radically different book, a wholly *other* book, that will transfigure or even rescue the book in face of present challenges, such as electronic and virtual incorporation, numerical composition, screen and keyboard embodiment, and online distribution.

For what we are dealing with is never replacements that put an end to what they replace but rather, if I might use this word today, restructurations in which the oldest form survives, and even survives endlessly, coexisting with the new form and even coming to terms with a new economy - which is also a calculation in terms of the market as well as in terms of storage, capital, and reserves. (Ibid.)

Importantly, with each new book we encounter a new economy, with new demands upon resources, and we do so endlessly.

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<sup>103</sup> According to *OED*, the verb ‘to book’ is derived from the noun and comes from Old English *bōcian*, corresp. to OFris. *bōkia*, ON. *Bōka*

<sup>103</sup> “1. to record in a book or list; 2. to engage ahead of time, as lectures, rooms, etc. ; 3. to record charges against on a police record”. (Webster’s: 84)

## Concluding Reflections

To conclude, one must not cease to investigate the complex of materials, forces and events that make up what we know as the entity “book” and what characterizes its mode of being – its quality of bookness, so to speak. Unlike many other cultural products and phenomena, it is intimately belonging with the human capacity for literacy. The book is both a material object and a centre for a diverse range of practices. The word ‘book’ itself is both noun and verb, and to book means roughly to record, to engage, or to charge. The book is bounded both as object and discourse; it is also creating and maintaining boundaries (linguistic, national, legal, economic, technological, social, etc.). It borders on both economy and culture, but cannot be reduced to neither of them. Indeed, the book both accumulates what is rich and manifold, and manages to distribute it, traversing and challenging boundaries in terms of time, space and people. We must continuously engage with the book, and follow its movements. What stands clear is that the book is not only a package or storage for content, but is also highly generative in turn.

The next chapter will turn to the genealogy of literacy as a way to follow the “wave-side” of readership, from the emergence of literacy to the present-day, a journey where reading and the book are increasingly seen through economic lenses, and literacy is increasingly coupled with consumption. Concluding this chapter on the book, we shall also bear in mind that a “reader” is not just a word for a person reading; it is also the term for computer hardware (cf. e-book reader), and according to the dictionary, it is also the term for a work which contains “selected passages for instruction in reading” (Webster’s: 618). In other words, ‘reader’ can also mean ‘book’.

## VII. A Genealogy of Literacy. From Sumerian Writing to Consumerist Reading

*Dare vel habere copiam legendi –  
To give, or have, the power of reading*

*Latin proverb*

*History is much too important a matter to be left to historians alone.  
Odo Marquard (1991: 51)*

*Building upon a genealogical approach to the background and history of reading, this chapter engages with expressions of valuation, morality and power. We are concerned here with two major themes: the invention of writing and reading, and literacy in particular; and its genealogical relation to the development of socio-economic organization of society, including consumption.*

### Introduction

As a practice, reading is deceptively simple, as the book historian Adrian Johns (1998) once observed. Reading seems so self-evident and obvious that one may astound at the fact that it has its own history. (Johns 1998: 385) Recently, there has been an upsurge in the interest into the diachronous history of reading with work by Alberto Manguel (1996), Adrian Johns (1998), Steven Roger Fischer (2003), Karin Littau (2006) and others, following in the wake of the life time work of synchronous studies of reading by book historians such as Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton, and many more. This renewed interest around the turn of the millennium should of course be seen against the background of the new conditions for the book following the electronic revolution. In the midst of these changes, Johns (1998: 385, my italics) suggests:

The history of reading aims to trace and account for such dynamic processes by appreciating the different practices by which readers in various times and places attribute meanings to the objects of their reading. It explains the global by rigorous attention to the local.

This approach is a welcome contribution to the struggle of challenging any universalistic beliefs about reading. It posits that it is mainly the readers themselves who individually render meanings of reading. However, it still takes such

categories as “readers” and “objects of reading” for granted. Moreover, with this approach, we cannot get hold of the changes in valuation of reading outside of individual reading practices.

The history of reading needs to be subjected to rereading and reinterpretation propelled by the acknowledgement that literacy and reading throughout history has been subjected to very strong powers, not least from ruling governments. The motion of revaluation over time can be discussed with the use of a genealogical method, inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). A genealogy discloses that the meaning of a practice cannot be taken for granted – that it indeed has been moulded and kneaded by different forces throughout the course of history. Above all, the method of genealogy will help us look closer at something that we already know and learn to look at it differently (Cf. Beronius 1994). Nietzsche once wrote that “[A]ll good things were once bad things; every original sin has become an original virtue” (1998/1887: 80). This reversal of values is well applied to reading, writing and the book.

This chapter will bring an overview over selected parts in the history of reading, starting in Mesopotamia. The case of ancient Greece will be discussed at some length and breadth, because the Greek tradition has formed our way of thinking about economy on one hand and reading, writing and the book on the other. In the following we shall consider the close connection between the cultivation of writing against the societal backdrop of pastoral economy, agriculture, growing populations and political measures.

### A Note on Writing Systems

Before we venture a genealogy of reading in terms of literacy we also need to consider some background definitions of writing. Writing emerged independently in three different areas: Mesopotamia, China, and Mesoamerica. In Mesopotamia, the earliest writing is connected with business, involving records of livestock quantities, workers’ tasks. In China, it is generally held that the earliest writing on oracles’ bones address the gods with queries, although it has been suggested that they had a commercial use too.<sup>104</sup> In Mesoamerica, the earliest scripts contain information on various life cycles: astronomical, calendrical, etc. The alphabet emerged only at one point in history and comprises both vowels and consonants and is a thoroughly unique idea compared to writing in general. (Man 2000)

The key question here is why writing even occurred in the first place. Daniels (1996: 5) comments:

It is often supposed that writing was devised for the purpose of communicating at a distance – in order to send messages that did not rely upon the memory of

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<sup>104</sup> Daniels refers here to Keightley (1989).

the member. But this seems to be a case of overlooking the obvious: the sending of messages, and the writing of books for posterity, are happily accidental byproducts. The earliest uses of writing seem to be to communicate things that really don't have oral equivalents.<sup>105</sup> (Daniels 1996: 5)

This means that although writing belongs with language, it seeks to take hold of things that could also exist outside of language. As we see here however, writing is often held as a way to handle the shortcomings of human memory. But human shortcomings in themselves do not spark off creations. There has to be a problem that propels us. What was the problem in ancient everyday life that sparked literacy? In what ways does writing, reading and the book belong with economy, society and the state? What are the different modes and interpretations of reading and how is reading moulded across time?

## The Genealogy of Literacy

The fundamental grounds for the valuation of writing and reading are that they emerged as a solution to the problematic of surplus. The invention of writing appeared when food-gathering nomads who formerly had moved from campsite to campsite began to settle around 10,000 B.C.E. They domesticated plants and animals and built dwellings and permanent houses, many times on their former campsites. (Kilgour 1998: 11) All the great river-valley civilizations along the Tigris and Euphrates, the Nile, the Indus and the Yellow Rivers were sparked by the farming technique of irrigation required a complex social organization. Compared to dry farming, irrigation is productive, consistent, and conducive to a dense population. It was also more sensitive to natural disasters and human devastation. (Findlay 1999/1973: 31) As people became more skilful in cultivating the lands – producing crops, raising livestock, and irrigating land - they began to produce surplus food. (Kilgour 1998: 11)

This surplus produce that was not consumed is what sparked the invention of writing. As Diamond (2003/1997: 221) notes, writing never appeared among hunters as they had no societal and agricultural institutions that could manage excess produce, a reserve that needed to be accounted for. Hence, writing is an invention set apart from many others, and most importantly, they suggest a completely different value than economic value that ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> century revolves around production and consumption in face of scarcity.

Prerequisite to literacy is basic numeracy, according to Harris (1986: 133). Counting numbers higher than four does not come naturally; one will have to *learn* how to count. (Ifrah I 2001/1981: 15) The oldest means for counting can be discovered on animals' bones that are in-between twenty and thirty-five thousand years old. There were many reasons for counting: counting the days

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<sup>105</sup> And here Daniels refers to Cooper (1989: 323 f, 329 f).

and finding the right time for harvest in religious festivals, business of farming, properties and herds, engaging in barter, closing deals, counting members, marriages and deaths (civilian and military), soldiers and prisoners at war (Ibid. 15). Of course, those responsible of tools, weapons, and food had to account for that which they had been entrusted. And shepherds taking sheep and goats to pasture had to count the animals upon return.

There were some easy ways for mankind to counting how many sheep they had: counting their tens by the fingers, twenties, including their toes. (Ifrah I 2001/1981: 16) The Sumerians in Mesopotamia used a counting system with the number 60 as base – the highest base known in the world. The same base is used to this day for measuring time and the circle's degrees. (Ibid.) The sexagesimal system S meant the Sumerians had to learn 60 different words and signs for counting. (Ibid. 195) The system was used to count discrete and inanimate objects. (Daniels 1996)

The distinction between 'animate' and 'inanimate' objects was very common in ancient times and should not be confused with "living" objects. Veblen (1994/1899: 7) clarifies that the concepts rather build upon a belief in active or inert nature to the degree of their ability and mode of initiating action. The distinction has remained within the belief system up to modern times says Veblen. Animate phenomena are driven by some force that give rise to human activity towards some end. Hence, it is the teleological actions of humans that define phenomena as either this or that. In this way, phenomena as a waterfall, rising storm, and even a disease (as mentioned by Veblen) count as animate phenomena. Those things that are 'inanimate' or 'inert' are fruit, herbs and even animals such as sheep.

Obviously, the Sumerians were highly skilled in numeracy and had no trouble with memory and learning. There should be no problem in remembering how large the flocks grew, and name the amount of surplus produce. Moreover, even less fortunate cultures should perhaps have wanted to record those things spared from consumption. Importantly, this means that we have to reinterpret the motives for creating writing in the first place.

So the creation of writing should not belong with the shortcomings of memory in recording surplus, but rather with that of surplus itself. For when should writing prove indispensable, if not when the sheer quantity of things makes a quick summing up and overview impossible? This feature sets the Sumerian system apart from others - one can only imagine the available quantities that surpassed the sexagesimal counting system. I regard it as symptomatic that, the Sumerian word for "to read" was *šita* (*šit, šid, šed*), which translates a wide range of meanings: "to count, calculate, consider, memorize, recite and read aloud". (Cf. Fischer 2004: 18)

It all began in Mesopotamia, with farmers creating and using special figures for accounting purposes: recording flocks, numbering sheep and measuring the

harvest. The yearly flooding of the Euphrates and the Tigris also provided the Sumerians with renewable resources, clay and silt, for producing these tokens. (Kilgour 1998: 16) Clay tokens appeared in the 9<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. and were used for thousands of years. The few subgroups of clay tokens are taken as evidence for the economic stability of that period. (Harris 1986: 133) In the fourth millennium B.C.E. the types of tokens increased, probably due to the increase in the variety of goods at that time.

In time, there was an un-standardized cumulation of different pictograms that rendered abstract depictions of real life phenomena. At one time there were up to 34 pictograms, which all meant sheep (Kilgour 1998: 13). Indeed, the pictograms thus gave rise to yet another expression of surplus.

The great invention that spurred the leap into writing as a system was most probably the prehistoric move from a token-iterative system in which the same sign for sheep had to be entered several times – sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep... *or* alternatively: sheep, another, another, another... The new system would be based on a way of ‘emblem-slotting’ by which one would write down ‘sheep, 60’. To Harris (1986: 145), this manner of *slotting* is a structural technique that is now regarded as “intrinsic to language”. As Fischer (2003: 25) tells, in Mesopotamia and every other city-state in the world, they had literary depots with information that were held essential to the proper management of the city. The managers of the depots were known as ‘the ordainers of the universe’. (Ibid.) As we will see, slotting and storing are not merely a linguistic practice, but have become intrinsic to the practice of social organization and the economy of reading and the book.

## The Rise of Power and Political Economy

A hierarchy was created among the settlers, and with that followed an economic stratification with the kings in the top and slaves at the bottom of society (Kilgour 1998: 11). In all great agrarian cultures slavery was accepted, even fundamental, whereas one could not own intangible abstract objects. In contrast, nomadic people did not permit slavery. They allowed for ownership of land and tangible objects (weapons, jewellery) as well as non-tangible objects (stories, pictures, designs), but certainly not of people.<sup>106</sup> (MacKenzie 2000)

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<sup>106</sup> According to MacKenzie then, the institution of copyright and patent protection and the abolition of slavery reflects a change back to a more nomadic order, one that has helped speed up the industrialization processes of society. The agrarian slave-holding society had little incitement to develop labour-saving technology. In the antiquity, the class struggle within a given group was predominantly acted out between creditors and debtors. In Rome the plebeian debtors were ruined and substituted with slaves. (Marx 1844: 116)



Thanks to the excess reserves of food produced by farmers, a cadre of state writers could be employed. In fact, as Diamond (2003/1997: 237) holds, writing continued to serve the interests of social institutions and in extension, the state. The emergence of an all-powerful state was also promoted by the dangers of overflowing rivers and by ravaging nomads.<sup>107</sup> The further development of literacy was due solely to economical and administrative purposes in urban settings. (Ong 1999/1982: 102) The first writing system, proto-cuneiform, was used in the Uruk period in the end of the fourth Millennium B.C.E. The context was that of population growth, rapid urbanization and an intensified division of labor and political development.

The human environment diversified rapidly and there was an increasing need for administration. Around 85% of the writings were of administrative nature and regarded, according to Michalowski (1996: 36), animal husbandry, personnel management, distribution of land and grain; and the processing of fruit and cereals. The 15% rest constituted lists of wooden objects, of professional names, and of the names of fish, plants, and other subjects. These writings were probably manuals for teaching writing. There were multiple copies and duplicates of these writings – up to 163 for the list of professions! (Ibid.) These writings were gathered together in depots that were essential to the emerging city-states. Here all the necessary information for proper management was easily accessible. Indeed, those who were in charge of cataloguing in these early libraries were called ‘ordainers of the Universe’. (Fischer 2003: 25)<sup>108</sup> This shows the extent of the organizing principle of written words as perceived by the Sumerians.

In agricultural society, there was an increasing split in two different powers, one political and one religious that actually function more as a pair than simple opposition to each other. (Cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1987/1980: 351)<sup>109</sup> Sumerian kings and priest preferred professional writers to account how many sheep were due as tax payment, to Everyman creating poems and cock-and-bull stories. (Diamond 2003/1997: 235) Around 2300 B.C.E. only boys had the right to learn how to read and write, but sufficient amount of women were literate for a specifically female writing to be created, *emesal* (Knights 2002/2000: 11). The

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<sup>107</sup> Conflicts with armed nomads are mentioned in (Akkadian,) Assyrian, Egyptian, Hebrew and Greek [written!] sources (Kressler 2003: 5). Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980) have written a whole treatise on the relationship between what they call the state apparatus and the nomadic war machine, and which I recommend reading.

<sup>108</sup> Fischer refers here to James W. Thompson (1940), *Ancient Libraries* (Hamden, CT)

<sup>109</sup> For Bataille, (2002/1967: 120), “[R]eligion is the satisfaction that a society gives to the use of excess resources, or rather to their destruction (at least in so far as they are useful).” Religion, the military, and “capitalism” are for Bataille three ways that societies commonly dispose of their wealth.

first known author of a text was indeed a woman, Enheduanna, princess and high priestess in the Mesopotamian city-state of Ur.

In the middle of the third millennium B.C.E., the people known as Akkadians spread southward into Mesopotamia and adopted cuneiform for their Semitic language that was unrelated to Sumerian. Cuneiform provided one single writing system for two parallel languages: Akkadian, which became the language of administration, and Sumerian that had begun to lose ground and increasingly became the language of ancient oral literature. Only when Sumerian threatened to vanish was the old literature restored by order of King Shulgi of Ur around 2050 B.C.E. Previously, the Sumerians had recorded economic matters only. (Man 2000: 42f)

## The Egyptian Tradition

The Egyptian tradition of script extends from the end of the fourth millennium B.C.E. Unlike cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs were not limited by the writing tool or by the size of the writing material. As the Egyptians used large rocks for writing upon which the hieroglyphs were either cut or painted, they could take all the writing space that they needed and they could elaborate the shapes with ease. Thus in time, writing became less a way of recording and more an art form in itself. (Man 2001/2000: 52)<sup>110</sup> In Egypt, the sign for speaking, thinking, and feeling is the same for eating and drinking, and is shown by a man sitting down and holding his hand to his mouth. (Ritner 1996: 77)

The religious and political elites alone took hold of reading and writing skills and they feared competition and lack of control, should the public be granted this key to success. A hymn reveals the splendid connection between literacy and the state as rendered superior to the farming classes: “Love your letters as your mother. You may protect yourself from hard labour of any kind and be a magistrate of high repute.” (Pattison 1982: 63) Obviously, at that time, reading was not considered as “work” in the modern sense, but rather as a means to earn high rank.<sup>111</sup> According to Diamond (2003/1997: 235), it was of course intentional that writing had such a limited application and spread. In that way others were kept off from developing more elaborate writing systems. Literacy was often kept within a caste of merchants or priests (MacKenzie 2000: 211), just like in Mesopotamia.

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<sup>110</sup> There were also a simpler form of hieroglyphs called hieratic that were used for sounds, and according to Darnell (in Daniels & Bright 1996), this script may well have inspired the development of an alphabetic writing to Semitic sounds and language.

<sup>111</sup> The Romans would later call those holding high rank *nobilis*, literally ‘wellknown’, (Webster’s: 506)

## Semitic Literacy

The Semitic invention was a consonant alphabet. The Egyptian image of ox was paired together with the Semitic word for ox, *alep* (or *aleph*); the image of a reed-shelter was paired with Semitic *bayit* (later *bet* or *beth*). (Man 2000) In this way, the development of a writing system emerged as a hybrid adaptation and belonged with the creativity and identity of a new group of people. John Man (2000) imagines that the new writing system was a revolutionary statement: the old, appropriated system is “for them” and the new is “for us”. The first known inscriptions of alphabetic writing are essentially graffiti. (Schniedewind 2004: 38) In this way, inscriptions could also be an expression of resistance to orderly behaviour, reminiscent of a tactic that operates against the ruling powers (cf. De Certeau 1998/1984).

With the new writing system, they could now start keeping record of their possessions and business transactions and mark their names on funerary objects. They now had the necessary means for building a unified identity from what was first a number of scattered groups. They centred on the figure of Moses, who led the Exodus from Egypt into Canaan. The belief in a single deity emerged. It was a god that was not tied to a specific region, but would be with his people wherever they went. Hence, this god was well suited to dispossessed nomads. The god demanded exclusivity and that the people would follow Ten Commandments – a top ten list of laws, in exchange for his support and protection. The laws were put down in solid writing and accessible to all. Unlike any other society, they would encompass everyone within the group, both high and low. This brought a change never seen before: that the highest good was not granted to the strongest or the mightiest, but to those who engaged in correct behaviour. The new god and the new script worked in tandem to forge a new nation based upon a shared form of organization and morality. (Man 2000: 143f)

In Sumerian mythology, the invention of writing is rendered in a manuscript in the tale “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta” of 1800 B.C.E. (quoted in Cooper 1996: 45):

The messenger’s mouth was heavy, he could not repeat the message.  
The Lords of patted some clay, he put words on it as on a tablet.  
Before that time, words put on clay had never existed.

This imagery was contained within Sumerian language. Judges referred to the content of tablets as their ‘mouth’, and they were held as ‘speaking’ for those who had sealed the tablets. (Fischer 2003: 18) As we will see, this “oral” understanding of literacy will remain a motif in the course of time, from early magistrates reading aloud, through the act of reading as ruminating, and to the anxiety regarding over-consumption of literature even to our days.

## Copious Words

Walter J. Ong (1990/1982: 50f) has already brought to our attention the additive, redundant character of orality, whereby sentences follow upon one another – not in a subordinating manner of arrangement, but in a *conjunctive* way: “And... And... And...”<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, oral cultures cherish a constant flow of words and artful speech, known as *copia* within rhetoric. According to Ong (p.54) *copia* was kept as a form of ideal even after rhetoric had increasingly become transmitted from public speech to the art of writing. Ong mentions this from a strictly aesthetic perspective, emphasizing the redundancy and amplifications that often characterize texts until well beyond the romantic period.

And yet, Ong’s perspective is quite limited in that he regards the influence of orality only in terms of texts and rhetoric. He agrees with Derrida that writing is not subordinated to speech, but argues against Derrida’s attempt to construct a specific logic of writing without taking orality into account. To Ong, writing emerged from orality; it is rooted there, and cannot be overlooked lest we limit our understanding. (1990/1982: 93)

Some characteristics of orality however, have not only contributed to rhetoric, but also to the economy of literacy and reading. Observe for instance what Ong disregards (or at least does not explain); the meaning of Latin *copia* is ‘abundance’ (Webster’s: 168).<sup>113</sup> It is derived from two linguistic elements: *co-* that encompasses a whole range of words: ‘with, together, joint, jointly, shared, mutual, mutually’ (cf. Greek *koinos*, common) (Webster’s u.a: 431) and from *ops*, which denotes ‘power’ and ‘wealth’. (Webster’s u.a.: 504) Thus, other meanings of *copia* are ‘number, ability, power’. (Ibid.) In extension, this word has rendered us with the adjective ‘copious’, which holds two meanings: “1. abundant; plentiful; 2. wordy; profuse or diffuse” (Webster’s: 168).<sup>114</sup> Above all, the richness and wealth of oral *copia* – the plenitude of the spoken word – has spilled over into these economies and its influence has not ceased.

## Ancient Greece

In ancient Greece, land was the primary source of wealth and provided the basis for the Greek *oikos*. The first means for acquiring land was warfare. The landed aristocracy consisted of warriors. (Austin 1977/1973: 41) In Homer, which is the earliest account of ancient Greek economy up until the 8th century

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<sup>112</sup> Today, this additive logic is easily recognized in the common practice of ranking and toplist-ing.

<sup>113</sup> The *OED* mentions the now obsolete expression *copia verborum*, ‘the copy of words’ as the copiousness, abundance, fullness, richness especially of language.

<sup>114</sup> The word ‘profuse’, given as an entry to ‘copious’ means “‘giving freely, generous: as, she was *profuse* in her apologies. 2. given or poured forth freely and abundantly”. It is derived from Latin, *profusus* < pro- forth + *fundere*, to pour. (Webster’s, ua.)

B.C.E., agriculture is held as the foundation of civilization. The ideal for an *oikos* was to render self-provision and self-sufficiency. It was a unit of both production and consumption. Land was used to plant rows of shrubs such as olive trees, fruit trees and vines. In practice, the pastoral economy appears to have predominated. The number of heads of cattle and oxen in particular was an important measure of wealth, as was the number of slaves. Here it is interesting to note that the lowest standing person in society was not the slave, for he or she would belong to an *oikos*, but the *thete*, who was a free man without property, and thus dependent upon selling his services to others, at the mere promise of a salary. (Austin, 1977/1973: 41ff)

Recall from Chapter II that the philosophical question of ontology revolved specifically around the Greek concept of *ousia*, which denotes substance, entity, things, property, etc. In the ancient writings we also find the concept of *periousia*, which Kurt Singer (1958: 31) translates as ‘balance’ and ‘surplus’. This concept ties well in with our genealogy at hand. The prefix *peri-* means ‘about, concerning, regarding, of’, but also ‘round, near’, ‘round about, approximately’ (Collins: 125). Based upon etymology, a tentative description of *periousia* would be some sort of closely related phenomenon; something which is about substance or being. I gather this as an important, observable fact that may shed more light on my further meta-theoretical investigation.

The Greek alphabet emerged in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE when the Canaanites, now known as Phoenicians, met with Greek merchants in the harbours of the Mediterranean Sea. Numeracy is generally prerequisite to literacy (Ifrah I 2001/1981). In Greece the alphabetic characters were used as numerals. (Threatte in Daniels & Bright 1996: 271) Perhaps one would expect that the earliest documents available would be connected to economic operations such as inventories, bookkeeping, etc. Svenbro (1993/1988: 9) explains that the Greek alphabet was mainly put to use as commemoration, especially of the dead, through inscriptions on various belongings or objects dedicated to the gods, such as statues, drinking vessels or tombstones.

Most probably, says Svenbro (1999/1995: 39), writing was put to service to the strong oral culture, where spoken words were held in high regard. Above all, Greek culture was obsessed with great renown (*Kleos*). Renown was a primordial value in society. Writing then, was not introduced in order to safeguard the epic narratives – although that would become one of its uses – but for the opportunity to resound renown and glory even further. Writing propelled a certain mode of production, one that would trick death and forgetting by captivating, conserving and dispensing life and create new supports for renown, both at present and in posterity.

Famously, in Plato’s dialogue *Phaedrus* (274E-275B), Socrates directs severe critique against writing, using the exercise of memory as an argument.

Those who acquire it [literacy] will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of on their own internal resources. What you have discovered is a receipt [recipe] for recollection, not for memory.

This critique is often understood as primarily revolving around the detrimental effects on memory.<sup>115</sup> However, there is another important issue to be raised here. What is remarkable about the above mentioned passage is less the disbelief in the benefits of writing than the strong belief in man's internal resources – even if these resources risk running dry when attention is turned outside, to the written text. In Plato's dialogue *Charmides*, Socrates sets an allegory of reading into play whereby he argues that the reader's soul (*psykhē*) has to join in the process and it has to have some quality of wisdom (*sōfrosynē*). (Svenbro 2002: 148) If it is not there, reading will be a *waste*:

And as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation for it without the reality; they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society. (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274E-275B)

Here we can make out a basis for the case against reading, and especially against reading too much. But to Plato it had nothing to do with a sense of literacy as a privilege for evading hard toil and drudgery as it had been in Mesopotamia and Egypt. In ancient Greece, writing was neither good nor bad in itself. Plato is above all concerned with the relations between writer and reader, according to Svenbro (2002: 148). More specifically, the reader's intentions and the reader's ability to comprehend what the writer intends. The writer who does not dispose of something more valuable than what he assembled himself – picking apart his phrases, adding this and removing that, twisting and turning his words – well, he was not held in high regard. The philosophical writer on the other hand was hailed on the basis that he is capable of giving an oral account that will surpass his written document and will even demonstrate that it is of lesser value (Ibid.) This logic of valuation entails the philosophical concept of *timiotera*, whereby new speech should always exceed old speech in quality. (Szlezák 1999/1993: 74ff)

In order to grasp Plato's critique, I argue we have to grasp the genealogy of literacy as belonging with agricultural society from the outset. With the connection of literacy to nature – barren, reproductive or wasteful – writing from this perspective, should be perceived as support or conservation of surplus, but should not be used for short-lived, wasteful excesses.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> See for example Szlezák (1997) for a brief overview of this reading.

<sup>116</sup> When Plato systematically delimits oral communication from written in *Phaidros* (276 B-277 A), he first gives an account of the characteristics of oral language and then proceeds with a comparison between the philosopher and the wise farmer (Ibid. 65). In the summer harvest, the

The surface of a page was often seen as a plot of land. To write then was regarded as a form of ploughing; in archaic Greek *alokízein* (to plough a furrow) was an expression used for writing (Svenbro 2002: 107) One mode of writing was called *boustrophedon*, because just like the ox (*bou-*) the writing ploughed from left to right and right to left, etc. In Latin, the corresponding saying is to ‘plough out letters’ (*exarare litteras*) and the movement of the plough in the field is called *versus*, which is the word for both furrow and for a line of poetry (cf. ‘verse’). The Greek word for ‘line’ was *stikbos*, a word with very many meanings: ‘a line of fruit-trees’, ‘a row of soldiers’ (Svenbro 2002: 109) or ‘a line of cells’ in a honeycomb. (Ibid. 111)<sup>117</sup>

Besides *oikonomia*, Singer (1958: 45) makes mention of another science, one that we could interpret as a “minor” economy, namely how to master the techniques of farming. This knowledge was not termed *oikonomia*, but was called ‘*georgia*’ in Greece, and similar to *de re rustica* in Rome. It was a literary genre that grew extensively, and it advised on planting and plowing, tending vines and keeping bees. It did not however advise on the thought and action of ordering the whole household, which remained within the realm of the *oikonomos*.

### Distribution as the Common Ground

The verb at the base of *nomos*, *nemein*, means ‘distribution’. According to Kurt Singer (1958: 55), most connotations of the word *nemō* carry strong spatial aspects. Singer (1958: 38) makes the important point that the concept of *nemō* is two-edged: one meaning points to expansion, and the other to limitations imposed by acts of appropriation and apportioning. Therefore *nomos* does not, as

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ancient farmers used to lay aside a small part of the new seeds in low bowls or baskets. They watered them and kept them in a dark space until shortly after, in the “dog-days” of the year, the seeds sprouted shoots in what was called ‘Adonis’ garden(s)’. The bowls or baskets were carried out in the sun whereby the plants immediately withered. The women in the family then threw the Adonis garden into the sea or a well while chanting ritual lamentations.<sup>116</sup> Plato explains that no wise farmer would waste next year’s seeds on Adonis’ gardens just for the pleasure of beholding (excessive) sprouting. The (wise) farmer would do such sowing as a form of play, at most, before the yearly Adonis feast. The seeds that the farmer believes will bring great yields will be sown in the good soil in accordance with the rules of agriculture, and not in clay bowls. He is happy when the seeds sprout after eight months. And that is how Plato expects the dialectic to handle his seeds too. He should not waste it at the Adonis Gardens that writing offers. (Szlezák (1999: 65) claims that the pure agrarian aspect of this ritual is not at all important for our understanding of Plato’s position towards writing. Szlezák 1999: 65f) Due to the genealogy of literacy, I do not agree with him.

<sup>117</sup> Apparently, since long, honey provides an old imagery of poetry. According to the legend, Pindar became a poet after the bees had made a cake of honey in his mouth while he was taking a nap out in the open. (Svenbro 2002: 111) In Sumerian and Greek mythology, honey was food for the Gods,<sup>117</sup> and in Greece it symbolized poetic skills, eloquence and wisdom (Cooper 1993/1978: 77), as well as sweetness. In the Bible, the Promised Land Canaan was described as a land that flows with milk and honey. (Biedermann 1991/1989: 180)

proposed by Rousseau (and Derrida, I should add), primarily belong to the realm of 'law' (*nómos*) but rather to that of a pastoral life (*nomós*) (with emphasis on the second syllable), meaning "distributing, allotting (primarily grazing ground), managing, feeding, caring for, a flock by the herdsman (*nomeus*).” In Homer, the herdsman was nowhere near the petty little administrator of the estates; rather he was the hospitable host, dispensing food and drink generously. As mentioned, the pastoral economy accounted for the largest part of economy at that time.

According to Jesper Svenbro (1999/1995: 40f) the most convincing etymology for *nomos* as law is that the laws were introduced in the 7th century B.C.E. in order to regulate the distribution of land in the Greek colonies.<sup>118</sup> But Svenbro observes a remarkable thing, namely that *nemein* also means "to read". The common denominator is found in the notion of distributing words orally. Often the distribution of justice entailed reading the written law out loud.<sup>119</sup> Just like in Mesopotamia and Egypt, to read aloud was the primordial notion of reading in Greece. (Svenbro 1993/1988: 5) The laws were based on memory and were vocally disseminated; hence in the ancient sources there is mention of *nomoidoi*, 'law-chanters'. Either reciting from memory, or citing a written text, their key task was the oral distribution of words.

In other contexts, the duty of reading (aloud) was often left to slaves, whose sole purpose was to serve and submit. The actual practice of reading did not go well together with the role of citizen. (Svenbro 2003/1995: 46) Moreover, Svenbro (1999/1995) tells that in the Greek antiquity, literacy should be kept to a necessary minimum and only be practiced with moderation; it must not become a vice. Due to the power relations implicit in writing and reading, the writer's thoughts invade the body of the obliging reader. Hence, reading was in fact seen in terms of a pederast relation: "[T]he writer of the inscription will

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<sup>118</sup> Among the ancients however, it was generally held that colonization was a safety valve against the troubles of over-populated lands. (Austin 1977/1973: 61, referring to Plato Laws 740 b-e) Agricultural settlements were far more common than commercial settlements. (Ibid. 63) The land of a new colony was regarded public property and was to be distributed fairly between the citizens (Ross's foreword to Aristotle NE: xii).

<sup>119</sup> The dispensation of land did take place by means of laws (*nómos*) alone, but by means of a token, (*symbola*, mentioned above). In Greek thought, a distinction was posited between visible things or substance (*ousia phanera*) and invisible (*ousia aphanes*). According to Shell (1993/1978: 31), this opposition is prevalent in Greek economic theory in two ways. First, the visible thing entails a transfer that was seen by others. The buyer and seller may for example exchange a symbolic deposit as a visible sign of their agreement. The invisible thing is property where the transfer was not visible. Second, the visible thing is defined as a non-monetary commodity such as land or "real" estate, and the invisible thing is money. (Ibid. 32) The landed aristocracy however feared the invisible property. Money appeared as a threat to their wealth, which was based on materiality, but even to their very mode of thinking. (ibid. 35) And yet, coinage seems to have benefited the wealthy, and made the peasants' situation more difficult as they would more easily fall into debt. (Austin 1977/1973: 54)



‘bugger’ (*pygixei*) the reader.” (Svenbro 1999/1995: 45)<sup>120</sup> The citizen should not identify too much with the submissive role of the reader, if he wanted to remain free. Socrates for instance regarded it better to be “*poor* at reading” (*ta grammata phaulos*), that is, barely literate. (Svenbro 2003/1995: 46, my italics) Being read to however, was a different thing; it was deemed as a healthy exercise for the psyche, and could even be ordained by a physician. (Fischer 2003: 57)

Svenbro (ibid. 41) suggests distribution (*nemein*) may even constitute the central meaning of reading, especially at a time when law was both set down in writing and distributed orally.

Table 3. Different cultural concepts of reading and of law, based on Svenbro (1993/1988; 1999/1995)

Culture:	Verb and meaning:	Law:
Orality	<i>eirein</i> , ‘to say/tell’ (Sparta)	<i>Rhetra</i> , ‘law; treaty’
Orality/writing	<i>nemein</i> , ‘to recite/read’	<i>Nomos</i> , ‘law; oral distribution’
Writing	<i>legere</i> , ‘to read’ (Rome)	<i>Lex</i> , ‘law; treaty; reading’

As the table shows, Svenbro holds that in contrast to Sparta, the Roman word for law, *lex*, seems to presuppose writing as it is the active noun of *legere*, ‘to read’. In fact, this meaning is quite puzzling as the other meanings of Latin *legere* are ‘to pick’, ‘gather’, ‘collect’, ‘select’ (cf. Webster’s u.a. p. 444, entry ‘collect’; p.1291 ‘legend’). Svenbro (1999/1995: 41) looks to the influences from Greece and suggests that Greek *legein* could well mean ‘to read’.<sup>121</sup> He says the Romans must have been aware of this Greek homonymic word and hence simply borrowed it, connecting it with Latin *legere*. In this way, ‘to pick’ would not be semantically connected with ‘to read’. There are however, two problems with this interpretation.

First of all, according to another essay by Svenbro (1993/1988: 15), the post-Homeric Greek verb *legein* means ‘to say’, which perhaps could suggest that *legere* could have an oral base even in Greek after all. (Webster’s also mentions

<sup>120</sup> This blunt declaration should not come as a surprise for those who read Michel Foucault’s accounts of sexual practice in Ancient Greece. Nietzsche (2003/1889: 120) also explains that the “sexual symbol was to the Greeks the symbol venerable as such, the intrinsic profound meaning of all antique piety”.

<sup>121</sup> He refers here to Plato’s *Theaetetus* ‘Well, slave, take the book and read [*lege*]!’ (1999/1995: 41)

*legein* as denoting ‘to collect, gather, choose, speak’, p. 1291). This would mean that the distinction between orality and writing is not as dramatic as proposed. Second, in view of Sumerian literacy being connected to the accumulation of surplus produce, we must not rule out the implications of understanding ‘reading’ in terms of picking, gathering, collecting. In other words, they may well be connected on a level of basic function or everyday use of economy, language and reading.

### Reading as Additive Activity

Because distribution (*nemein*) holds such a central position in both economy and reading, we should look further into its origins. Kurt Singer (1958: 37) explains that most etymologists hold that the root of *nomos* can be found in Indo-European *nem* that can be found in Old High German *neman*, meaning ‘to take’, and the Avesta word *nemah*, meaning ‘loan’. Here we find interesting parallels to the economic practices of taking land and taking from land. Allegedly, *nem* originally meant “to bend’ (towards oneself or towards someone else)” (Singer 1958; see also Bay 1998). Perhaps a similar ambiguity can be found in the English word ‘yield’ (cf. yield returns)?

We shall now look at additional ways to speak of reading that revolves around reading as distribution in ways that bends towards or yields in different ways. Svenbro (ibid. 42) has found a whole range of words for reading with *nemein* and *legein* placed at the centre, and he has visualized them in a table with the additions of the prefixes of *ana-* and *epi-* on each side. To begin with *ana-*, it has five basic meanings: ‘up’; back; again; throughout; according to or similar to’. (Webster’s: 25) It should not be confused with *an-*, meaning ‘not, without’ (Webster’s: 25). The prefix *epi-* means ‘on, upon, over, on the outside, anterior, beside’. (Webster’s: 252) This range of words connected to reading displays a striking symmetry:

Table 4. The symmetrical range of additional words for reading revolving around *nemein* and *legein* (based on Svenbro 1999/1995)

Active form	<i>epinemein</i>	<i>ananemein</i>	<i>nemein</i> (‘to read’)	<i>legein</i> (‘to read’)	<i>analegein</i>	
Middle form		<i>ananemeisthai</i>			<i>analegesthai</i>	<i>epilegesthai</i>

Indeed, as Svenbro (1999/1995) has shown, reading could be seen as an additive operation. In Svenbro’s interpretation, the addition of the prefix *ana-* in its middle form means above all to include oneself in the activity. Thus, *ananemeist-*

*hai* and *analegesthai* means ‘to distribute, including oneself in the distribution’ and ‘to read, including oneself in the reading’. (Svenbro 1999/1995: 42) In this way, reading appears as an inclusive activity.

By contrast, the other set of words beginning with the prefix *epi-* emphasizes that reading is an additive activity. Svenbro (1993/1988: 42) tells us of the Greek words *epinemein* and ‘*epilegesthai*’, a verb frequently used by Herodotus (5<sup>th</sup> c. BC.), meaning ‘to read’. The literal meaning of this verb is “to add something said to”. Svenbro says the reader *adds* his voice to the writing; without the reader, the written letters would remain dead. Therefore, reading is *added* to writing, for example as ‘epi-logue’ (Svenbro: *Ibid.*)

We do, however, also have some ancient words that are added to writing itself, for example ‘letter’ (*epistolē*) and ‘prescription’ (*epitagma*) (Cf. Svenbro 1993/1988) or indeed, epigraph, epigram, episode, epistle, epithet, and epitaph. (Webster’s: 253) In other words, we should not isolate these literary epiphenomena to reading. Indeed, from this additive model, we could speak of readings that are added to writings that in turn are added to some other phenomena.

Svenbro (1999/1995: 44) draws a triplet of observations from his study of the words for reading. First, the nature of the reader’s role was merely instrumental. Second, writing is incomplete and requires the sound of the reader’s voice. In this way, reading becomes integral in the text, argues Svenbro, based on the above-mentioned verb of *epilegesthai* whereby reading is added to writing. Third, those who were addressed by the writing would not be readers in the traditional sense, but rather ‘auditors’ (*akountes* or *akrotai*), as they would listen to the text being read out loud. (*Ibid.*)

Given the Greek resistance to any activity that will diminish self-reliance and increase external dependency, however, this should raise the question of how the inclusive conceptualization of reading was valued. In my interpretation, the additive model for reading captured in *epilegesthai* does not imply that the reader is integral to the text as Svenbro posited – rather the opposite. Here the reader is not submissive but has an outside activity or contribution to perform, namely to add a reading to what is already written. Against the above-mentioned value concept of *timiotera*, which privileged adding new, surpassing readings to the written document (Szlézak 1999/1993), it would appear that the additive model would have been easier for the Greeks to accept.

## Roman Reading

In early Rome, we find the first use of the expression ‘lettered man’, *litteratus*, although at that time it was held as derogatory. The expression emerged from

the practice of branding slaves with a letter of the alphabet. (Pattison 1982: 61)  
<sup>122</sup> Hence, this practice is at heart of the word that has formed the base for 'literacy' and 'literate'. Slaves and employed workers were gathered in workshops, *scriptoria*, where they often multiplied texts by means of dictation. (Ankarcrona 1996: 76f; Mackenzie 2000: 211) The use of slaves decreased in the first couple of centuries AD. The workforce was remunerated with a set tariff per line depending on the type of document and style of writing. In order to monitor whether a text was complete or not and to assess the wages, a *stichometric* method was used. According to Martin P:n Nilsson, the institution of a maximum tariff for scribes in 301 AD was one of history's most consistent attempts at bringing about price regulation. As soon as the text was produced, it was open for anybody to copy and sell. Hence, the publishers had one chance to decide on how many books to produce before letting them free at the market. (Ankarcrona 1996: 78)

Bookshops were set up across the Roman Empire long before retailing became a modern market concept. Before the bookshops, there were only two ways to acquire books: to steal and to copy. (Ankarcrona 1996: 75) When the Roman bookshops appeared, they were called *taberna libraria* and were just a hole in the wall: an opening onto the street and advertisements for books posted on the door and the doorposts. The books were kept in buckets, bookcases (*armaria*), and in compartments (*nidi* meaning birds' nests). (Ankarcrona 1996: 76) Public readings became popular, just like in Greece, and authors presented their work to the audience who would then give their direct acclaim or constructive criticism. In fact, public readings were so popular that the rich would build specially suited auditoriums in their private homes. (Fischer 2003: 76)

At the beginning of the second century BCE, reading circles were established in Rome, inspired by the Greek example. The earliest known circle was especially leaning towards Greek culture and revolved around the general Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus (235 – 183 BCE), famous for defeating Hannibal. Many other literary circles followed, and women often played an important role here by hosting young authors in the making, fostering them and promoting them to the larger public. (Fischer 2003: 73) As time went on, a large population of readers and writers secured the growing bureaucracy and a pool of managerial talent. (Ibid. 63f)<sup>123</sup> In the Roman Empire, reading and writing Latin had become a political tool.

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<sup>122</sup> In Greece, a tattooed man was either a slave or barbarian. As an exception, Svenbro (1993/1988) mentions Epimenides who upon his death was found out to be tattooed with writing all over his body, and hence he became renowned for not letting his body and writing be separated. In a sense, he became his own book.

<sup>123</sup> The word 'talent', comes from Latin *talenta*, which is plural of *talentum*, a unit of weight or money. The Greek *talanton* denotes 'balance', 'pair of scales', 'unit of weight or money'. The expression appeared in Old French as "inclination, desire, disposition". (Websters': 2333)

## Reading and the Christian Church

The Christian church sought to oppose the Roman Empire by resisting writing for a period of time as “[T]he sins of the bureaucracy were the virtues of the faithful.” The apostles Peter and John were described as *agrammatoi* and *idiotai*, “unlettered and uncouth” and Jesus himself has only written once, in the dust, in contempt of the Mosaic Law that condemned [women’s] adultery. (Pattison 1982: 70f) Early Christianity sought to re-establish the oral means for communication, propagating the Word and not the writing. The political dimension is pervasive, Pattison (ibid. 72) explains:

The Christian attack on classical literacy was part of the implementation of a [...] revolutionary program, by which the Church hoped that the population of the ancient world would break their ties to the old gods, the old bureaucracy and the old politics, all of which were tied to the old literacy of official and literary texts.

In time however, the Church found itself in a paradoxical situation. The literacy that it had vehemently fought against was in fact required to preserve their ideology and newly attained power. A compromise was brought forth: the Church kept reading and writing as means for organizing its business, but restrained knowledge of it to those who withheld a sound doctrine, i.e. the churchmen themselves. (Pattison 1982: 73) Thus, the restriction of literacy seem to have played an important role in the Christian revolution that Nietzsche condemned as giving rise to a slave morality and *ressentiment*.

As a consequence of the restrictive policy, readership declined in the Roman Empire between roughly 500 and 1000 B.C.E. (Pattison 1982: 71). There was no longer an educated, reading public. (Ankarcrona 1996: 95) The book workshops, *scriptoria*, where slaves and a cheap labour force had produced books, disappeared. The exclusive and expensive parchment substituted the popular and cheap papyrus as material for books. And as the book ceased to take part in everyday life, it was no longer regarded among people in general as a tool for knowledge. (Ankarcrona 1996: 101)

In the early Middle Ages, reading was practiced mostly in the monasteries. One read collectively during meals, offices, spiritual exercises, and individually for meditation or study. Within the monasteries, the tradition of reading called *ruminatio* was a form of meditation or a prayer that was associated with the Eucharist and reading aloud in a low, murmured voice.<sup>124</sup> Hence, Augustine marvelled when meeting Bishop Ambrose of Milan who read silently to himself. With silent reading, the mouth and the ear simply ceased to be decisive organs in reading. And yet, Ambrose’s mode of reading reconnected with his

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<sup>124</sup> The word *meditare* is a translation of Greek *meletein*, meaning “to perform exercises, both physical exercises as soldiers do, and also the memory exercises associated with learning to read and write”. (Carruthers 1997: 7)

mouth, not as vocalization and production through a repeated process of rumination, but as *ingestion* and *reception*. (Amsler 2001: 84)<sup>125</sup>

Words and books were closely connected to the notion of eating, devouring and digesting, etc. Manuscripts from the 14<sup>th</sup> century displayed on their margins a growing and excessive luxury: appetizing vegetables, wild game and spices (Ibid.); leaves on trellises, lush fruits, male and female bodies, parts of bodies – all this was offered to the reader to pluck, pick and eat from. (Camille in Warwick Frese 1997: 57)

At the time of Gutenberg, there were already screw presses as tools for crushing olives, grapes and other fruit. Yet other presses are often cited as precursors of the printing press: compressing cloth bales, smoothening cloth (especially linen), and rendering them with gloss. Allegedly, the presses for drying freshly moulded papers were the most important source for inspiration, according to Kilgour (1998: 87). Our genealogical study seems to suggest however, that fruit presses played an important symbolical precursor to the printing press. The ancient Greek word *καρπός*, which in plural means ‘fruit’ (Collins), is also used for yields and returns [*avkastning*]. Symbolically, fruit is seen as providing the essence of life. It brings the culmination of one level of being, containing the seeds for the next level. In that sense, fruit as a symbol belongs with immortality. (Cooper 1993/1978: 54)

*Image (Next page) Wood cut by Jost Amman (1588)*

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<sup>125</sup> Famously, Nietzsche would later seize upon the digestive system as a parallel for our mind – as indeed Herder had done before him - and introduce indigestion as a harmful condition for the mind. (Cf. Pasley 1978)



Literature had become food itself and offered to the mind and spirit. Elizabeth I wrote of her devotional readership in terms of a sensuous consumption (Fischer 2003: 235):

I walke manie times into the pleasant fieldes of the Holye Scriptures, where I pluck up the goodlie greene herbes of sentences, eate them by reading, chewe them up musing, and laie them up at length in the seate of memorie... so I may the lesse perceiue the bitterness of this miserable life. (Book of Devotion)

The practice of reading was indeed a form of eating and imbibing. Recall for instance that in the antiquity writing often appeared on jugs and vessels.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, “table books” – wooden tablets – were precursors to the codex and the modern book. (Petroski 1999: 30)<sup>127</sup> Shell (1993/1982: 41) mentions a

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<sup>126</sup> The new (print) art was called *Ars imprimendi ac caractericandi*. About the verb *imprimere*, Virgil writes in *The Aeneid* of a jug with impressed pictures. (Füssel 2003/1999: 53)

<sup>127</sup> The Latin word *tabula* means ‘board, tablet, writing tablet, record, document, list’. (Webster’s u.a.: 2324) In this context we need to acknowledge that tables for eating were foremost an individual phenomenon so that the resemblance between writing tablets and eating tables would be even more striking. (And of course, ‘table’ denotes both a piece of furniture and a graphic or enumerative schema.) For instance, as MacKenzie (2000: 211) tells, The Epic of Gilgamesh was

Greek, hermetic tradition that holds “the word is drunk, the food of thought” and “the knowledge of divine essence is eating and drinking from the word of God”. In the debate within the Christian church regarding transubstantiation, food and drink continued to be associated with the word of God.<sup>128</sup>

Regarding *devouring*, among the earliest mentions of in 14<sup>th</sup> century English is in fact connected to reading books. And it is a similar case with the verb *digestion*, which also displays a connection to spoken words. (*OED*) The notions of ingesting texts in fact preceded these modes of reading.<sup>129</sup> This connection was established at a very early date as a tension between *nemein* in the sense of reading, that is, distributing words aloud (Svenbro 1993/1988) and in the sense of pasture (Singer 1958). Against this background, the pastoral pleasures of Elizabeth I make perfect sense.

According to the *Eastern* Christian tradition, the primary sin of Adam and Eve was the gluttony (*gastrimargia*): to eat from the tree’s fruits. With the *Western* tradition, however, the fall from grace was derived from Man’s pride [*högmod*], his will to be the origin, which leads to a sinful domination over other creatures; whereas among monks in It is a sinful, lusty use of the sensory creation that ends up as *abuse*. Hence, both traditions bring consequences for ecology, Thunberg (Ibid. 62f) claims, but in my view, also for our views on economy and consumption, especially in terms of reading.

## Reading in Silence

The inward motion of reading is expressed in a 12<sup>th</sup> century work, *De interiori domo*, rendered meditation as a form of “internal reading” (Leclerque 1963-1964 in Fischer 2003: 164). Just like the Greeks had envisioned, reading was seen as a tool that operates directly on the human inside. (Fischer 2003: 164) Thus, read-

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transcribed by servants straight onto clay tablets as the words poured from “the mouths of illiterate bards.” In this way then, writing entails that servants lay the tables with the words that are on offer. This imagery is furthered by the observation that before tables for eating became a large piece of furniture for collective meals, they were primarily individual. In any case, there is an intricate composition that brings together oral literature, writing and reading with tables and eating.

<sup>128</sup> This was even after 1215 when Magna Charta was signed.

<sup>129</sup> Not only humans, but also various animals and insects were nurtured by the books and left marks of their bodies on the texts. (Ibid. 42) For example a 'book worm' is “an insect larva that harms books by feeding on the binding, paste, etc.” and secondly the nick-name given to “one who reads or studies much” (Webster’s: 85). Greene (2005: 27) believes that the Tudor trope of print culture as pestilence may have contributed to the practice of book burning. Apparently, Henry VIII had claimed in 1538 that even to “buy, receive, or have” these “naughty printed books”, “pestiferous” as they were could be subjected to capital punishment, even if the book was never opened. Printed books were also deemed a potent poison that threatened to unsettle the world. (Ibid: 25)



ing had found its “home”, not in the outside world such as in the *oikos* of *oekonomia*, but rather inside the body of the individual reader. Unlike previous communication that was bearing the stamp of collective or social functions and processes,<sup>130</sup> silent reading brought along a secluded, more direct and therefore completely uncensored way of communication. Thus, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, reading practices were constructed around two models. One was the New Benedictine model that cultivated a private, silent, still reading – reading that did not involve voice, breath or gesture. In contrast, the other model revolved around an “affective literacy” that entailed an emotional form of devotional reading and involved a somatic relationship with the texts. (Amsler 2001)

Silent reading is an excellent example of how simple, everyday practices performed by citizens, can in fact be regarded as a threat to the ruling powers. With silent reading, Fischer (2003: 162) writes that “[R]eading transcended its social function as a tool, to become a human faculty.” Hence, literacy was further internalised and became constituted as a basic capability or power of the human mind.<sup>131</sup> This shift made an impact on the community and on the state body. “The public member had become the private contender.” (Fischer 2003: 163) Facing increasing numbers of literates, the ruling powers within the state and the church most likely sought new ways to promote new forms of devotional and disciplinary modes of reading.

In an age of higher degrees of accessibility to written knowledge, the practice of private, silent reading was increasingly widespread and permitted larger possibilities of questioning dogma. Fischer (2003: 163) relates the first burning of a heretic at the stake in Orléans, France in 1022 and the 1231 decree of death penalty for religious heresy to the context of private communication such as silent reading formed a sufficiently large base for people to assert their right to a more immediate relationship with God, outside of intermediaries as authorities. And although Fischer states that “silent reading certainly did not cause these things”, at least there is a connection. In the Medieval times, the body was treated as a means for recollection and memory, in other words the body was often understood as a form of book. (Carruthers in Warwick Frese 1997: 1) With silent reading, the books quite likely were regarded as forming an internal part of or imprint on the human body and following this logic, to burn the heretic is less a punishment for a crime, but rather rational way to eradicate the heretic texts.

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. *communicare* in Latin – to share, impart, partake (Webster’s u.a.: 460).

<sup>131</sup> Interestingly, according to Webster’s (u.a.: 813) one meaning of the word ‘faculty’ is “a pecuniary state as evidenced by ability to pay” and often related to the concept of *means, property, resources*.

## Scholastic Reading

With the establishment of universities (Bologna 1119; Oxford 1214; Sorbonne 1255), writing and reading began to form around a new model in the context of schooling. There was a shift from monastic reading to scholastic reading. (Lit-tau 2006: 15; Hamesse in Cavallo & Chartier 1999/1995) The new model indirectly implied the value of utility and profit of reading. It was also held that books needed to be approached in the proper way. The students were very young, and teaching had to be organized in order to render access to the texts. The method entailed three steps in order to attain comprehension: a grammatical analysis (*littera*); a commentary to gain an understanding of the general sense and of the nuances (*sensus*); and third, a more deep and personal interpretation by the professor (*sententia*). Most students however, relied on the scribbled notes, extracts, summaries and commentaries by the professors for their learning. There was a wide array of available abridgements, tables, indexes, concordances, and *florilegia* (Hamesse 1999/1995: 113).

## The Advent of Print

The rationalized Gutenberg printing press was put to work well over a hundred years before ‘modernity’ in Cartesian and Kantian terms emerged.<sup>132</sup> Thus, the technology of mass print both preceded and participated in the formation of modern society as we know it, for example, the Protestant reformation movement, the emergence of industrial capitalism and bourgeois culture as the defining mode of everyday life. (cf Ong 1982; Goody 1976; Eisenstein 1983) Literacy is intrinsic to the growth of the modern nation state, according to MacKenzie (2000: 214). Where there had been overlapping languages, the spread of literacy and print culture helped forming boundaries between them, which in turn crystallized the borders between the European nation states. Instead of a gradual differentiation of languages across wide stretches of land, the national borders created a point or strata that divided a way of speaking as either this or that, good or bad. Military power was decisive in this assessment: “a language is a dialect with an army” (ibid.).

Importantly, the business of reading, writing, and the book has made the economy what it is today. The production of printed books was conducted along the first-ever assembly line, a technique for producing a series of identical objects made from exchangeable units. It took three hundred years before this tech-

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<sup>132</sup> Woodmansee (1989/1988: 220) even relates Kant’s aesthetic theory to the debate over reading in Germany: “Official history presents the *Critique of Judgement* as the fruit of a century of pure philosophical reflection on the arts. While such purely internal, philosophical factors undoubtedly played an important role in the evolution of aesthetics, the German reading debate calls our attention to the broader, cultural-political impulses that helped to foster it.”

nique was implemented and put to use in other productions (Ong 1990/1982: 138). Book printing was the first mechanization of a craft, and the book is the first mass-produced good known to man (McLuhan 2001/1964: 201). Modern systems and practices of pricing would not have developed without the standardized book. Marshall McLuhan (2001/1964: 205) claims it would be a simple task to support with evidence how the continuity, homogenization, and repetition of book printing have become the basis for industrial production, for infinitesimal calculus and marketing, for entertainments, and for science.

Ever since Gutenberg's leaded types revolutionized book printing, publishing is characterized as a predominantly rationalist and capitalist enterprise entailing financial investments, large scale operations, standardization, costs decreasing with the numbers of units produced, etc. the first publishers however, mainly initiated production of religious edifying literature that was distributed for free among the general public. Hence, making money or profit was not the primary aim of publishing (but perhaps the secondary). Instead, the aim was to secure the salvation of their soul. The Church was another category of publisher that often paid for the printing of literature for service. (Yrliid, 1994) The mass production of books was really about producing books for *mas*. This ambiguity between is produced by the fact that modern type book publishing in the west first took place in a period of time that we may term pre-modernity.

At the very core of modern book publishing, some medieval quality was retained, namely that "knowledge, as the gift of God, was common property and so could not be sold". The printing presses allowed for quantities of books and editions never seen before, spurred along by the increase in literacy, and eventually the book became more common in the eyes of the reading public. Eventually, "The gifts of God can be sold and given, it depends on the circumstances." (Zemon Davis 1983 quoted in Scott-Warren 2001: 3) And so happens that books were given in a startling variety of ways, beginning with printed dedications written by "the author, translator, or printer to patrons, friends, or relatives". Some books were bought and given as personal gifts, as a "particularly flexible kind of present, which would be ritually inscribed by the recipient"; other books yet were distributed freely, as mentioned. A third form of gift was the category of books given in bequest, among the movables of the deceased. Interestingly, here, increased gift giving follows a surging wealth of books.

Zemon Davis concludes however, buying and selling books did not completely or automatically extinguish God's share. The book could stand against attempts at permanent appropriation and moreover, it was particularly bad to view it merely as a source of profit. (Scott-warren 2001: 11) Allegedly, this view influenced the ethos of many into the 17<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. (Scott-Warren 2001: 3) However, Scott-Warren observed "Although the common good may be stated goal of much early modern book-giving, it is arguable that such donation is always a form of appropriation, premised on the assumption that a book *can*

be private property.’<sup>133</sup> Literature was also the first of all the arts to undergo the challenges of imitation/replication/piracy, aesthetic valuation, and other important changes in the eighteenth century, and it has continued to exert power on production, distribution, and consumption ever since (Cf. Woodmansee 1995: 22).

Print culture, among other things, was the driving force behind the rise of a consumerist culture in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe where we find a strong current of “hedonistic consumerism” (Mukerji 1983 in McCracken 1990/1983). And as Walter J. Ong (1990/1982: 142) observes, cultures of handwriting are producer oriented, whereas printing alleviates reading and is therefore considered consumer oriented. Ong (1990/1982: 137) also observed that book printing contributed to the materialization of the word. Handwritten letters do not own a material existence until they are written, but with alphabetic print, the letters are cast in separate units, in types, and as produced objects they exist before the words they will form. According to Ong, this marked a psychological breakthrough of the first order, for the word was made an integrated part of the production-process and therefore became a utility good [*bruksartikel*]. (Ibid.)

With the advent of print in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, manuscripts were multiplied and readers could read extensively and purchase several books, beginning to seek variety itself. (Fischer 2003: 255)<sup>134</sup> Around this time, the notion of “reading” (French *lire*) was not yet exclusively connected with books; it designated “deciphering, comprehension, and interpretation” of objects or forms even outside the category of written materials.<sup>135</sup> (Chartier 1997: 90) The etymological basis for the English verb ‘to read’ suggests that it is connected to collectively discern or understand something obscure (Howe in Boyarin 1993).

## 18th Century Reading Revolution

Rolf Engelsing (1974) has argued that there was in fact a “reading revolution” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Engelsing observed a change from the *intensive reading* of a small number of books belonging to a collective canon of texts, to the *extensive reading* of a large variety of texts for desire of information and for individual pleasure in particular. Importantly, Wittman argues that the difference is less

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<sup>133</sup> For example, he describes how portraits of writers *holding on* to their book are just as prevalent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as those largely medieval portraits of writers pointing to their books as *gifts*.

<sup>134</sup> So much had bookselling increased during the Protectorate that, in 1658, was published A Catalogue of the most Vendible Books in England, digested under the heads of Divinity, History, Physic, &c., with School Books, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and an Introduction, for the use of Schools and Scholars.

than clear-cut. Intensive reading could be performed as a routinized ritual, and extensive reading could be intense and passionate. Considering that literacy was highly limited in scope across Europe – except from Scandinavia and especially Sweden – it cannot have been as widespread as the conservatives feared, says Wittman (in Cavallo & Chartier 1999/1995: 289). And yet, he claims that the new reading public was not marginal, on the contrary, it was to have a strong impact on cultural and political developments.

Following the burgeoning number of printed books in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was an upsurge in readership in Europe and reading seemed to take on new cultural functions among a larger part of the population. Aside from the expansion within the book business, this development is related to two important changes that occurred by mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. For one, widespread famine was gone. Occasionally, there were bad years with hunger, disease and urban unrest, but there was no starvation. Secondly, “surplus population” moved to the cities from saturated lands. By regulating the grain trade and by fixing the price of the daily bread, the Crown tried to keep the problem at bay. (Fox-Genovese 1976: 25) If the number of women was high relative to men or if men for some reason did not marry, there was soon a women’s surplus population. (Gedin 2004: 218) The increase in surplus both in terms of food and people provided the necessary background to the increase in reading.

The reading habits across Europe changed quickly in the wash of urbanization and those groups that responded most quickly were the domestic workers, chambermaids and lackeys; but also tradesmen, craftsmen and servicemen such as barbers and army-men. They all shared the prerequisite access to reading light and moments available for reading were dispersed during the day. (Wittman in Cavallo & Chartier 1999/1995) Hence, in contrast to other forms of consumption that may have diffused conspicuously from the power centres of society (Cf. Veblen 1899), empirical studies disclose that reading materials more or less travelled both downwards and upwards in the social strata and to a much larger extent than perhaps expected (Chartier 1992).

Fiction, and especially the novel, showed a remarkable increase over the 18<sup>th</sup> century, both in terms of titles and of copies, mostly due to the practice of reprint. Book prices however, did pose a problem to expanded reading as they increased eight- or nine fold. The cost of one novel in Germany and Britain could have sustained a family’s meals for two weeks. The increase was caused by booksellers’ practice, says Wittman (1999/1995: 303), the system of net retailing, the break-even structure, and also, to the ever-increasing demand for the *belles-lettres*. This demand was partly met by the emerging lending libraries and reading societies.

Literary groups grew out of a form of joint subscriptions by informal groups in which literature started to circulate among the members. The need for a physical storage of books led to the establishment of *circulating* or *reading libraries*, emerging across Europe as a new form of library because a social group had the

direct influence over the acquisition of books. (Östholm 2000; Wittman 1999/1995) In London the first circulating library was established in 1740 and by the end of the century, there were around thousand such libraries spread across England. (Starker 1990) Notably, this form of collective organizing around books occurred well before the consumer cooperatives set up in Britain in the 1840s.

The circulating libraries managed to create a new market for fiction, as told by Starker (1990). Importantly, it was a challenge to book supply as the libraries required constant refilling. There was ample opportunity for literary “hacks” who imitated favourite novels, and introduced a set of stock elements in a new “formula fiction”. Eventually, authors and publishers were charged with being too commercially oriented (Ibid.) But that is not the end of it. The reading libraries also inspired to *social activities* in non-commercial *reading societies*. A range of names for reading societies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: reading cabinet; reading circle; reading association, reading institute; and later, society, club, casino, museum, “*Ressource*”, and harmony. (Stützel-Prüsener 1981 in Östholm 2000: 29; Wittman 1999/1995) There were also commercial establishments called *lending libraries*. In this way, even those with little financial means could get access to reading matter. As one bookseller noted, perhaps a bit over the top, even the poor families in the countryside shorten their winter nights by tales and romances; “all ranks and degrees now READ” (Starker 1990).

The literary development was not all about harmony though. The increased reading in the expanding population in Europe was not to everybody’s satisfaction and the development was against the interests of the reactionary, conservative and clerical strata of society including groups that represented the state. Critics were concerned that the reading spread through the whole of society, including the lowest classes. Contemporaries were prone to speak of this transformation as a “reading bug” that spread into a collective “reading epidemic”. (Wittmann in Cavallo & Chartier 1999/1995: 285) Famous examples are the Pamela-fever in England that broke out upon the release of Samuel Richardson’s moralistic epistolary novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, first published in 1740, the very same year that the first circulating library was established. (Cf. Starker 1990).

*Image 1. (Next page) The front cover of the 1741 edition of Samuel Richardson’s novel Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded.*

P A M E L A :

O R,

V I R T U E Rewarded.

In a SERIES of

F A M I L I A R L E T T E R S

F R O M A

Beautiful Young D A M S E L,

To her P A R E N T S.

Now first Published

In order to cultivate the Principles of V I R T U E  
and R E L I G I O N in the Minds of the Y O U T H  
of B O T H S E X E S.

---

A Narrative which has its Foundation in TRUTH and  
NATURE; and at the same time that it agreeably entertains,  
by a Variety of curious and affecting INCIDENTS, is entirely divested  
of all those Images, which, in too many Pieces calculated for  
Amusement only, tend to inflame the Minds they should restrain.

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In T W O V O L U M E S.

The S E C O N D E D I T I O N.

To which are prefixed, E X T R A C T S from several curious  
L E T T E R S written to the Editor on the Subject.

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M D C C X L I.

In Germany a *Wertherfieber* broke out following Goethe's novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, or *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774. Trained on reading for instructive and useful purposes, some readers even regarded the latter novel as an invitation to follow young Werther's example into suicide (Wittman 1999/1995).

The term reading epidemic was not merely used as a metaphor for its rapid expansion. Indeed, as Karin Littau (2006) reports, there were alarms for a number of real-life health hazards of reading, ranging from physical to psychopathological ills: lethargy, congestion, wind and constipation on one side, and exhaustion, lack of emotional control, vision blurring, migraines, melancholy and hysteria on the other. Reading in bed, reading inappropriate materials (i.e. literary fiction), reading too engrossed and reading plain too much – all these practices would give cause for un-health. In a comment to this account, Karin Littau (2006: 38) observes that “[S]ymptoms seem to intensify or multiply when it comes to excessive reading”. As held by the famous critic Q.D. Leavis, the one thing that held off the addiction to fiction among the lower-middle classes for some time was “the exorbitant price of novels” (Starker 1990).

Those who objected to the reading epidemic also objected to the lending libraries for their part in spreading the disease. (Wittman 1999/1995: 307) In England, circulating libraries were condescendingly termed “slop-shops in litera-

ture” (cf. Starker 1990). There were strong conservatory forces that sought to regulate the supply of literature by means of state intervention. In the wake of the French revolution, all German states either put a total ban on reading libraries, or subjected them to strict control. (Wittman 1999/1995) The more modest suggestions entailed that the reading societies should be “organized and administered” rather than closed down and that the lending libraries that were run by entrepreneurs should indeed be nationalized so that civil servants of the right mind would be put in charge of book selection and acquisition. (Woodmansee 1988-1989: 209)

### Better a Reading Public than Public Reading

After the Napoleonic Wars few governments were inclined to act upon their commitment to increasing literacy and to handle its consequences. (Vincent 2000: 127) For instance, the British State was reluctant to let the reading public engage freely with printed matter. Lords such as Privy Seal dreaded the becoming of “politicians at the Spinning Jenny” (ibid.). While discussing proposals for a national, elementary educational system, the Government imposed security bonds on printers and increased the taxes on newspapers so that they would be too expensive for poor readers. (Ibid.) In America, there was no such tax burden and hence their press thrived in the 19th century, and a range of formats was developed specifically devoted to fiction. (Starker 1990)

The result from the British taxation was an increasingly militant readership that flourished among the illegal and radical printing presses. Allegedly, 600 people were sent to prison and eventually, the regime had to reconsider its position as regards elementary education as well as to mass communication. In 1833, the government made their first investment in elementary education. (Vincent 2000: 128) “The means by which the consequences of investment in education were measured tended constantly to exaggerate the shift towards privacy.” (Vincent 2000: 16)

At the same time, the governments across Europe had to relax their surveillance over printed matter. It was the sheer volume and ever-increasing expansion that posed problems to the ruling order. With the ceaseless introduction of *Penny Post* versions in the UK – not to forget *Aftonbladet* in Sweden – comprehensive control became impossible. “Readers and writers were outrunning the censors.” (Ibid.) Only at wartime, the states were empowered to reintroduce their former controls.

Interestingly, the high price had led to collective purchasing practices, whereby each reading act could easily become a political gathering. Against this background, mass circulation of newspapers would allow for a “safer mode” of consumption. (Vincent 2000: 129) The market was increasingly used as a means for disciplining the public into a desirable behaviour:



With the market free to drive costs down towards the pockets of individual working men, the papers could be perused in the privacy of the home. Distance was placed between one reader and another, and between deciphering and debating the news. Whatever its content, information absorbed at the kitchen table or on the front door step during the more sharply defined leisure time was less inflammatory than when it was read aloud to the company of a public house or artisan workshop. (Ibid.)

Here it becomes clear that there are powerful forces that wish to construe readership as a private enterprise within the household, rather than a social or collective one. Vincent (2000: 15) writes, “[R]eading and writing were promoted by the public authorities in the nineteenth century as an antidote to the oral and communal forms of recreation and protest which increasingly were seen as inimical to an ordered society.” Indeed, even after World War II, an official report in Sweden mentions reading as one activity among others that should be encouraged in the private household. (Aléx 2003: 131) Thus, the social and public modes of reading were succeeded by a mode of reading by which the individual read in isolation, as means for hedonic escapism on one side, and for social climbing on the other, and commercial distribution was required for this reading practice. (Wittman 1999/1995)

Siegfried Schmidt’s (1991) studies into the literary sphere in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany stress mainly the important shift towards increased *reflexivity* on part of the reading public. The bourgeois subject, he writes, “demands individual entertainment (that is reading as an end in itself) directed towards maximising reflexive processes (self-reassurance, self-knowledge, self-preservation and self-projection)”. (Ibid. 102) It is actually possible that what Habermas’ viewed as terrible tokens of increased commercialisation of the book trade in fact belong with the historical shift towards *reflexivity*. As Schmidt (1991: 97) says, “Reflexivity enables social processes to become self-regulating.” This could mean that the activities that Habermas cherished, such as *reflexive* reading (in its most simple form, of course), in fact has contributed to the increasing focus upon self-entertainment.

The important change was that individuals were now seeking to *maximize* the reflexive processes of self-reassurance, self-knowledge, self-preservation and self-projection. As reading became a goal in itself, it was transformed into an individual pleasure, separated from other forms of socially striated, collective pleasure. (Schmidt 1991: 102) Reading for the sake of oneself opens up to an image of reading for keeps. Reading for individual gain thus becomes a motive for reading. The individual pleasure would come to be regarded as re-creative, a reflexive way of creation, a veritable self-creation.

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was also great hope of the beneficial consequences of reading. In the UK, school inspector J.G. Fitch wrote an influential article in 1888 where he rejoiced over the “multiplication and diffusion of

cheap books” which rendered that time the best opportunities ever to obtain “systematic intellectual discipline”:

Readers are multiplying daily; but they want guidance, help, plan, some principle of selection, some purpose and method in study, some safeguard against the fatal habit of letting the mind drift about aimlessly, and permitting itself to be influenced by whatever books happen to come nearest, whether good or bad.

The response was swift. The following year, the National Home-reading Union (NHRU) was instigated by John Brown Paton “for the purpose of developing a taste for Recreative and Instructive Reading among all classes of the community, and directing Home Study to definite ends so as to remedy waste of energy and lack of purpose” (Stimpson 2002: 52). It sought to encourage those boys and girls who just left school, workers and those who had not been able to pursue further education. “READ, THINK, PERSEVERE” was the motto in the first editorial. (Ibid.)<sup>136</sup>

Arnold Bennett, who recommended to buy a specific set of books in order to become a reader (mentioned in the introductory chapter), considered “serious reading” as an affair involving hard work:

Now in the cultivation of the mind one of the most important factors is precisely the feeling of strain, of difficulty, of a task which one part of you is anxious to achieve and another part of you is anxious to shirk [...]<sup>137</sup>

This hard work of reading (good novels exempted) will be rewarded by the formation of a certain literary taste, according to Bennett. In effect, it is a question of exchange and cognitive expenditure: the reader spends his or her cognitive resources in order to get something in return. This view emerges with the realization that literacy and readership form the conditions for a highly qualified and productive workforce.<sup>138</sup>

In Sweden the ‘study circle’ [*studiecirkeln*] was championed by Oscar Olsson in 1902. It grew out the sobriety movement [*godtemplarordern*] in Lund and was modelled after British and American sister organizations. The aim of the study circle was to bring general enlightenment to the people and bring knowledge in the sobriety issue. Literature provided an important way of getting enlightened, aside from courses and lectures. (Gogoulakis 2001: 18) Each study circle brought the establishment of a small library (Ibid. 129). In the 1912 official investigation regarding library reform, the library should not only be seen as a simple collection-place, but the connecting tie between all citizens. The reform

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<sup>136</sup> Rose (2001) also gives a wide range of examples of literary ventures and volumes directed at the working classes.

<sup>137</sup> Arnold Bennett, in *How to Live on 24 hours a Day*, chapter eleven: “Serious Reading”.

<sup>138</sup> Today, Steven Johnson (2005: 23) argues that apart from informational content of books and the mental work, there are even long-term career benefits: “being an avid reader is good for you because the educational system and the job market put a high premium on reading skills”.

eventually led to a governmental support of national education. The investigator, Valfrid Palmgren (1912: 51, quoted in Gogoulakis 2001: 128), writes of the book's role in national prosperity and welfare:

One is starting to realize, that every single person's life can become richer and happier through the book and that a better, happier person is an economic profit to society [...]. And one knows nowadays also that only a people standing at the highest possible educational level could become and remain fit for development and competitive on the world market.

This rhetoric regarding the book is foregrounding the human capital discourse as it was to be phrased in the 1950s. Palmgren refers just two years before the outbreak of WWI how the great nations in Europe prepared for international competition regarding workforce. Allegedly, German industrialists and employers sought to follow the Anglo-Saxon example of establishing libraries for their workers as a means for national development (Ibid.)

## 20th century

After the years of Economic Depression in the US, new research efforts were directed towards reading. Niles (1936) constructed the following typology of reading and its functions: 1) *Serving the function of 'escape'*; overcoming "loneliness, disappointment, idleness, and restlessness"; Reading "as an essential part of his whole existence, a compensation for what [he] lacked", abandoning all regard for limiting conditions. 2) *Affording temporary diversion*; sympathetic observers, little relation between events of the story and everyday experiences, passing forms of enjoyment, adding joy. 3) *Defining the reader's conception of his rôle*, reading as "an organizing influence in the reader's personality, defining his rôle and conception of himself and relating to his personal problems". 4) *Relating to objective interests and activities*; instrumental reading – but not dry or distasteful – serving to answer questions and to enhance enthusiasms. Niles noted that the first, escape, was the most common function of reading.

Miller's (1936) comparison of readership between two Tracts in the Chicago area built on extensive demographic data. Marital condition was the first mentioned variable before sex, age, schooling, nationality and economic status. Dwelling and juvenile delinquency was also factors that were investigated. Books were distinguished according to a quality ranking system (superior, medium, inferior). Miller observed that poorer families borrowed magazines from each other to a larger extent, just because it is available at hand. "Recalling the inferior quality of magazines read by the poorer tract, the question may well be raised as to whether the supply of good periodical literature might not be one of the tasks of a formal social agency." (Miller 1936: 755)

Already before the US entered the World War II, The title *How to Read a Book* (1940) by Mortimer J. Adler stayed on the US bestseller lists for several weeks.

(Schattuck 1996: 104) And yet, there were still many functional illiterates among adults, especially among the African-Americans. (Loss 2003)

The libraries became centres for information about the war. (Loss 2003) The publishing industry formed an advisory board to the Federal Government, The Council of Books in War. It cooperated with the United States Army Library Service (ALS) and Penguin Books among others in order to supply American GIs with a paperback series, the *Armed Service Editions* (ASE) during the years 1943-46. The Council's aim was threefold: to influence the American people's "thinking" around the war; to keep up the nation's morale; and to convey the importance of each individual effort in fighting the enemy. It also had the benefit of diversion. More than 1320 titles were printed in 122 million, specially designed, custom-fitted copies and were distributed to soldiers along with cigarettes and candy.<sup>139</sup>

The British, German and Soviet nations also distributed books to their soldiers, but never came near this effective US program. It was deemed the greatest publishing project known to that time. As for the national scene, the Council initialized a number of events to counter the tendency of book banning and burning in the Axis countries. They also set up two programs: "The Reading List" programme with up to 58 separate lists of recommended reading and the "Imperative Book Plan" containing titles directly related to the war effort and with a sales potential. Most did become national bestsellers at a time of increasing restraint and censorship. The scene was set for the post-war boom in publishing (Loss 2003).<sup>140</sup>

Regarding the consumption developments in the US after World War II, Lizabeth Cohen (2004: 236f) reports that mass consumer economy was deemed as economically sound for the nation. Although there were plenty of needs for goods among the population, consumers were unwilling to spend whatever money they had. Extensive efforts were called for: by business managers, labour unions, government agencies, mass media and advertisers in order to coax

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<sup>139</sup> Another publishing venture that became successful in times of war was Penguin Books, set up by Allen Lane in England in 1935. It soon assumed the role of "Popular Educator of the English People" with the help of their line of Classics and Specials. When World War II broke out Penguin Books had a large paper allowance relative to other publishing companies. Allegedly, their paperback fitted the British battle-dress thigh-pocket like a hand in a glove. At the end of the war, Penguin Books was incredible strong at the market and veritably without competition. (Sutherland 1991:7)

<sup>140</sup> Even as late as 2005, a few years after the declared war on terrorism, The University Press of the Pacific published *A Book on Books: A Guide for the United States Marine Corps Professional Reading Program*. "This is not homework; this is not drudgery." The aim is clear - the reading programme is called "Read to Lead in Today's Corps". The book is presented at the Swedish Internet book shop Adlibris with the following description: "Our profession is warfighting, and therefore, the emphasis of the professional reading program is on books that will make the individual Marine a better warfighter."

Americans to indulge in consumption as a form of “civic responsibility”. The promoters regarded a national economy driven by mass consumption as a means to ensure both economic and political democracy. The message was that private consumption and public benefit simply belonged together.

## Contemporary Nursing of Literacy and Reading

Ever since John Stuart Mill took an interest in national education, there has been a more explicit connection between literacy training and economic benefits on a national level. Previous to the 19th century, the link between literacy and religion was very strong. In many state literacy projects in modern times, the economic perspective is predominant, even to the extent that economic theory has come to inform scholars’ approach to the area of literacy. Economy has become the lens through which we regard reading, writing and the book. And they in turn, are often held as driving forces of the economy.

### Literacy Projects as Agents of Economic Production

During the 20th century, and especially in and around the world wars, the issue of literacy became more urgent. Indeed, early 20<sup>th</sup> research on literacy originated mainly in the military. It relied increasingly on printed instructions and news, and it was important that the soldiers could be trusted as readers. It was actually in the military context that the term “functional literacy” was coined. The basic meaning was to be a “good soldier”. (OECD 1992: 19 in Mackenzie 2000: 218) Conversely, ‘functional illiteracy’ is an inability to fully take political part in the economic and civic life of their community (cf. Mackenzie 2000: 219) Note the expressed order: the economic life is ranked first, civic life second.

In a classic study of literacy, Brian Street (1984) discerns two basic models of literacy: the “maktab literacy” named after the religious schools in which they were developed, and the “commercial literacy” that emerged in a setting of fruit-growing villages. Unlike the “maktab model”, commercial literacy is not textual, but draws rather on the style and layout of words on the page – implicating a spatial order – so that lists, tables, columns makes it possible to use actively to classify, order and retrieve information. Although the two models differ as relates to ideology, socialization and to economic conditions such as employment (Ibid. 179), Street holds that the first model enables the second to develop. (Ibid. 173) And in a fortunate setting with the right infra-structural support, the commercial literacy further enabled economic growth. (Ibid. 159) But Street emphasizes that even commercial literacy is foremost part of deep-running socialization processes and practices that construct a complex ideology

that evolves and is acted out within the framework of a specific infrastructure. (Ibid. 180)

In many state literacy projects in modern times, the economic perspective is predominant. This is deemed logical because literacy training requires investment, but also because both literacy and numeracy are designated important roles in the relations of production. Thus, linking economic functions to literacy represents an evolutionary view of social change. (Lind & Johnston, 1990: 51f) The economic literacy approach relies on a basic ideological underpinning of human capital theory and the objectives are to give direct impact on raising national production. (Ibid. 75) Early UNESCO approaches to literacy programmes have been criticized for privileging financial and commercial interests:

It subverted the interests of foreign investments and multinational companies on the premise that productivity and profits could be raised if 'literacy levels' were raised. From the point of view of many States, who badly needed such investment, literacy programmes represented an input factor whose success was to be assessed in terms of economic return. (Street 1984: 184)

Pattison (1982: 32) mentions that the two major methods of spreading literacy are instances of economic realities in themselves; there is always an *exchange* or a bargain involved. According to him, the method used by Frank Laubach is a no-frills business arrangement: "Pay the instructor, and he teaches the book." The other method, developed by Paolo Freire, is characterized by Marxist thinking. Here the exchange takes on a more idealistic than monetary value. However, as Pattison has observed, "[W]hether the medium of exchange is cash or ideas, however, the development of the talents of language belongs within the realm of economics." Hence, the value of literacy will be determined in economic terms. In other words, by how much individuals and societies are "willing to spend on it" (ibid.)

Concerning the concept of "human capital" invented by Theodore Schultz, McCloskey (1985: 77) notes that with that phrase "the field in economics treating human skills was at a stroke unified with the field treating investments in machines". This is well suited to the instrumental view of literacy:

The subjects themselves were a form of 'plant' whose effectiveness could be maximised by the employment of new 'educational technology' in the form of 'literacy skills', thereby enabling greater surplus to be extracted from them. (Street 1984: 184)

Literacy had once been propelled by hard work on the land, tending crops and animals, producing surplus. Now humans have ceased to belong with plants and animals, instead they are used both as material and means for extracting surplus *in* industrial plants. Often the expectations of direct economic gain is transferred onto the post-literacy stage, where "learning to read" is supposed to be shifted onto the individual and transformed into "reading to learn" (Singh 1976 in Lind & Johnston, 1990: 52)

## The Cost–Benefit Model of Literacy and Reading

According to Vincent (2000: 75), literacy can be seen in terms of costs and opportunities. From this perspective, for a child to complete schooling would then increase the overall life-time earnings, which in turn would render the parents' investment worthwhile, given that illiterate workers get less wages than literate. It is difficult to know how many families actually calculated on this rational model, especially since it applied mainly to boys, whereas for girls, learning to read and write would mainly increase their prospects of marrying a man with a view to higher earnings. Moreover, for the poorest families, there was little benefit to send their children to school. In fact, parents even stopped thinking of the benefits of literacy and focused upon the costs of their children growing up illiterate. Hence, the calculation does not sum up, and therefore one may argue that the cost-benefit model ceases to be relevant to the idea of literacy. It is precisely because the readership calculus rarely is balanced among the literate that compulsory education had to be introduced. (Interestingly, Vincent [2000: 76] suggests that the households' fondness of *gambling* may have sparked their motivation to learn how to read and write. From this perspective, schooling may be the "throw of the dice" that may give the fortunate few the chance of "breaking out of the cycle of inherited deprivation" (Ibid.).

However, even, within the science of literacy education and training at the turn of the millennium, the *cost–benefit* model is used as an emblematic tool for understanding the problem of becoming a reader. (Cf. Lundberg 1998) According to this model, reading is regarded as a form of *resource investment* with the activities of word decoding, sentence analysis and comprehension as bringing certain *costs*: effort, mental energy and concentration. The core *benefits* of reading are listed as value, utility, suspense, significance, meaning, joy, pleasure, satisfaction, social relations, a basis for conversation, pleasing the teacher, avoiding punishment.<sup>141</sup> The literacy model also builds on an assumption of a *reasonable balance* between costs and benefits. If the costs are too high in relation to the benefits, the pupil will seek other paths to more benefits. (Lundberg 1998) Note that some words, value, utility and satisfaction, are strongly related to economic thought. Similarly, Wallendorf (2001) acknowledges the economic metaphor of the expression to 'pay attention'.

But what is really conveyed in the process of teaching reading and writing skills? Neuroscientist Matti Bergström (1996/1991: 28ff, my translations) speaks of an "economy of learning" where input of information is regulated and output of knowledge is increased in order to obtain less pressure on the nerve cells and maximize and optimise the brain's efficiency [*effektivitet*]. The

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<sup>141</sup> Steven Johnson (2005: 23) maintains that reading involves certain *cognitive* benefits as "effort, concentration, attention, the ability to make sense of words, to follow narrative threads, to sculpt imagined worlds out of mere sentences on the page".

difference in input and output, i.e. what stayed in the brain, is termed the “net flow” and according to Bergström, this can be measured and calculated:

Just like one can save or waste one’s monetary resources, one can save or waste the knowledge resources. [...] But this also means that nothing in the brain happens ‘for free’. Good results in learning must be paid by a corresponding quantity of belonging ‘currency’. This is consumed knowledge.

Giftedness does not exist in the sense of attaining success without “payment”, such as a “gift”. Such things are not known by the natural sciences. There is only an economy of learning. The social environment that school children come from is decisive in this matter.

Hereby Bergström, who calls children “the last slaves” in our society, seeks to liberate children by turning them into economic actors instead - actors who pay for knowledge with currency, as in an act of consumption.

Even within research on culture and media, it is commonly held that the reason behind *why* people read books depends on the perceived exchange value and utility of readership and the idea of rewards or profit from reading. Sten Furhammar (1985) regarded these benefits as individual and categorized them along the two dimensions of on one hand, *instrumentality – experience*, and on the other hand, *personal – impersonal* attitude to the reading content. Although readers testify to the good use of books in social life, the proposed benefits from reading are presented in individual terms. Furhammar (1985) also traced a “compensatory function” of reading for those who had few friends and thereby he constitutes reading as driven by feelings and experiences of *lack*.

### Literacy with Low Economic Returns

Writing at the turn of the new Millennium, literacy scholar David Vincent (2000: 147, italics added) and above all consumption as the solutions to the issue of readership:

Not until the systems of occupational progression and recruitment began to become linked with all levels of education, not until poor readers started to find the time, space and money *to become independent consumers of literature*, could the real potential of reading and writing for eroding inherited inequalities of wealth, status and power begin to be realized.

Vincent’s words revolve around the politics of modern life conditions and capture the mentality that time. In the modern (European) context, the legacy of financial and social inequalities is crumbling. Poor readers are now in a position to realize the potential of reading by means of becoming consumers. It is understood that this will be of long-term benefit, to them and to society.

According to Emmanouel Boudard’s (2001: 105) study, the importance of literacy and reading skills for predicting recurrent training and earnings were lower than he had expected. Furthermore, he asks himself whether human capital



theory may even be misleading, given the problems of measuring and assessing the value of knowledge and skills (such as literacy). He suggests that theoretical refinement may be needed, as well as input from qualitative methods, such as ethnography of both home and work environments.

Richard Desjardins' (2003: 28f) study suggests that 'personal-interest-related informal learning' – that is: reading books, using the public library and writing letters or anything else longer than one page – in fact has a *negative* effect on *economic outcomes*. Perhaps not surprising, Desjardins holds, "since it diverts time and other resources away from work and the production process" (Ibid. 30). Even informal 'job-related learning' – reading or using manuals, reference books (including catalogues), writing or filling-out letters and memos, reports or articles – has a negative outcome on economic outcome as it is a positive direct effect on learning for personal reasons. But regarding *social outcomes*, which is where personal-interest reading and writing exerts the strongest positive effects, even to the extent that a decrease would be negative, whereas the influence from job-related has a direct negative effect. Hence, if we consider social well-being at large, "then the diverted resources maintain a positive effect on standards of living". Moreover,

[T]his suggests that enacting policies, which promote learning for personal-interest reasons, are desirable for social well-being. If social well-being in turn positively affects economic well-being, as suggested by findings in Mac Mahon (1999), such policies would also positively affect economic well-being in an in direct manner.

This way of looking at literacy can be related to Brian Street's (1984) proposition that there are two general theoretical approaches to the study of literacy. One is termed the "autonomous" model and it looks at the general effects of literacy upon a society. (Eg. Goody 1977) Here literacy is regarded as a "catalyst in a chemical experiment" – it will change society without being changed itself. (Thomas 1992: 24) The other approach is labelled "the ideological model" in that the impact of literacy is determined by habits and beliefs already formed by society. Here literacy is not the cause of change as much as it is subjected to change in itself by society. (Ibid.) Literacy then emerges as an "enabling factor" more than anything else. (Street 1984: 159) Pattison (1982: 64, italics added) has a similar case in point:

The skills of reading and writing have no inherent disposition to produce independent thinking. This talent grows not from technologies of language but from attitudes toward language itself. Reading and writing may in some circumstances facilitate an independent, critical spirit, but *they are not its cause*.

## To Conclude

Reading and the book have undergone remarkable reevaluation throughout history. My intention here has been to sketch the complex and shifting relation-

ship between literacy and economy, particularly consumption. It is already known that the Sumerians had invented writing as a useful means for handling everyday economic matters. The ancient Greeks regarded reading as drudgery or buggery suitable for slaves and lowlifes, to put it bluntly, whereas today, reading in general is held as altogether beneficial, an epitome of civilization. Moreover, in contemporary society readers are increasingly being valued as consumers.

A genealogical account shall, above all, create a new interpretation of things already known. The genealogy of reading and literacy gives underhand that the powers of revaluation across history has given precedence to economic value (value-in-exchange) over people's everyday use of value. In this way, the value of reading is increasingly interpreted with economic lenses and subjected to the morality of consumption. Viewing the invention of writing this genealogical account of reading with "new eyes", we can also behold the remarkable account of how the invention of writing and reading revolved around the gathering together and depositing of surplus produce. Scarcity as we know it from economic theory in modernity had nothing to do with the economy and value of writing and reading. Reading is still intimately connected to economy, but in another way. Indeed, Svenbro has shown that distribution and reading share the same word-base. Modern-type economic lenses trained on housekeeping with scarce resources are at a loss when we regard the genealogy of reading and books in view of economy and consumption.

Writing emerged as a way to render overview and retain control over the appropriation or distribution of (surplus) resources across time or space, and especially when the conditions for overview and control are challenging. Specifically reading aloud became a way to first orally distribute words through a vocal copy. Then over time this changed into orally consuming and digesting whatever riches was captured and contained within the scripture or book. In this way, reading provides an early-history example of consuming as eating, not only symbolically and connected to language, but also as everyday life practice in the genealogy of (mass-mode) consumption. The anxiety of excessive reading must be understood against this backdrop.

We must also acknowledge that we would not even have economic lenses if it were not for the emergence of literacy and the book. Importantly, this does not mean that the cultivation of literacy and reading always would be the cause of economic thinking, as many literacy/human capital theory researchers would have it. Rather they are connected and coordinated with economic processes from the beginning.<sup>142</sup> And from time to time, literacy and the economy of the book have contributed to the development of economy and consumption, al-

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<sup>142</sup> But when Adam Smith mentions that the first step toward what he calls advanced or improved society was by means of appropriation of land (Guillet de Monthoux 1992/1983: 76), he makes no mention of the role of literacy in its further advancement.

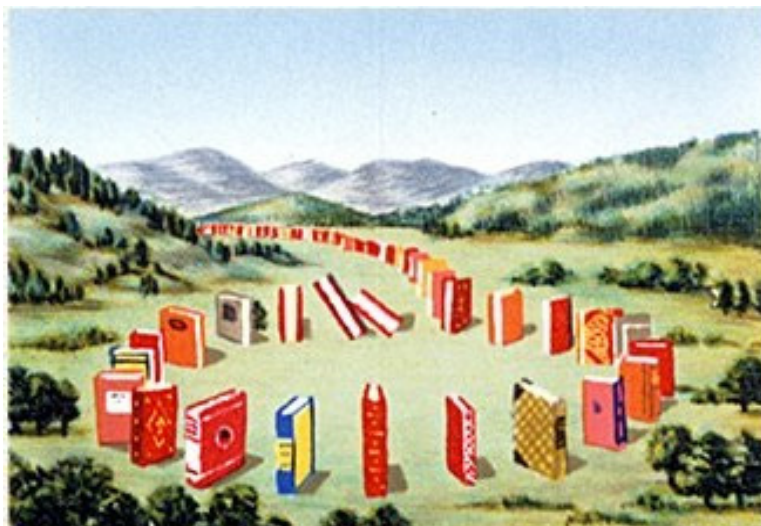
though not in terms of cause and effect. In that respect I believe that many will have much to learn from the book world – even in the future.<sup>143</sup> With the emergence of digitalization today, the book trade, along with all other industries that have relied on print technology (like newspaper, photography and music), are among the first industries to meet this challenge.

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<sup>143</sup> Laura J. Miller (2006: 16) is more cautious than I. She suggests that an examination of the business practices of bookselling can bring forth other ways of conceptualizing the consumer beyond private instrumentality. Although bookselling is not really “fundamentally different” from selling hardware or pharmaceuticals, the book industry offers an openly ambivalent stance to commerce (i.e. that of “reluctant capitalists”), and as such we can better understand “processes that apply to retailing and consumption more generally” (Ibid. 19).



### Part III: Empirical Studies of Book Reading in Consumer Culture



## VIII. Letters from a Vanishing Reading Culture

*There are ten thousand books in my library,  
and it will keep growing until I die. This has exasperated my daughters,  
amused my friends, and baffled my accountant.  
If I had not picked up this habit in the library long ago,  
I would have more money on the bank today; I would not be richer.*

*Pete Hamill*

### Introduction

At the turn of the millennium, there was a widespread anxiety that books and other expressions of print culture would disappear in the new media landscape in favour of the digital alternatives. We are now acquainted with the fact that the book often differs from other cultural products due to the prerequisite demand of literacy and that literacy plays a vital role in the overall development of consumption. After some time in the empirical phase of my study, I experienced a need to explore whether and to what extent literacy and reading practices are connected to economic aspects from the readers' point of view. I also wished for a material that was not already tinged with the purpose and debate of the VAT reduction context. The Nordic Museum inquiry list Nm. 228 is about contemporary reading and writing in the shift of 1999/2000.<sup>144</sup> The inquiry list should probably be understood as an attempt to document a vanishing reading culture. At the same time, the debate about the VAT reduction had not yet risen to the surface of public media that could have made an imprint on the respondents' replies in one direction or the other. The inquiry list would be able to render a map of reader's consumption practices and use of value.

In order to capture the context and *Zeitgeist* of that time, I shall give a glimpse of two projects that pertain to literacy and reading in terms of consumption. First, one organization has been given more attention than others in the area of

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<sup>144</sup> Petra Söderlund at Uppsala University drew my attention to the existence of this material. She had used it as part of her book *Läsarnas nätverk* (2004) in which the meanings of reading for readers, and specifically their love of books.

literacy and reading: the Reading Movement [*Läs rörelsen*]. It was established by Elisabeth Reslegård in 1999, supported and financed by a number of well-known people and by both commercial and non-commercial foundations and organizations (ranging from libraries to the Swedish Church). They launched national campaigns at the turn of the millennium with the motto “Give your children a language” [*Ge dina barn ett språk*]. The organization has ventured several projects on different scales directed especially at parents of small children, of children with dyslexia and at the group of “new Swedes”. The discussion that ensued centred on whether or not the moral ends would justify the commercial means for distribution, and if one could awaken children’s need to read with the help of hamburgers.<sup>145</sup>

Second, as observed by Petra Söderlund (2004) a web-based enterprise called *Cint* set up its website in 1999. *Cint* stands for consumer intelligence, and was established in 1998 as an independent forum for the consumers’ voice as regards a wide range of services on the market. The web site features a headline emphasising the message of consumers’ power [*konsumentkraft*]. Producers pay *Cint* for letting their members rank their products in accordance with the *Cint* index, but producers have no power of influencing the outcome. Amazingly, among the categories put up for ranking was literature in various genres. Most ranking variables point to qualities of the text, such as the descriptions of characters and environment, and the treatment of language. (Ibid.) Bookshops are also ranked, but under a different category.<sup>146</sup> Although the *Cint* ranking is not a widely noticed phenomenon, the service has continued to draw rankings in the years after.

These two examples show that at the turn of the millennium, books and literature not only belong with literacy and reading; they are also subjected to a ‘consumer literacy’ denoting not only the ability of reading and writing, but also roughly the broader skills for coping and leveraging in society (cf. Adkins & Ozanne 2005).

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<sup>145</sup> For example, *Läs rörelsen* has also co-operated with leading audio book publisher Bonnier Audio in a project directed at eight different classes of immigrant students learning Swedish. In 2001, *Läs rörelsen* started its most widely discussed project in co-operation with McDonald’s and have distributed children’s books in the project Book Happy Meal once a year. In 2007, McDonald’s paid for a TV commercial for the project and that was broadcasted nationwide. In 2008, 900,000 books were distributed this way, amounting to 4, 6 million books in total since the project started. (Fagerlind, 2008)

<sup>146</sup> At the time of writing, the last bookshop to be ranked was Akademibokhandeln, Borås (12 October 2010). ([www.cint.se](http://www.cint.se), accessed 16 October 2010)

## Prerequisite Competences: Becoming Literate

In the following, I shall look into the issue of how the Nordic Museum respondents became literate in the first place. From their accounts we learn that institutions play an important part in becoming literate; around half the informants (approximately 40 out of 78) have learned how to read in school and one informant in hospital (Sven Richardsson, code of access: KU18548). It seems to have gone rather well in most cases. Some mention that they have had some difficulties, and recall special training with their mothers, and sometimes with their teachers. Much literacy training for children occurs outside of public institutions and before school has started. Many have learned how to read through their immediate social circle, with the help of their elder sisters or brothers (KU18482; Christina Bergdal, KU18549; KU18513); mother (KU18553; KU18554, KU18493); father (KU18484; KU18525); grandmother (KU18510; Sture Hazard KU18537); grandfather (KU18556); cousins (KU18523); foster grandmother (KU18492) and daughter of a day-carer (KU18477). A young woman who had received help from her father mentions that she in turn taught her younger sister to read. (KU18525) One young woman born 1972 (KU18522) and raised in a working-class family learnt how to read at an early age and was allowed to read stories at her day-care centre. Much later a friend told her she was envious of her because she could read. For some, the envy of an older sibling could be an incentive to learn how to read (KU18507). One woman born 1928 (KU 18542) relates that she is ashamed that she had not learned earlier, before school. She feels she should have taken a larger share of responsibility for her literacy training..

In addition, many children learn how to read through close encounters with materials for reading. It could be books like the psalm book (KU18532) and schoolbooks that belong to elder sisters or brothers (KU18530). There are also printed materials in the home: the local newspaper (KU18495); *Aftonbladet* (KU18486) or magazines (KU18485) Non-printed items such as a homemade game with letters (KU 18487); a bag of letters (Inga-Lisa Åkerlund, KU18498) and a stool painted with letters (Ingegerd Hedin, KU18552) – all provided by a supporting family. One informant (KU18487) mentions a popular children's TV show from the mid-seventies [*Fem myror är fler än fyra elefanter*].

In most cases, a gradual process of literacy training is required by which the reading capacity is increasingly incorporated in body and mind. These processes leave few traces in memory. Rather few informants have clear memories from literacy training. But for some, acquiring literacy happens from one moment to another, like suddenly breaking a code to a secret language and it strikes the individual with an enormous force in a singular moment. It becomes an experience that puts the world in a new light and their senses are changed for the rest of their lives. It is like turning a leaf in life's book. (Ruth Johansson KU18541) One young woman, born in a workers' family in Västerbotten in 1972, writes



that learning how to read was a very important moment and that she will always remember it.

I was 5 or 6 years of age and it was a Saturday morning. I had woken up and picked up a learn-to-read book. And suddenly everything fell into place and I could read and form the words. I became overjoyed and completely fascinated, it is clear that a whole new world had opened to me. I ran to daddy's bed and tried to get him to wake up to show him that I could read. But it was very early in the morning so it was not surprising that he was not so wide-awake and interested. And since then I have been completely crazy about reading. (KU18522)  
In school, learning was easy for me. When I had learnt in the first term how to read, I remember that I darted home to mum and yelled that I could read. Then I guess I was hanging with my nose in a book as often as I could get the chance, which was not very popular. (Ruth Johansson, born 1919, Småland, KU18541)

Between these two women there is half a century in age difference, but their experiences are similar. Both come from families without any specific traditions of reading books. The younger woman characterizes her background as working-class, whereas the older woman grew up on a farm. Their life-stories tell us that literacy does not necessarily increase incrementally; it can happen suddenly and immediately, without any visible roots to the family's book-reading habits. Becoming literate, then, could happen even though the immediate circle is not at all prepared.<sup>147</sup>

Often people hold that it could be difficult to know what learning how to read will give in return. Here we are reminded of the cost-benefit model of literacy, namely that the cost of investment in training should be exchanged for specific benefits of reading, ranging from utility, joy and more to pleasing the teacher. In the Nordic Museum letters, we learn that some adults back in time solved this problem by giving rewards as a financial incentive to literacy. The older generations particularly mention a reading-book that features a hen that lays money (KU18495; KU18502; KU18565); and in a small fold in the book the child's grandmother (KU18510) or father (KU18484) could place a coin that the hen had laid when the child had read well.

These children often learnt how to read before school, but for the woman born 1923 (KU18502) this learn-to-read-book was a way to encourage her reading practice that did not go so well in school. This woman soon became an interested reader, to the extent that adults around her started to become worried that she would read overmuch. As an adult, this woman belongs to the most frequent readers; according to her, she reads at least 50 books a year. Maybe the hen had helped her regard reading as rewarding after all; a gift to hold in trust.

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<sup>147</sup> Regarding parental support of schooling among the working classes, Rose (2001: 172f) concludes that it has been much more common than previously assumed; a clear majority sense their parents were interested. And conversely, lack of encouragement may not influence enjoyment in schooling negatively, as often is presumed

The other informants that received the laid coins have also become interested readers. Only one is forced to forsake reading due to failing eyesight.

### Becoming a Reader

It is easy to believe that as soon as a child has learnt how to read, then it will be a simple thing to start reading books. But for most people, that is not the case. Literacy is a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite to start reading books. Karl-Erik Rosengren (1970: 179) states clearly that one must not believe that the desire for reading is a given at birth. Becoming literate is one thing, becoming a “reader” is yet another. For instance, one woman born in 1964 (KU18504) recounts that she became a reader of books only as an adult, and due to her literacy training in school she detests reading aloud to this day.

It is often held as important to create book-reading habits early in childhood. Many respondents, but far from all, describe that they have encountered books when they were little. The majority of respondents have become readers when of school age. Several mention that adults or older siblings have read aloud to them (eg. KU18525; Annette Stenbäck KU18527; KU18539; KU18555; KU18557). Some say they started to read books that they found at home in the bookshelf (e.g. KU18513; KU18487; KU18553). For instance, one young woman tells the story of how she had found her mother’s old Kitty-books, which she started to lend to, and exchange with, the other girls in her class. (KU18487)

Other respondents recall memories of how their desire for reading was aroused by finding books, magazines or comics in a box up in the attic (Kerstin Bexby KU18529; KU18523; KU18544; KU 18499). This experience is also recognized from the individual interviews, for example, with a man (JÅ) and a woman (PS) who are both members of different book circles. Another couple of inquiry list respondents write how they themselves have stored their old school-books (KU18493) or *Bamse* comics (KU1842) in the attic.

It is interesting that the discovery of boxes in the attic has created such a desire for reading. Perhaps it is the experience of going on an exploring expedition in a hidden and mysterious place and finding a treasure. Perhaps books glimmer more in the dark. (Among the respondents, there is even a woman who narrates that, as a child, she used to sit and read books in a box-room. KU18544) Particularly the attic seems to have an adventurous atmosphere. So far, no reader has attested to experiencing a wondrous feeling as a child about boxes filled with books in the basement. Possibly the desire to read is aroused by the sheer abundance of books and magazines that promise hours on end of entertainment. The child no longer has to suffer from lack of reading materials, and can engage in continuity of reading. Also, a series such as the Kitty books

found at home by the girl mentioned above, holds the promise of plenitude and continuity.

For many respondents, the library has played a similar role in their lives; they are completely overcome by the great supply. Some specifically speak of the benefits of the librarians sifting through and selecting good books. One person is particularly thrilled by the library atmosphere, which is experienced with a combination of exhilaration and devotion (KU18525). The opportunity of coming to a place to sit and read in peace and quiet is mentioned as a benefit. For a couple of respondents, the library is a solid and secure place when life around them is changing. When they are moving house, it is important that a library can be found nearby (KU18533; Kristina Andersson KU18534)

Several respondents no longer borrow books from the library, but as children they used either the library at school (Rachel Karlsson KU18520; Mary Reinhed KU18518; KU18542) or the ordinary library (Majvor Svensson, KU18515; KU18510; KU18502). For a couple of respondents, the time limit for borrowing is too short; they cannot finish reading before they are fined. Others find it difficult to find what they are looking for (KU18517; KU18530). A couple of respondents recall the special library fragrance as a precious memory from childhood (KU18565; Lena Lindström Wahlgren, KU18566), but a third woman thinks the library books themselves smell bad and thus she prefers to buy her books (KU18559). Here we can connect with Paco Underhill (1999) who emphasizes the sensual experience of shopping. This goes for bookshoppers too, Underhill holds; they often smell books before buying them.

### Book Prices, Acquisition, and Other Economic aspects

The inquiry list respondents belong to the generations that were formed by the likes of The Book-of-the-Month Club (cf. Radway 1997; Steiner 2006). Of the 74 respondents in my study, 25 are, or have been, members of a book club. And of these, some are members in two or more clubs at the same time (e.g. KU18497; KU18500). And it happens that one does not buy books there but uses the membership magazines for guidance and inspiration. (KU 18504) Then one could go to the library and borrow the books there. (Pernilla Gustafsson, KU18526) One respondent points out that book club membership is not that cheap because the costs of packing and postage are added (KU18538). Some respondents take turns in shopping for books in book clubs and in bookshops (Widar Ericsson, KU18546; KU18559), and others mention bookshops only (e.g. Inga-Lisa Åkerlund, KU18498).

Others are against book clubs and prefer the bookshops, mostly because one can touch the books (KU18506; Annette Stenbäck KU18527). Several respondents mention buying books in the annual book sale, and the importance of cheap paperback books emerge in the letters (KU18486; KU18554; KU18550;

KU18513). At the time of the inquiry list, in the shift of 1999/2000, buying books over the Internet is still very uncommon. Only one respondent, a woman born in 1972, states that she increasingly buys more across the Internet than from the book clubs where she is a member (KU18522).

Buying books as a child was not easy. One had to be very inventive and operate together with friends, especially when the parents are restrictive about the choice of books, as one woman recalls:

When I was 11 or so I formed a book club with three of my friends, in secret of course. We met in secret places and each time we put 25 öre [0. 25 SEK] in a cash-box. When we had got together 1:75, each of us in turn got to buy a book that we then all read. That is how much one of Wahlström's juvenile books cost at that time. (Kerstin Bexby born 1939, Hälsingland, KU 18529)

According to another woman, books were expensive when she grew up (Annette Stenbäck, KU18527) and a couple of families could not afford newspapers (Klas-Peter Sunesson KU18540; Annette Stenbäck KU18527). At the time of the inquiry list, one woman also mentions she cannot afford a subscription to the newspaper unless there is a special offer (KU18505). An older woman states that some books, new and splendid specimens, are a little too expensive for a pensioner like herself (KU18511). Most critical of book prices is a man who did not grow up in a very "bookish home": "The half French bindings were probably more home theater and stage scenes." (KU18486) He has become a reader nonetheless and been able to keep up his book reading despite the move to the countryside:

The book clubs have meant a lot to me. As have the paperbacks. It is extraordinarily convenient from a sparsely populated horizon to get books home in that way. Unfortunately, the prices have shot up at the speed of a crazy horse in recent years. Now a book costs around one crown [SEK] a page on average, with package and postage. Bestseller-type books are cheaper of course. But who wants to read always Sidney Sheldon or fantasy novels. [--] For financial reasons, there hasn't been much reading for pleasure, apart from what I have on my bookshelves. I'm surprised, though, that there is so much good literature on my shelves. (Man born in 1941, KU18486)

Here the respondent has observed a variety in price-levels between different books and genres depending on their popularity. This experience contradicts Armando Petrucci's (1999/1995) hypothesis that the differences between different types of books are rarely expressed in terms of price.

Francis Fishwick (1985) relates people's book consumption primarily and directly to the level of income. Some respondents mention that they started to buy books in connection with their first earned money and that their income level has influenced their book consumption (KU18533; Britt-Marie Rosell, KU18558):

On the other hand, when I started wage-earning I also got money to buy books, which I have done to various degrees over the years depending on the state of

my private finances. But strangely enough, I have bought books even when the private finances have been poor. I guess that I'd rather buy a book than, for instance, clothes. (Woman born 1951, Hälsingland, KU18533)

I had a dream that when I grew up there would be lots of books in my home. And that is how it became. A lady from Fritzes Bokhandel in Stockholm came regularly to my workplace at that time and sold books in beautiful leather binding & half French binding. My salary was small, but [I would] rather relinquish other things. Monthly installments – that did it. Then came the book club “Svalan” and filled my shelves. (Woman born 1923 Jönköping, KU18502)

When buying habits are more or less established, books may be valued above other things, even when money is scarce. A woman who grew up under simple and laborious conditions experienced a great sense of freedom when she moved to Stockholm as a young girl and lived with her sister; she tells how she became an avid reader:

I joined Svalan's book club. We bought as many books as we could manage. They were mostly novels and we sat through half the night reading them. What a liberating experience, we could read as long as we wanted. A wonderful time. (Woman born 1926, KU18489)

But this case does not always apply. In the long term, the attitudes to books that were formed during one's upbringing seem to have an impact. One woman grew up in a home without specific encouragement to read. As a young adult she became a member of a book club and that changed her reading-life, but only for a period of time:

When I was grown-up, around 23 [25?], I joined a book club, Svalan. Then I read a lot for some years. Later I left because it cost too much and I did not read all the books. (Woman born 1940, KU18481)

The book club could contribute to a wider range of reading, speed up the pace of consumption and increase the quantity read. But if the packages do not match the expectations or are not adjusted to their reading pace, the membership becomes very costly. Sometimes it is difficult to know what defines the pace of reading, the inflow of books or the reading capacity. The woman above concludes that the weakness of the book club is also its strength:

The downside with the book club was that one could not choose whatever books one wanted to read. The upside was the same; that one got to read books that one would not otherwise have come in contact with. (Ibid.)

Some readers, it seems, venture to the outer limits of what is possible to consume:

I buy frightening amounts of book. When I look at my bookshelves I can't believe that I have bought all this. And on top of that, because when I think I need to clear some out I try to take away the ones that I don't think I will read several times. Then I take a period and read some selected books a second time, then I give most of them away. (Kerstin Bexby born in 1939, Hälsingland, KU 18529)

It is as if the plethora of books cannot remain with one single person. Abundance builds up only to be spread out for the benefit of others. The same woman tells that she gives all her crime fiction paperbacks to her Samic friends, “and then we lie in the tent-hut in the summer abode with the coffeepot over the fire and read”. In order to limit the inflow of books, she tries to restrict her book club purchases every month. She also seems to periodize purchases by shopping on the annual book sale. For some readers, resisting buying books is easier said than done. One woman (Rachel Karlsson KU18520, born 1924) still buys books sometimes, although she has decided not to. It happens at the book sale where she buys what she calls “peek books” [*tittböcker*], books with many pictures and little text. Perhaps she is referring to those more luxurious coffee table books that are usually quite expensive.

According to De Certeau (1988/1984), reading erodes in forgetting and in the movement of time. If you have a great sense of memory, however, the reader will not need to add new experiences, not even re-readings.

Book clubs are probably good, but it costs money to be in one. I have no interest in investing money in books, because I never re-read them. I remember too much for it to be interesting. (Woman born 1938, Skåne KU18524)

An older woman claims that the supply of books in the annual sale does not correspond to her desires:

In the book sale I usually search for books as in the library, but I often search in vain. Buying new books by authors unknown to me I have neither the money nor the desire for. I go home and search through our bookshelves and usually find books that I have read previously, but that could well stand another reading.

It could also be the case that the publishing companies have brought such changes into the supply of books that the older readers do not always have a chance to follow. Because book purchasing for many readers is a form of risk-taking – they never really know in advance what they are going to get – it is important that they will not be outrun on the market, but escorted into finding new authorships, new genres and new forms of reading, not least because the literary supply and differentiation have increased over the years (Cf. Schmidt 1991)

For the older readers, the pace of reading has slowed down. Their skill is not what it used to be; eyesight falters. For the woman born in 1913 (KU18531), perhaps there is no use buying new books in the bookshops:

Nowadays, when my eyes are not particularly good and I have to read more slowly, I buy books in the Emmaus [charity] bookshop in Kallhäll.

It is important to acknowledge that the older readers are not encompassed by the development on the paperback market. Because the paperback is a smaller reprint of the hardback edition, the size of print is diminished. Often the print is so small that older readers do not have a chance to distinguish it. Underhill

(1999) predicts that all companies, and particularly book and magazine publishers will have to find ways to increase type-size in the next few decades primarily because the post-war generations are getting older. These people are by far more well-to-do and more demanding than previous generations. Perhaps a larger-size paperback, nicely executed, like those common in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, would become an important complement, not least for the older readers.

### Readers' Use of Value

As one respondent says, books are really her most cherished property (KU1826) and books are spoken of as friends (Annette Stenbäck, KU18527). For some it is enough to say reading is important (KU18496), or really important (Majvor Svensson, KU18515) without specifying more than that it is important and fun (KU18487). Others hold that reading (including writing) is a nice hobby that renders a lot of joy (KU18490), especially recalling childhood reading as pure joy (KU18499), and another speaks of bringing peace of mind and wellbeing (KU18507). One respondent describes reading as being simply wonderful (KU18502).

It can also help in keeping track of what happens (Rachel Karlsson KU18520); hence, it can be both relaxing and instructive (KU18478, KU18497), specifically bringing new ideas (KU18497). Although reading non-fiction is heavy, it is also food for thought [*matnyttig*] (Gert Lindell, KU18508), and another reader agrees with the heavy but adds time-consuming and inspiring too (KU18477). One reader aligns himself with the inquiry letter and speaks of "the power of words" (Sture Hazard, KU18537). Another is quite instrumental about it: reading as a means for attaining vocabulary and a way with language [*språkbehandling*] (KU18500). One young woman puts the increased vocabulary in relation to less instrumental motives: relaxation and experience (KU18482), whereas another woman highlights being able to put thoughts, experiences, and emotions in everyday life into words (KU18481).

The respondents describe reading as a must or a strong need (KU18489), even a life-necessity (Inga-Lisa Åkerlund, KU18498). One avid reader relates to her strong need for reading as a veritable vice (KU18525). (One woman confesses that her reading one specific book led her to decide that she would lose her virginity; said and done! KU18484). One man holds reading has more the character of desire, and he regards it mostly as an egotistical experience (KU18486).

In contrast, another man says it is about seeking out the world (KU18475); it also widens horizons of thought, increases understanding (KU18523), specifically of other people (KU18509); indeed, it creates understanding of both others and oneself (KU 18530). In this way, reading influences people, and one is moved, and in the process, it creates tolerance for other people (KU18504).

Hence, reading is a developing practice, and apart from understanding, humility and empathy are developed, which is vital! (KU18522) Yes, reading is important but sometimes one is moved painfully by reading sad stories (KU18517). Reading creates one's very sense of identity and imagination; it gives nourishment and comfort (KU18484). A couple of respondents bear witness to reading influencing life (KU18525), having shaped them as human beings (KU 18538; Annette Stenbäck KU18527).

Some readers speak with reverence of reading as joy, an honour bestowed upon human beings (KU18506) Literacy and reading are like a gift for which the respondent is deeply grateful and that begs for giving to others (KU18557). And a third woman is grateful of other people's gift of reading [aloud] and it is a grace that they want to share it with others like herself (Lena Lindström Wahlgren, KU18566).

In contrast, several readers bear witness to how reading did not go down too well with their parents (Ruth Johansson KU18541). They could be worried that they were overdoing their reading so that they would become 'overly bookish' [*förläst*] (KU18485, KU18502); thinking that reading books is not very useful (Lena Lindström Wahlgren KU18566), or particularly valuable (Arne Isacson, KU18562); indeed, it is rather strange (KU18497). In one family, working and praying was the family motto and reading was a necessary evil; reading too much means one's senses could be darkened or muddled. (Sture Hazard, KU18537)

### Returning to Reading practice

Many readers relate that they read books as children but fell out of practice, and then returned to reading books again, as adults. This is especially interesting to examine more closely, not least because Barker & Escarpit (1973) emphasize that most people do read books as children but simply fall out of the habit of reading when they finish their schooling or education. Put differently, reading books after school is no longer a necessity. Most people may not consider it is still possible. Scholars like Schooten et al. (2004) actually wonder why it is that some people maintain their reading habits into adulthood. They call for measurable variables that could bring clarity to the issue. With the material from the Query list we could at least get an inside view of how some people start reading anew.

In some cases it is the family that could entice people to read again. Sometimes it is the children that bring reading practices to the parents. One woman born in 1933 (KU18453) reports that she started to read again as the mother of a reading teenage daughter; it was she who inspired her to take up books again. Similar stories are heard among the interviewees. In other cases it could be the working life or profession that creates the possibilities for starting to read again.



One woman born in 1930 (KU18517) grew up in a reading family with a father who ran a small Christian publishing house. It was not until she worked as a nurse on night duty that she found her way back to reading books again. Another woman, born in Finland before the war (KU18523) read a lot as a child, but she did not know Swedish and read no books when she arrived in Sweden where she found work as a day care nanny [*dagmamma*] for a three-month old baby:

When the girl grew up she brought children's books with her. Lovely pictures and a little text too. I tried to read those books. I listened to the radio and watched TV and tried to understand and store in my memory. It took several years before I could make out most of the newspaper and many years more before I dared go to the library. Nowadays I am a loyal visitor in the library and I have gone over to the children's and juvenile department.

Acquiring the ability to read in a foreign language takes a very long time. Other people who did not read books as children, have started as adults, often in connection with some type of education. These people are already literate in the language, but they have discovered reading anew, as a practice and possibility, and not as duty. Some started by themselves, and others needed support from a role model:

I started working straight after nine years in school. After having worked for about 6 years I started studying to become a child minder [*barnskötare*] and after that I have started reading a lot on my own. The first book that I read and those that set off my reading interest were probably Sidney Sheldon's books. Nowadays I read all the books I can get hold of. (Woman, born 1964, Trångsund KU18504)

The reason that I never learnt to read fiction was that everyday life was filled with completely different, more practical things. The days were filled with experiences. Peace and quiet for sitting down and read did not happen. When I came home from Canada I became a pupil at Jära adult education college [i.e. *folkhögskola*] outside of Nässjö. There was a great personality, Karl de Vylder, as Principal. He introduced me to history and philosophy. It was not until then that I really learnt to read books. (Klas-Peter Sunesson, born 1945 Småland KU18540)

In a couple of cases, it was the very home that needed to be decorated with books. A woman born in 1922 (KU18543) had not had the time to read outside modern school. She recounts how she and her husband, as newly-weds, were to build up a joint home; it laid the foundation for her future reading.

We had now got a real home into order with two bookshelves that begged for books; some we had brought from our parental homes, but here new books were needed, but how would we get them? We could buy books at the annual book sale that came every year on February 1st; one could join the various book circles [sic] that existed.

A woman in Uppsala (KU18498, Inga-Lisa Åkerlund, born 1921) mentions that it was an outsider, someone in the book trade, who encouraged her book reading:

As an adult – around 20 years of age – I suppose I read mostly weeklies. But already at 25 years of age books started to come into my life. An active salesperson of FIB books gave me the right push into the world of books.

It could also be that reading can become a habit in connection with a specific place. De Certeau (1988/1984) spoke of how the reader moves, like a tenant renting an apartment, into the text, if only for a little while. Some respondents among the older generations explicitly mention reading in the bathroom or in the outdoor toilet [*‘dass’*]: one man born in 1922 (KU18475); another in 1928 (KU14893) and one woman born in 1937 (KU18510). Perhaps it is not surprising that a range of reading materials have ended up in the outdoor toilet; books have long been connected with nourishment and reading with eating (cf. Fischer 2003; Schoenfeldt 2003, see also chapter VII), and thereof follows the connection to evacuation of the bowels.

Here I will specifically highlight two quotes about reading in the outhouse by two men born in the 1920s. Their descriptions suggest that reading is either something one becomes accustomed to by recurring routines, or by a sudden event in life. Consequently, there is a similar relation between the different ways of becoming a reader to that of becoming literate. First, the written quote from a man blinded after an accident [!]:

A small but perhaps still justifiable account of environment and not an entirely inappropriate one is this: naturally out in the country we only had an outhouse or dry toilet [*torrtoa*] lying rather secluded in the shrubbery!! There were, commonly at that time, sometimes telephone directories [!], sometimes a bunch of magazines of all kinds, particularly when the summer guests were out in the summer. Anyway, this access to light literature was still a way of passing the time, and could prolong a visit there by several half-hours dedicated mostly to reading or searching for some pages to tear out and bring home again. In any case it was exciting. For me as a countrykid at that time! (Man born 1928, Skå, KU18493)

In this account it seems that the young boy has been accustomed to reading by repeatedly having the opportunity to read in a kind of nest of papers in a near-hidden place. I imagine that many people could be lured into reading by being granted access to a quiet nook to occupy with magazines and books, a nook to return to and thereby develop a solid custom of individual reading.

Here is the next account: a nice example of a micro-story (cf. Klein 2003), that is, a well-rounded anecdote that is both intimate and rich in points [*poängrik*].

The relation of childhood reading must also touch upon the outdoor toilet. In my West Bothnian [*västerbottniska*] countryside one went to the outdoor toilet. Everyone had an outdoor toilet. When our well dried in the winters I had to go and fetch water from a neighbour who had an inexhaustible [*outsinlig*] well. On

one such occasion, I had reason to visit the neighbour's toilet these were closed with a simple hasp. In there was a rag-rug on the floor, a small curtain across the window, a yellowed oil-print of Oskar and Sofia [the royals]. On the floor: a half-metre high pile of *Allers* from 1930-1935 or thereabout. What happiness! In our home, existed, apart from the reactionary *Skelleftebladet*, possibly *The Messenger of the Evangelical Nations Foundation* and sometimes when subscription was cheap, *The Swedish Journal*: "Congenial. Current. Christian" – according to itself. But *Allers*! For over an hour I lost myself there among fanciful multi-coloured drawings [...] I didn't dare steal a copy and had to discreetly sneak away so they wouldn't come looking for me [*bli efterhys!*]. This founded a habit I have retained to this day. In my summer toilet there's always a stack of magazines that demand re-reading. There I read P.O Enquist's *Kapten Nemo's bibliotek* last summer, for example. [...] And in my bathroom there is often a book. (Man, born 1922, Sundsvall, KU18475)

This vivid account gives an example of a person becoming a reader from one moment to the next: reader in the sense of voluntarily incorporating books and magazines into one's (future) life. The similarities between the two settings are remarkable, but there is a great difference in what takes place. In the former example, the boy had free access to reading in the toilet. Of course, he shared it with others who contributed to the circulation by bringing new reading materials. But he gave the toilet an importance of its own, making the toilet visit dedicated to appropriation of reading.

In the latter example, however, the visit happened accidentally. The boy finds himself on grounds that do not belong to him and he discovers a treasure that does not belong to him. Just as he borrows a moment in the outdoor toilet, he borrows a moment of reading. And the power of the experience of the colourful magazine is not to be mistaken. At home, the boy does not suffer from lack of reading materials, although they are not suited to his age or interests. In the letter, he mentions a variety of books, mostly religious, which he read when he was ill, etc. I believe that *Allers* better corresponded to his reading skills and desires. In hindsight, the books at home appear poor and meagre. Perhaps we can see an imaginative parallel between drying-up waters in the parental home and the neighbours' never-drying well.

Reading *Allers* in the neighbours' toilet is in a double sense moving to another place. (Cf. De Certeau 1988/1984) Therefore, the impact on habit is twice as hard; it brings him to incorporate magazines, books and toilet reading into his future life and home. And as De Certeau (1988/1984) points out, readers are poachers, taking what does not really belong to them. Moreover, reading cannot be accumulated. Books can be owned, experiences accumulated and create a desire for new experiences, but reading erodes in forgetting. By wanting to steal away something, it seems that readers wish to retain their prey.

## Depositing Books

Considering that books need to be stored and deposited (cf. Derrida's mention of the Greek verb *tithenai* from chapter VI), it is clear that various deposits play an important part in readers' lives, and especially the bookshelf. Its history is as far-reaching and variegated as the book itself. (cf. Petroski 1999) In the SOM study of 2002, access to books at home was surveyed quantitatively on the premise that it gives an indication of book reading, and book consumption in particular. Access was measured in terms of length of bookshelves filled with books, ranging from zero to twelve metres and above. It was asserted that 95% of the population has access to books at home on average (n=1770), although a closer analysis shows that the number decreases with age and thus is lowest among the elderly: 80 % among the 80-85-year olds. Regarding shelf-length, the distribution of books across the classes was as follows: +12 m (23%); 6-12 m (24%); 2-6 m (27%); 1-2 m (10%), less than one metre (11%), and having no books at all (5%). (Antoni 2004)

Against this background it is interesting to explore qualitative data on what role bookshelves play in readers' lives and what kind of practices they bring about. In the Nordic Museum's letter of instruction to the respondents, there were specific questions regarding bookshelves, and especially whether they usually glance through other people's bookshelves. The respondents do, however, mention their own bookshelves too, and this is where we will start. We have already seen that some respondents refer to their bookshelves calling out to be filled. A couple of respondents have assessed the quantity of books in their own homes, and a young woman born in 1976 relates:

Where I live today, 32 m<sup>2</sup>, I have three gigantic bookshelves. I love my books so much! Although they are getting to be too many, especially since I am allergic to paper dust. I have loads of different dictionaries, half a metre of poetry, half a metre of language, novels, history of ideas, music, physics, lots...

One woman counts around 400 books after 53 years of marriage and of these 150 are large illustrated books (KU18543). Another woman, born in 1936 (Småland KU18505), notes that people are surprised at the number of her books and reflects that she cannot seem so well read to them, but remarks that the people who know her often ask her to look up some books for advice. She also checks out bookshelves herself. Someone comments on having unread books on their shelves (KU18554). For one woman, the sheer quantity is surprising, she cannot believe she has bought all that, and more to boot (Kerstin Bexby, KU 18529)

One woman, born in 1928 (Åkersberga, KU18557) has developed a very specific relationship to bookshelves in her home. She explains that she grew up in a home where there were bookshelves in every bedroom as well as in the living room and the hall. They were free to take any book, and read it on the soft carpet, as long as they were careful. This woman enjoys exploring bookshelves

at her friends' and acquaintances' homes; not only does she find unknown authors, but she is also excited about the manner of organization. She notes that some place them according to size, no matter the author or content; others use the library system. As for herself, she gathers them in accordance with their subject; although she points out that poetry is always on its own shelf and at eye level. In the shelf beside her own bed, the books change over time. It becomes clear that bookshelves are intricate parts of organizing reading practices:

In front of all our bookshelves I have placed a stool or a small chair because I really like sitting in front of the books and reading a little [*smäläsa*]. Around twice a year I usually vacuum-clean all the books, among other things because my husband smokes and dust and smoke thrive particularly well in paperback books. These cleaning sessions have another purpose too: suddenly I get hold of a much-missed book. Which in turns leads me to rearrange shelf after shelf; however, the rooms decide where the books should be left where they are. Women's literature in my room, consequently, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and historical-mythological books in the living room. For I prefer to sit in the living room when I solve crosswords. The bookshelves in the guestroom get a mix between crime fiction and anthologies of columnists' works [*käserisamlingar*] along with journals. The bookshelf in my husband's room contains Wodehouse who is his favourite author, together with sea literature. Next to the upper veranda, which has a marvellous sea-view, there I have gathered genealogical data, photo albums, poetry and stories about Stockholm. There is also the grandchildren's bookshelf in front of which I sit and write, so there are also some dictionaries. (KU18557)

As it seems, this woman has organized her whole home in accordance with her books and reading and writing practices; her home is a gigantic bookshelf where each room is a shelf. Another respondent says that having different shelves for different kinds of literature is particularly cosy (KU18532), whereas another enjoys beholding an entire wall of books (KU18542).

Several respondents readily admit that they investigate other people's bookshelves (KU18542), or give them a quick glance (KU18496), or at least a sneak-view (Solveig Alvbrink, KU18521), especially to see how many or few books there are (KU18505; KU18499), thinking it strange if a home does not have books (KU18484). Some always look through friends' shelves (KU18504), because reading is an important characteristic in friends (KU18524), although they may not have very many books, mostly CDs and ornaments (Solveig Alvbrink, KU18521). Indeed, it is worth checking whether it contains books or is just there for show [*skrythylla*] with a lot of ornaments (Rachel Karlsson, KU18520).

Of course I end up by a bookshelf wherever I go; it is exactly as if they smell; my sensitive book-smelling nose gets going as quickly as I get to a new place. (Woman, born 1946, Västergötland, KU18532)

Bookshelves, yes, those I see! Even at IKEA's furniture department I stopped and checked out the books in the bookshelf. "That's not what's for sale", said my daughter. (Woman, born 1935, Norrbotten, KU18561)

This latter woman also says that she met her husband for the first time in front of her bookshelf in her room. He was her friend's colleague and he looked through her books and commented upon some book. "That I immediately put down as a plus." (KU18561) After having coffee, the young man was back at the shelf, and he was offered to borrow the book if he was interested. One week later he returned the book and their friendship continued. Nowadays she usually jokes about his borrowing the book just to get a chance to meet her again as it was not his usual taste, but he claims to have read it. "In any case I am glad that he borrowed it." (Ibid.)

One man prefers people not to look in his home. (KU18499) And several respondents state flatly that no, they never look (KU18481; KU18485; KU18494). Some respondents are reluctant due to the intimate nature of bookshelves; it is a private area (KU18523).

I do not investigate the bookshelves when I am invited someplace, unless we discuss books and the host/hostess shows something special. Books are so personal for me so I feel that I do not want to force my way into somebody else's personal territory. But if there are books lying around on tables, etc. I love to look. That feels more inviting. (Britt-Marie Rosell, born 1942, Västergötland, KU 18558)

Bookshelves are unimportant I think. But books that lie here and there say a great deal. (Man, born 1925, Småland KU18551)

Both respondents quoted here find books outside the bookshelf more interesting, supposedly because they are being used and not assigned to backstage storage. Although these books may convey some sort of meaning, the respondents do not expand on what this meaning may be. Others say books reflect people's interests or give an image of the owners and therefore they look through them (KU18500; Annette Stenbäck KU18527), including the artworks at home (Kerstin Bexby, KU18529). Bookshelves could show if you have something in common (Christina Bergdal, KU18549), and a filled up bookshelf makes for a good sense of connecting (Widar Ericsson, KU18546); it is a natural topic for conversation (KU18538; Lena Lindström Wahlgren KU18566), and may even render a new "book friend" (Ruth Johansson, KU18541). One respondent, a young woman, points out that some books have just ended up there, indicating that one cannot really tell anything by them (KU18477). Another respondent observes that it is easy to tell whether the books in the shelf are there for show, or if they are read. (Majvor Svensson, born 1943, Älmhult KU18515)

For one respondent, the lack of books renders the pale cast of thought:

It has happened that I have visited homes where there is no single book or anything readable at all. In one home with two parents and two teenage children, there was only one single issue of print: a men's pornographic magazine, [called] *Stop*, which was in the toilet. I became both sad and angry there. What kind of intellectual luggage do those children get from their home? (Woman, born 1950, Dädesjö, KU18484)

## The Development of Reading over Time

Very accustomed readers seem to have some kind of inner drive for reading that propels them to seek out new kinds of books. The accumulative logic of cultural consumption seems to encompass a qualitative change in the choice of books over time.

My reading habits have developed the whole time. Now I read more non-fiction than previously and more horror books, less romance, more psychology, more about the Second World War, more books that are about what I am trained for. One knows better now what one wants to read about and what will especially interest one. (Woman, born 1972, KU18522)

I read all the time, but the demands do increase the more text one consumes. (Woman, born 1950, Dädesjö KU18484)

Although many respondents are more or less accustomed readers, this applies by no means to everybody. Less accustomed readers do not seek out books on their own; rather they wish to read books that have some sort of centripetal force, something that could pull in the readers at once:

I haven't spent that much time on books.

I want something that captivates me right from the first page, in that case. They must not be slow-moving (*sega*) and take several chapters to get into. (Woman, b. 1968, Västergötland KU18553)

This woman also says that she just falls asleep whenever she “sinks back” to read or solve crosswords. And yet, she wishes for her children to become “bookworms”; “it develops vocabulary and knowledge” (Ibid.). Some respondents, however, bear witness to the fact that reading in school becomes a duty (i.e. coercive reading [*tvångsläsning*] as mentioned by a young woman, KU18482), and that takes away whatever joys literacy brings. This could have effects upon the very competence of reading, here understood as the capacity to read various types of texts at different levels of difficulty.

I don't know if I have read too much, am too tired, or if I need glasses, but sometimes the words jump around (I don't have dyslexia) and then it feels reluctant to read. Then the text is boring.

If I feel that way I usually do something else and maybe read something I know is fun, eg. a magazine. Suddenly the words don't jump at all. (Woman, born 1982, Götene KU18477)

When reading becomes a matter of individual task or performance instead of a human feat, a must instead of a possibility, motivation is thwarted. Facing the demands of school education, a pupil like this young girl may have to use all kinds of tactics in order to create a working mode of reading.

Regarding school, reading is often heavy. I have a lot of difficulty just sitting down and reading seventy pages just like that. I almost have to “trick myself” to start reading: I sit down and leaf through the book, I get caught by a funny picture and start reading the text next to it, then I turn the page and continue to

read. And then suddenly I'm reading.

Then I have to have put away everything that is on my desk. It must be a completely empty space, and a BIG table. Then I can read. (Woman, b. 1982, Götene KU 18477)

This description is very close to De Certeau's account of the reader as a tactic and a "poacher". It is clear that there is nothing wrong with the young woman's reading ability, but the entrance to the book is difficult to get through; its door is too heavy to open. She sneaks in through the images, as though they are the book's windows and backdoors.

One woman states that she never attracted attention as a reader in school, due to the prevailing norms:

In my school days, reading was not valued, only reading what the teachers thought was good. With my social background from small-scale farming parents the step to "good" authors was too far. (Woman, Hälsingland, b. 1951, KU 18533)

Some respondents mention experiences of the type of popular literature that according to Gunnar Hansson (1988: 14ff) has been debated by critics. Many times the authors and publishers have been charged with rendering people passive by finding their weak spots and playing on their simple desires, effectuating some kind of mental exile. As we will see in a later chapter (XII), the discussion on popular literature is somewhat more informed and nuanced since several important studies in the 1980s (Cf. Jensen 1984; Radway 1984; Hansson 1988). From the readers' perspective, popular literature has created a desire for reading and at the same time they have developed their skills and practices that drive them to explore further terrain. We are reminded here of Warde (2005) who maintains practice is the key to multiplying forms of consumption.

But we should not forget Sigge Stark and Bernard Nordh, who from the beginning have given me strong reading experiences and inspired me to continue reading. Therefore I have never understood why they have been banished from the libraries from time to time. As relaxation I think even now that it is perfectly all right [*lagom*] to read them.

When I had read all that I could find by them, there were others, Moberg, Fridegård, Salje, Ivar Lo etc. Without practising with Stark and Nordh maybe I would never have continued. My patience has never been very great and it still isn't. (Annette Stenbäck, born 1943, Värmland KU18527)

Practicing reading is a good start whatever the content, and as long as the reader keeps going.

Interestingly, the concept of Harlequin novels or similar is quite absent except from one mention of the Angelique series (KU18484). An older man states laconically that he sometimes relaxes with porn (KU18492). Some women mention romance (KU18522), or 'love novels' in passing (KU18482), but it is difficult to tell whether they belong to the mass-market paperback genre or not. The lines drawn between popular and high culture are not only awkward. They



can be instruments for oppression, not only in school or society, but also within the family. A couple of readers have told of their childhood in families with a stern and judgmental religiosity. In one case, a woman previously mentioned buying books collectively and secretly as a child; the head of the family had sought to enforce a restricted access to reading materials at home:

In my family, reading and writing were mainly regarded as positive. It was only when some chores needed to be done that one could hear: You could help here, you are only lying down reading anyway! Then it was a completely different thing that one was not allowed to read what one wanted. Weekly magazines were completely prohibited, and most of the so-called fiction I borrowed from my father's school library. I think I was a teenager before my mother was allowed to subscribe to *ICA-kuriren*. The daily newspaper was all right, but because this was during the last years of the Second World War and the time after, there were no particularly nice reports there. [---]

A lot was prohibited. Weeklies I read in the home of the neighbour's girl where I was not allowed to be, or in the attic after paper collections. Even in adult years one had to hide one's book carefully, or else my father burned them. I remember one time when I had borrowed *Sommaren med Monika* from a friend and fallen asleep with my night lamp lit without putting the book away. My father had come in and taken the book and I was desperate before I succeeded in getting it back. Of course I had to promise to never read such dirty filth again, how on earth he could know it was dirty, he who rarely ever read anything but Bibles and books of sermons.

Until I was 14 years old two of my sisters and I shared a room in the attic. Up there we hid stacks of books that we had borrowed from our friends and we lay and read at night. Perhaps it is true that forbidden fruit tastes best and that much of my reading hunger today has its origin in the fact that I have not yet grown out of defiant behaviour. My siblings have also always read a lot. (Kerstin Bexby, born 1939, Hälsingland KU18529)

This narrative of a father burning his children's books is a haunting reminder that the freedom to read may not be granted even in a peaceful, democratic and largely secular society such as post-war Sweden. And yet, by stopping the supply of books deemed inappropriate, the desire to read has simply increased. My guess is that this has not happened as a consequence of the father creating a deficiency that in turn would spark off the need for books. It is clear that books were accessible in many different ways. Instead, the father acted upon a strong belief, or rather, an over-zealous conviction, in the transformative capacity of reading materials. This belief was communicated forcefully and transferred to his children, regardless, however, of the content.

### Critical Commentary

According to De Certeau (1988/1984: 171), reading is often used as an instrument or means for different power relations between teachers and pupils, producers and consumers. Various social institutions set bounds between readers

and the text, and only the “true interpreters” are allowed to set the norm for what true reading is. Other people’s reading can thus be dismissed for being insignificant or charged with being depraved. But to read a book is not just a theoretical performance, as often believed; it is a practice. Previously, reading practices have not been assigned a value, but it was only the literary content that mattered. This means that many people with great interest in reading have not been considered as “readers” in a limited sense.

Bourdieu (in Reeser & Spalding 2002: 670) remarks that schooling has the unexpected effect that it eradicates the need to read in order to get information about all kinds of things and about life at large. Instead, schools seek to create a need for reading what is connected with high culture. Consequently, this leads to a paradox, that people fall between two forms of culture: they are bereft of their own everyday culture that builds on their own life experiences, and at the same time, they do not appropriate or command the learned culture either. (Ibid.) Perhaps this could be one reason that many people in the so-called middle group, lower officials, rarely read much. They know exactly what they should not read, but they harbour no desire towards reading what is considered high-culture books. Scholars like De Certeau (1988/1984) and Chartier (1994/1992) make it possible for us to leave questions of the content of reading aside, in order to focus attention on all the possibilities of literacy and the practice of reading in all its variations. A text or a book for that matter is always open to plural readings. It is the practice of reading that can be encouraged beyond all top-down values and pointers about what is “good” or “bad” reading.

However, teachers and officials often have expectations that as soon as people learn to read, they will read to learn (cf. Lind & Johnston 1990: 106). But for the great majority, it is the opposite: one does not learn to read in order to read books, but one reads books in order to learn how to read. Most educational pedagogies use books as an important part of basic literacy training.<sup>148</sup> In this way, reading and the book come across as a one-sided instrument for those who do not yet master their literacy skills, rather than as a multivalent practice in itself. And for those who have not had the chance to acquaint themselves with books in their homes or in pre-school, this instrumental view of books could have consequences for their idea of books. Rosengren (1970: 182) remarks laconically: “For book readers, books play the role of teachers. Non-readers obviously have other [teachers].”

Perhaps we find here a reason for some people sensing they do not need to read books. First of all, from the view of the book as instrumental means in

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<sup>148</sup> An exception is the Waldorf pedagogy, which exclusively builds on the teacher drawing and telling a story about each letter with the purpose of conveying a sense of the symbolic side to the alphabet as well as its coherence and context. Books are introduced far later in teaching, and then the children often create their own books as a summary of what they have learnt.

literacy training, it follows that it should aid in correcting an inherent shortcoming or lack in the individual. And if you do not have a specific learning aim, then according to this view, you do not need to read books at all. And if you happen to have a learning aim, then it is probably more socially prestigious to manage without a book, and depend on individual competence and common sense. If you have no other choice but to revert to learning by the book, then you need to know beforehand that the specific book will help you reach that aim, which, of course, is virtually impossible to know. A book cannot be actualized in its multiplicity and totality in a single moment. Perhaps it is against this background that one should understand Bourdieu's thoughts on how the book, like other cultural products, does not require knowledge of its specific value, but rather a belief, and that this belief must also be produced.

## IX. Metal Reading. Reading among Metal Workers.

*It's not macho to read a book? Nonsense. Reading is a stout-hearted activity, disporting courage, keenness, stick-to-it-ness. It is also, in my experience, one of the most thrilling and enduring delights of my life, equal to a home run, a slam-dunk, or breaking the four-minute mile.*

*Irving Stone*

*Should one then discourage people from reading? Oh no! One should only consider that a human being may develop a rich personality even without books - fiction at least.*

*Olof Lagercrantz*

### Introduction

According to Karl Rosengren (1970: 183), one must not believe that the desire for reading is congenial. In his study of reading habits, none of those people termed “non-reader” [*icke-läsare*] agrees with the statement that they could not live without books. An important influence on reading habits comes from factors in the social environment. Interestingly, those who are termed non-readers amount to one-seventh (14.2 %) of the Swedish population since 1988. (Antoni 2004: 3) Barker and Escarpit (1973) hold that of the people who usually state in surveys that they do not read books, the majority have often ceased reading in connection with finishing their schooling or education and have started working instead. They simply fall out of the habit of reading. Very few are wholly uninterested in books. They mention a relative share of 7-10 % of a whole population that really do not like reading.

It is problematic however, when scholars and others term people who usually do not read books “non-readers”. This concept needs to be critically discussed without further ado; it is problematic to define someone in terms of a negation, which establishes a basic assumption of a lack on the part of the person. It may also imply an interpretation of deficiency through guilt by association, so that “non-reading” may be understood as someone with low skills of literacy. A

“non-reader” is mostly fully literate, but is dedicated to other things than reading books. Even though people today may not have access to the most expensive or enhancing practices, Warde (2005: 148) holds that people derive benefits from engaging in the multiplicity of available practices in contemporary society. Each practice brings some sort of reward, regardless of where it fits on a vertical scale of social prestige.

Moreover, it is not self-evident what it means to “read a book”. In the SOM study from 2004, it is reported that even those who state they have not read a book at all proceed to state that have read at least one handbook. The reasonable explanation is that people might not even think of these genres when asked about their reading. (SOM 2004: 19; see also *Mediebarometern* 1994)

Given this background, I have decided to substitute the term ‘non-reader’ with the description that some people are *not accustomed* to reading books. (See also Chapter IV, A note on habit) Although this expression is a rather awkward description, and far from self-evident, the benefit is that it gives prominence to the various social and cultural factors and conventions that influence the practice of reading. Moreover, the words ‘custom’ and ‘customer’ are related, implying a relation between culture and the market.

## Selection

In the debate before the VAT reduction, there was much concern for the regeneration of readers, especially among children in the age of digital entertainment. In the Government's directives to the BPC, a specific consideration was mentioned for creating favourable conditions for young people (SOU 2002, see appendix). When the extraordinary success of Harry Potter exploded across the world, the prospect for children's reading looked slightly better, and attention was turned towards other groups in society where the frequency and extent of book reading was low. In the ongoing discussions within the BPC, the male metal worker became a symbol for national ‘non-reading’ and this symbol was strongly stereotyped as a largely uneducated, small-town male and wholly uninterested in books and reading, perhaps even directly negative towards them. Importantly, the union trade *Landsorganisationen* (LO), which organizes metal workers, is by tradition an important voters' base for the Social Democratic Government Party.

When I raised the question of interviewing adults with little experience of book reading, I was recommended by my different contacts related to BPC to interview colleagues at a workplace in order to secure participants for my study (as mentioned in chapter V), and the BPC Head Secretary urged me to approach a group of male metal workers. At first, Sand's idea created ambivalence on my part: I was apprehensive of the stereotype, afraid of typecasting real-life persons and reproducing unsuitable categories, subjected to either idealism or prejudice.

Already Richard Hoggart (1957) claimed it is common that the early culture of the working classes is romanticised, which in turn often leads to concerns over their debased conditions in contemporary society. And still, I was very curious whether this image would stand up to further scrutiny. I finally consented on the grounds that I could broaden and complement the range of groups in terms of sex and geography.

When I contacted Åke Dansk, educational organizer at the Division of Metal Workers in Sandviken, I explained the purpose and design of the study. Above all, I requested to meet with men little accustomed to reading. Dansk invited me to a couple of study days with 20 members of Metal Department 135, fifteen men and five women (see below). I conducted additional interviews with Dansk and eight other men, either individually, in pairs or in a mini-group of three, depending on the time available in the course schedule.

Table 5. Members of Metal Dpt. 135 interviewed in August 2004

<i>Born</i>	<i>First name</i>	<i>Born</i>	<i>First name</i>
1965	Mikael (Micke) *	1969	Joakim
1978	Leif	1951	Kurt *
1958	Olle	1974	Ted
1972	Nina	1944	Håkan *
1968	Maria	1950	Ola *
1969	Evelyn	1969	Pär *
1945	Ronny *	1976	Kari *
1965	Anita	1980	Bodil
1957	Kjell	1969	Rikard*
1961	Hans	1953	Bo Göran

\* Additional interviews

Twenty people form too large a group to be a legitimate focus group; it becomes difficult to retain focus while also eliciting everyone's views. Due to the limited time available, I had to manage anyway. Because several participants had little experience of reading books, I decided to abandon my primary focus upon reading practices. Such a design would perhaps allow the well-accustomed readers to voice their concerns, and render all of the less accustomed readers silent. Instead, I sought to create an open atmosphere in which there would be plenty of room for the group to decide the direction of the conversation. I judged I would learn more of their relationship to reading in this inductive way, than if I foregrounded my own thoughts and conceptions. Besides, I did not want to appear like an old-time school mistress or a reading inspector sent from the authorities: "Well, have you read your books properly?"

My experience from the group interview in Sandviken is that the free conditions contributed to creating a high-grounded discussion in a way that did not always occur in other groups. In Sandviken, the overall theme of what it means to read emerged.

## First discussion

I met the whole group twice during two days in August 2004. When I came there the first day and introduced myself, there was a spontaneous discussion among some of the participants. Unfortunately, I did not manage to record this discussion but I recollect that the topic was whether it is possible to know in advance what a book “gives you” [Swe. *ger*]. One man, Ola, who does not willingly read books, started by saying that one cannot know whether a book is good or not. Mikael, a well-accustomed reader, objected and pointed out that one can certainly form an impression in advance: by reading the newspapers, speak with friends, etc. Ola disagreed and said that everyone he knew had told him that the book *Popular Music from Vittula* (Swe. *Populärmusik från Vittula*, by Mikael Niemi) was funny and good, and it was not at all. He did not get a thing from that book! At this confession, the group stirs with surprise; apparently, Niemi’s novel was rather popular.

Ola and Mikael seemed to have adopted two diverging conceptions of reading. Ola’s starting point seemed to a model of thought where reading entails placing stakes and getting something in return. We recognize this model as the cost-benefit model, which is quite common in modern literacy training (cf. chapter VII), and which builds upon an exchange of investment and profit. Because Niemi’s book had not fulfilled his expectations, Ola felt sceptical towards books in general. If you cannot trust other people’s recommendations, then how do you find the right books? The task is nearly impossible, and it is easy to give up trying. In this respect, it resembles the context of consumers’ hyperchoice, which induces a sense of stress, feelings of dissatisfaction and regret, and drains the consumer’s energy (cf. Glen Mick, Broniarczyk, Haidt 2004). For Mikael, in contrast, it is more of a search for information about books that are possible to read. It is self-evident that there are great books and fantastic reads out there, and if he does not like a book, then there are others. After a while, one learns to distinguish which genres, books and authors one takes to. Reading continues all the while.

## Discussion Continued

The next day, the discussion continued, and this time my recorder was prepared from the start. Two people in the group, Mikael and Anita, regarded themselves as highly accustomed readers; and around a third of the group confessed to not

being interested in reading books. The rest of the group seemed to have some book-reading habit. Reading books, however, they all agree, is no longer considered as something refined [Swe. *fin*]. The book is '*allmansrätt*', everyone's property, Åke points out, alluding to the Swedish legal right of access to private land. In this way, everyone has the right to read books. As a group, their experience was that reading was more divided several years ago; reading pulp fiction [*kiosklitteratur*] was not exactly considered refined. To this, Mikael retorts that pulp fiction is something altogether different than paperbacks; it is more like 'Bill and Ben' [*Bill och Ben*], and everyone gets a good laugh.

Paperbacks seem to be the in-thing now, a woman remarks, "so that we should read paperbacks because that's something we can bring everywhere... and read everywhere." Paperbacks are cheap, a man comments appreciatively. "Buy and throwaway!" a man says, rather jokingly, but is met with opposition right away: "No, you never throw away a book." Yet another man mentions the possibility of leaving the book on the train so that the next person could get it. One woman then tells that she has left a book she really liked on the bus. Hence, it appears not only the most avid book-lovers engage in releasing books (cf. Maclaran & Masterson 2006), but also among those with slight experience, and performed in less formally organized ways.

One woman states that she finds it hard when there are two or three books that she wants to read at the same time. She then gives up in some way, cannot be bothered at all. My guess here is that for the person who is not used to reading much, reading becomes a performance or achievement, and having a mountain of books building up would be perceived as a heavy load even before starting. Compare this with those readers whose reading desires awaken with piles of books.

Is there anything negative about reading books? I wonder, whereupon follows an interesting discussion about the importance of critical thinking: not to believe everything one reads, but being able to keep a certain distance to the book. The more one reads, the more multifaceted comprehension one gets, Ronny holds, and someone points out that each reading is unique. Then follows a line of thought whether or not one gets images in the mind while reading about something one has not seen or experienced before. There seem to be different takes on whether inner images of previously unknown things are possible or not. The more accustomed readers seem more convinced: "Well, I have been to Ystad, although I have never been to Ystad", claims Mikael and refers to Henning Mankell's internationally acclaimed crime series about Wallander.

The difference between, for example, watching scary things on film and reading about them is that images are displayed in the mind. This could be even creepier, says less accustomed reader Hans, because one has created the images oneself. And in a book, one can easily go back to that horrible passage, "take it over again, take it over again, repeat". And once repeated many times, then you remember it more clearly; it becomes part of long-term memory in a different



way from the movies. Books are also more detailed than films, which are mostly made from a lot of fast cuts and a load of impressions.

Change of track. It is good to read books aloud, says one woman who reads books to her four-year-old daughter. “And I can see that I myself get better at reading when I read aloud... to her. And you... remember the books more if you read aloud. I think.”

Kurt, who does not read fictional books himself, asks the accustomed readers of fiction if they read more, or less, when they feel bad. (In the individual interview, he says he feels you have to be mentally prepared for reading, for taking to what you read.) “For me, there is no difference”, says Micke; “me neither”, confirms Anita (who like Micke is a book ombudsman [*bokombud*] at work). “That is all the time...”, smiles Micke. In contrast, less accustomed reader Hans says that if he feels bad, he does not want to “take in anything” [*greppa in någonting*], because then he has enough already of what he is doing. One woman agrees with this.

Mikael holds that he needs to read just because he has a family: to get into his own world. In my interpretation, this does not mean escaping, if by escape we mean fleeing from or evading something negative. Mikael has his beloved family around him, and yet he needs to create space for an inner world too. If all cultural experiences entail an accumulative logic (Cf. Colbert in Wennes 2002), then it also appears that reading is adding something to everyday life. It could possibly be an added dimension to life, perhaps a complement or contrast to everyday existence.

To read then, means to *add* manifold experiences, and not primarily to remove experiences. This, however, is difficult for those who are not accustomed readers; adding experiences could be over-whelming, not least since reading brings a range of conceptions of performance and achievement. Not until one has rid oneself of these attitudes is it possible for reading to become a source of strength and inspiration. Åke, who became a reader a few years ago, tells that he has found a way to get support and inspiration in the poetry of local author Stig Sjödin. When he is weighed down by everyday work in the trade union, he reads Sjödin’s poems and soon he regains his fighting spirit. Hence, accustomed readers regard reading as practice and not achievement. And so readers continue to devote themselves to books.

Speaking of having the time to read, Pär maintains that today people have so many material things to manage, and one makes plans accordingly. From this point-of-view, it should be important to have books at home, because it becomes easier to plan for moments of reading. Mikael adds, “there is always time to read”. Yes, there is, holds Pär, “you *make* time for reading”. Hans replies:

I sit a lot in front of the TV, but that is only because the TV licence is so darned expensive. [All laugh] The more I watch, the cheaper the TV licence is. [Scattered laughs]<sup>149</sup>

Those who have not bought more books after the VAT reduction reply “no” without hesitation and have little else to add. The whole group is positive to the reduction with various degrees of involvement in the issue. Regarding book acquisition, one woman says:

I don't buy books. If I wanted a book, then I would buy it whatever the cost. That's how you feel, if you are interested enough: 'this book I would probably like to read', then... I buy it. When I was younger I bought a specific author; well then I bought her books, whether there was a book sale or not. And if I found it on sale, I bought it then too. If it was someone that I wanted to continue reading, then I bought it regardless. Then price did not matter.

For this woman, as a reader, it happened that some books were valued beyond price. The book sale did not broaden her literary experiences but entailed additional purchases of the same titles. Hans agrees, saying: “If you want to read, you don't sit around and wait for the book sale, in any case”. Price does not seem to be the issue here, but rather the desire to read. One man, Olle, catches on:

I never buy books. But on the other hand I have access to books because my wife reads unbelievably much. Then often I can find some book she reads. So, sure, the fact that the VAT has been reduced has had an influence. There are more books at home.

In other words, his wife has bought more books after the reduction so his access to books has also increased indirectly. He tells that they went to the publishing company Bra Böcker's book outlet on their vacation, commenting laughingly that it became expensive. A woman in the group asks him whether they got many books, and he affirms yes. Upon my question whether he has read more as a consequence of her buying more, and whether his selection has become greater, he answers that reading, like the others have said, depends on the mood. “Sometimes you feel like reading and then I can go and rummage through her shelves, so to speak.” He comments that she often buys really thick books, big and heavy, that would take him months to read...

Turning to two men who I had not interviewed individually but who had said they do not read books much, I clarified that I also include handbooks and other types.

-Yes, well that is different! Then you can do it. -  
Yes, but there are pictures in them, so you don't have to think through anything!  
[A little laughter in the background]

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<sup>149</sup> The cost of the general license for colour TV increased from 1 668 SEK in 2001 to 1 812 in 2003, according to Statistics Sweden (2005: 375). That is an increase by 8.63 %.

On average, the first man, Hans, reads at most two books a year, and they are not particularly thick but take about a week to finish. He emphasizes that he can buy certain literature himself, that which he is *interested* in, cars and motorcycles, handbooks. The other kinds of books he gets as presents. It is difficult to just sit down and start reading a book, he says, but those times he has got started, he nearly wants to read it all the time. He finds it a problem that he then reads really fast and forgets what he has read, so he has to turn over the leaves and start way back to remember. He enjoys listening to audio books when he is driving for a longer stretch. "Then I am keen to get a book going and... it stimulates." He observes they are becoming more common in the bookshops. He does not go to the library to get audio books, but mentions Traffic Stop where one can borrow titles. One man tells us that they have audio books [eg. *talböcker*] at his workplace. Hans agrees, but adds:

As a rule, they are in such bad shape anyway, so I have tried to take home a couple, but then a tape is missing. It is like tearing out seven-eight chapters from a book [some laugh] or they get into a tangle and how fun is it to listen to half a book and then not be able to hear?

This experience of work-place libraries brings to mind Määttä's (2009) observation of the condition of audio books in ordinary libraries, where some show "unmistakable signs of having been chewed by dogs or small children". Thus, for audio book listening, other means of access are required, for instance by gift giving. Back in Sandviken, a young man claims to have read about three books in his entire life, and prefers watching films. He says he may try to listen to (local author) Bernt Olov Anderson that he got as an audio book. When asked who gave it to him, he explains that it was actually he who had given it to his mother, and she had lent it to him now that she had finished it. Giving books is something that even less accustomed readers engage in, and in some cases the gift circulates back.

### Pairwise Interview

I interview two men, Pär (born 1969), who works with packing and lives together with a woman and their two children, and Kari (born 1976), CNC-operator with a wife and a young stepson. Pär appears to be accustomed to reading books, whereas Kari says there is not much reading on his part. In the background there is a small group talking of this and that; at one point I hear them discussing *The Da Vinci Code*.

Regarding the acceptable price of a book, Pär says that for him, if it is a really good book, one that he really needs, or would have use for, a dictionary or just any kind, he would be able to stretch to SEK 400, but not much more. That is just about max. As for Kari, the limit extends further:

Probably more. If it is something that gives me a lot of something I could pay just about anything. Because it pays back anyhow in the future, that is how I see it.

It all depends on the purpose of the book, Pär and Kari agree. Upon the question whether they go to the book sale, Kari says it happens. Pär claims there is always something interesting to be found. He has been taking a look at books that cost three-four hundred crowns [*spänn*] and when it's half the price he buys it. When asked about whether the VAT reduction has had any influence on their book buying, Kari replies he thinks so. Pär says he is looking more at books in the bookshops now than before. You notice them more easily, reflects Kari. You'd rather buy a book for SEK 150 than 298, Pär asserts.

Asking whether they find the VAT reduction good or unnecessary, Kari replies it is a good thing. Those who want to read but cannot afford to could perhaps buy a book and feel better. It becomes easier to get to buy a book, kind of. He has not seen a reduction before. Pär also finds it a good thing, but reflects on what else the state has cut down on instead. Are there other things that suffer instead? Reducing tax on books is a good thing so everyone gets access to books. He hopes they have not cut spending on school or something connected with learning. He also reflects that they have cut down much on culture the way it seems.

As for books as gifts, Kari says it has not changed with the VAT reduction. It does not happen very often that he gives books as presents, as it is difficult to know what the person would like. But if someone had wished for a specific book, then it is easy. But that is not often. For Pär, it happens sometimes. For children, they have decided that there should always be a book for their birthdays. It does not matter if they get other presents, they shall always have a book, says Pär. They have told their parents to always buy a book of some kind. And that is the way things have turned out. Here Kari agrees that for children, there have been more [books as gifts]. Like for the little boy, it happens that you buy when you see something special.

One question concerned whether they ever heard someone get harassed for reading or not reading. Pär replied at once, Well one can get comments for reading certain books. Kari agrees hesitantly. At work, or? I ask. "No, at home", says Pär, "there are different perceptions..." He stops as if it is a bit difficult to talk about. I pursue the topic further, asking how he copes with this.

Well no, I say that it is for my development, so that... 'This you should read too, so that... we can maybe get to the same level or something...

*What does she say then?*

But you can't read books like that...'

*Is that so?*

Yes, but I guess it is because you're a bit afraid perhaps. You don't know what you... Well, maybe afraid to find out certain things. Eh, I don't know. It is hard to tell. But it happens.

Gathering that Pär seems a bit unwilling to talk about what type of books are concerned, perhaps a little wary about being judged, I move on to ask whether they think this could be a problem to unaccustomed readers, somebody who perhaps is curious about books but who has not quite got started yet. There is a long silence. Pär then speaks: “I don’t think that there should be any problems with books. For if we don’t read and learn about things, how it works, etc. then it is difficult to live in society, you know. To be able to function in society.”

### Individual Interview

Dansk’s father had been employed at the local plant and also working as a travelling salesman, selling books from the back of his moped. In this way, their home was filled with books, but Dansk never took to reading as a child. It was the worst thing he knew. He later discovered that he had problems with dyslexia. A consequence was that he had problems drawing conclusions from what he had read. It is only recently that he discovered the joys of reading. In fact, he proudly declares that he became a reader on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2000, when he decided to borrow a book by a visiting author from a friend. Until then he had only read five books of fiction in his whole life.<sup>150</sup> But ever since that day, he has been reading. In the group session, Dansk said he reads two books at the same time, in different rooms in his house, the veranda and the bedroom. When I ask him about it, he says:

I think it is better – better to have two books going, kind of, than that when I am going upstairs to go to bed, then, ‘where do I have that book now?’ Well, it is downstairs and then I will have to go down and get it. Better than that when I’m going to sleep, I put the book down there, so that it is there the evening after too, right?

Having a bit of trouble moving up and down the staircase, it appears that even a newly accustomed reader like Åke is experiencing the additive logic of reading to the extent that he doubles his book-reading. In this way, each book is in its right place and he need not be without it. Sometimes he just reads two or three pages, and other times he reads until two or three in the morning. One morning at breakfast, his wife got quite confused as Åke was all worked up:

‘I’m just wondering how things are working out for Maria, if she can keep Micke in order.’ And the wife just gave me a look... ‘And there is a problem with Markus too and...’ ‘Damn it, what are you babbling on about?’ And then, ‘Well, you know, there are problems with Markus. Now they have been to the police station and and things...’ ‘But what are you babbling about?’ ‘Oh, sorry, you weren’t there last night...’

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<sup>150</sup> Similarly, Arvidsson (2000: 14) interviewed a 50-year-old taxi driver who began reading books in 1993 at a time when he was unemployed.

For Åke, who was deeply entrenched in reading Torgny Karnstedt's novel *Låtsaspapporna*, it had been only natural that his wife had joined him throughout the events in the book. If we are to believe De Certeau (1988/1984), the way we make use of language is the same as we make use of other consumption practices, and therefore I shall highlight one change of meaning in the English translation. In Swedish, Åke uttered, "you weren't with last night", referring more to "being with" than "being there" as in the English translation "you weren't there". Where English places an emphasis on events taking place, "being with" expresses a sense of togetherness between people and the events. I believe this says something about the practice of reading. Also, when asked about reading in relation to his wife, Åke says he has also shared many of his thoughts with this wife, asking her what she thinks of quotes, etc.

Åke's life would change forever after reading *Happiness* by the Dalai Lama, a literary encounter that acted as an eye-opener and developed his empathy towards others.<sup>151</sup>

I have become much, much more harmonious. I will never be able to hate any human being after having read it. [Sighs] I mean, now I'm coming over all bloody strange again [moved to tears]... but... Before, I could think very, very badly of people. Next to hate. 'You have no business here', kind of thing. But then when I read that, well. Yes – I do understand – I can understand these people who behave in that way towards me. I understand them, but I don't have to like them.

Before reading the book, his emotions were more pent up, and the only outlet was in slagging other people off; feeling vengeful for wrongs done to him. The Dalai Lama's book has introduced to Åke a new way of relating to other people; instead of telling people to go to hell, he can now empathize with their viewpoints and still draw the line in relations. He says he feels more secure now, in himself and at large, he dares to make a fool of himself and does not feel anxious about what other people think anymore. He feels happier now, more satisfied, and likes people better, in his own way.

## Afterthoughts

Jimmy Vulovic (in Mortensen 2009) has highlighted that at the time of the first Social Democratic government, the Swedish workers' movement took an active

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<sup>151</sup> Interview, 20 August 2004. Today Åke Dansk is well-known for his support of reading. In 1999, Dansk initiated the project Read to Me, Daddy! (*Läs för mig, pappa!*), and he has become highly acclaimed for this work. In 2006 he was awarded both the Ordfront Democracy Prize (*Ordfronts demokratipris*) and the Gulliver Prize. Interestingly, when the participants in Dansk's project were surveyed as new readers and asked if they had read more books after the VAT reduction, around 20 percent agreed. Therefore the increase in book sales does not seem to be limited to people who already regarded themselves as readers.

part in attempting to exert influence on the Swedish book market towards improved aesthetic and ethical standards for fiction. In 1921, *Landsorganisationen* (LO) among others supported a boycott campaign, launched by ABF (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund*, The Workers' Educational Association) against the pervasive "dirty literature" [*smutslitteraturen*].<sup>152</sup> Workers were also encouraged to build up a library of their own (just like Bennett's and Eliot's support for reading),<sup>153</sup> as books were considered a great weapon in the class struggle and their higher content would compensate for the injustices of society. (Ibid. 210)

Jonathan Rose (2001: 371) has described British working-class reading as a "random walk", rendering an indiscriminating pattern with a "promiscuous mix between high and low" in a "mongrel library". Today there is text everywhere around us, on t-shirts, billboard ads, placards, text messages on mobile phones, subtitles on TV and film. Even the people who are not accustomed to reading books make use of literacy. Even those who claim not to read books in the ordinary sense seem both to be able to buy and use handbooks and other types of literature around their specific interest. In other words, there seems to be a widespread perception that the expression "to read books" only encompasses fiction in a wide sense. To use books, glance through, and look at pictures in books do not seem to be part of the rather abstract idea of what it means, "to read".

If we take heed of Bourdieu's thoughts on how the book as cultural product is dependent on a belief in its special value, then this means that there are people who possibly believe in the specific value of other people's books, but not in their own. Other people read books for real, and they do not. But books are not merely content to be cognitively decoded; they are also a form, and commonly a material object with a sense of bookness that all readers experience with their bodies and senses. We may have to open up for the possibility that people who read handbooks and special-interest books may have a more visual and aesthetic way to appropriate books. This way is different from the ongoing poring over books among well-accustomed readers, and a stark contrast to the cost-benefit model where reading becomes a heavy undertaking in view of unknown returns.

Those who read more or less regularly and those who do not are not two separate groups leading separate lives. Even within marriage, husband and wife can have very different views on reading books. From Per's story we learn that spouses could be suspicious and non-supportive of reading. It is mainly about

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<sup>152</sup> Jonas Åkerstedt (1967) has conducted research on the role of ABF in *Den litterate arbetaren - Bildningssyn och studieverksamhet i ABF 1912-1930*, Uppsala: Avdelningen för litteratursociologi vid litteraturvetenskapliga institutionen

<sup>153</sup> Vulovic refers to Paul Thomas Murphy (1994) who writes that in Britain, a literary canon for the working class was already formulated during the first half of the 19th century.

differences at the individual level where different experiences and personalities will determine the degree of interest. Importantly, the reader will define herself or himself in relation to other people. From Åke's story, we learn that strong-engagement reading could be an encompassing and inclusive experience, in which he sensed that his wife had joined in. Reading could therefore bring a sense of togetherness, which, by extension, could encompass all of humanity. In this way, the very practice of reading seems supportive of empathy among people.



## X. Grouping and Coupling: Reading in the Monday Gang

*All that we read emerges before us in the light that someone else has lit.*

*Olof Lagercrantz (1985, my transl.)*

*One element of being a reader is the elision of the question why one reads, whether reading is self-evident, and whether there is a need to read.*

*Pierre Bourdieu*

### Introduction

In order to explore joint values and social processes of consumption, research on books and reading can turn towards different categories of people, based upon age, gender, socio-economic groupings, etc. But we should be careful to distinguish between groups of different people in practice, such as between men and women, young and old, “readers” and “non-readers”. It is as important to explore how reading practices are created and maintained between individuals, not least as an issue to be settled among couples and within marriage.

### Selection

The Monday gang consists of five couples that have been meeting, men and women separately, on a regular basis, once a month, for more than two decades. Originally they all lived in the area of Dalsjöfors, a short distance outside the city of Borås, and that is how it started. Most of them were originally neighbours and they all had small children, born about the same time. Some have worked together in different constellations over the course of time. Also, one man and one woman are brother and sister, so two of the women are sisters-in-law. Now that the children are all grown-up and have moved out, two couples have moved closer to Borås, but they have still retained the old Monday gang. When I met them for the first time on a dark November evening in 2003, they had been meeting regularly for twenty-three years. The women often do things together, go to the cinema, theatre, and lectures; they go bowling or

crafting; and have theme nights. Often they just have coffee and sit and talk together, about life, their children and such things. The men do more sport-related things: have different competitions (archery, for example) or discuss sports. A couple of times every year, both men and women gather together, around Christmas and the crayfish premiere. They also save money to go on holiday together occasionally. They have already been to London and the Azores.

In other words, they all know each other very well by now. At our meeting, they speak one at a time for short moments, but the others soon catch on, and conversations spring up among those sitting next to each other. The atmosphere of our meeting becomes very free and easy and loud. They seem to forget that the conversation is being recorded and from time to time around five people talk at the same time and laugh a lot. Now and then I stop them and ask them to recount briefly what they have been discussing. They ask me questions about books and some literary terms; “perhaps you know?” For example, whether reading habits are different between men and women; what the word “*tegelstensroman*” means; and the difference between ‘memoirs’ and ‘autobiography’. They are very curious and they help me interview by posing questions to one another, “how do *you* do that?” [Swe. *Hur gör ni?*] The participants are, as follows, presented in pairs.

Table 6. Pairwise participants of the Monday gang

Women:	Men:
E	L
A-G	L-G (absent)
B-M	I
K(m)	H
K(l)	Olle

Present at the interview was also my friend S, daughter of E and L. In case I do not know for sure who says what, I will write:

(W) Woman

(M) Man

(O) - Perhaps we should start to meet and read books instead... [Everyone laughs at the mere thought]

(W) - I think not!!!

(W) - I don't believe that!

(O) - All unpack their books and say, ‘well, let's get going!’ [scattered laughs]

(W) - But we do meet and exchange books, *that* we do. We exchange books with each other.

In general, the women read rather a lot; they exchange recommendations and lend each other books. Only one woman, A-G, explains she is more on the receiving end in this matter. The men read books considerably less than women. The books they do read, however, they remember well, unlike the women who forget them rather quickly. The men read the newspapers every day and watch television more than the women. They are generally very interested in sports.

The men however, do not think it “unmanly” to read. It is just that they find it hard to sit down and concentrate on the text. Often they do not have the peace and quiet to sit completely still with a book in their hands; there are so many duties around the house that they do not feel they have the time to read books. But they do read newspapers, sometimes several, in order to “keep up”. This argument for men’s newspaper reading also appeared in Furhammar’s (1985) study of the different motives for reading.

E: - Km and I worked together before for about ten-eleven years or so, until O thought, ‘Now you are not funny anymore, E, now you can’t be here any longer’, and then we exchanged [böj]... no, but then we often exchanged books. And then I have worked together with A-G so occasionally we exchanged books.

A-G: - I do not really have any books; I just borrowed from you.

E: - Ah, well.

(W):- Well, you do have so many books here.

E: - And then they usually go round...

A-G: - Because I don’t have any... or I don’t own any books.

E:- Yes, but there it is actually that we usually lend and borrow [låna]. If you have read a good book, then... ‘this book you have to borrow and read’, kind of, in general.

A-G: - Yes, you read an unbelievable amount.

E: - Yes, I read a lot.

(W): - Yes, but it is S [E’s daughter] who brought you a lot of books. Right from the beginning? Or have you always read this much, when you were young too?

E: - No, I don’t think so.

(W): - That was later, wasn’t it?

E: - That was later, yes. Not as a child, I didn’t read so much I believe. But say the last...

S [daughter]: -But *I* read a great deal as a child. You must have been inspired by me, rather.

E: - Yes, I read a lot to you, of course I did. But then you started to read by yourself so early, so that...

(M): - But you don’t watch TV a lot, do you? You don’t have a TV? [Everyone laughs] - But you read until late at night or something? Or late in the evenings.

E: - Well I read until I fall asleep. Towards half-past twelve, or thereabouts. So usually I squeeze in at least half a book. But if it is a really great book, then you read the whole... But then I am like this that if I’m supposed to clean for example and I have a really good book, then I can sit down and read for half an hour because I think it is so deadly dull to clean. [...] I could go and interrupt my

cleaning time just to sit down and read this book that I think is crazily good.  
Half an hour, three quarters of an hour.  
(M): - But that is really good, that.  
A-G: - But think of those Ayla-books... You see, we did not read that much when the children were younger. And I know that we were out with the trailer somewhere in Bohuslän and what boring parents we were! Because we read these books, you know. I don't know what the children did, because we were completely...

[--]  
O: - Right now I read.  
(W): - Do you *read*, O??  
O: - You see, I nearly never read books. I want to read books, but it just never happens. I start... and nothing happens. But now I got a book –  
(W [his wife?]): - You read evening papers.  
O: - Yes, yes, *newspapers* I read. But books then.  
(W): - But then we should really find a book where something happens in the first five pages.  
O: - ... read Marklund's *Gömda*.  
(W): - Yes, wasn't it good??  
O: - Yes, it was good. That one I read easily.  
(W): - Well, there you see!  
O: - I have got a book from Kl [his wife] for my last birthday and that was called *Oss golfare emellan* [a woman laughs].  
E: - Wodehouse?  
O: - Wodehouse, yes.  
E: - I think I have got it somewhere in here.  
O: - No, I... I don't get a thing. [O laughs a bit. There is a woman's laugh in the background]  
(W): - They are not particularly funny, are they?  
O: - No, it isn't, no. The question is if I will get through it.  
[--]  
(W): - A book that you have read a hundred pages and nothing happens, then you put it aside.  
O: - No, but I have only read 37 pages so...  
I: - But if you haven't done that, then you're not going to continue  
O: - Then when I lie and read, then I think: can't the chapter be finished so that I can concentrate on the next. There is none. I just read and read and read and...  
(W): - No chapter that ends?  
O: - No, there isn't! I have read around forty pages now and it is all in one go.  
(W): - And then it is not funny?  
O: - No.  
[...]  
O: It always feels easier when you're going to finish it, kind of, so you turn the pages up to where the chapter ends; yes, there are another three pages....  
[...]  
O: There should be large print and many chapters. And then things should happen all the time. Not such... tiny print.  
I: 400 pages with tiny print.  
O: Then you get tired...

## Visualizing Session

So far we recognize the prevalent image of women as a group of book readers, while men more rarely open a book. For this reason I let them participate in the visual experiments on our second meeting, men and women by themselves. The women gathered in the kitchen and the men in the living room. When they were done with each image we all gathered in the couch area for presentations. They seemed to have a great time, and there was no difficulty agreeing on the joint images.

### Future Reading among the Women

The women's image of the longed-for reading in the future is to sit in a lovely armchair with a good reading-light, candlelight for the sake of cosiness, and a cup of coffee (here balanced on the left side). Time is completely forgotten, and all the "musts" that hover around and call for attention are removed. There are already enough "musts" for the women. They just want to be here and now with their book reading.



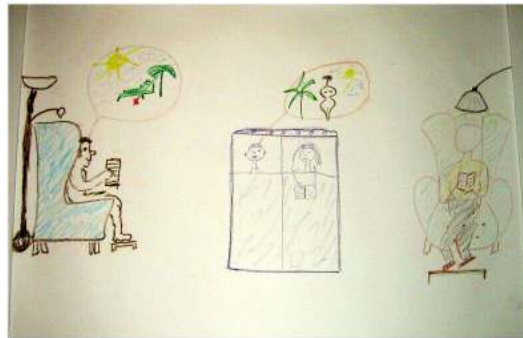
They long for a breadth of literature: fiction, classics, poems, and non-fiction, here expressed by the pile of books in different colours. They feel they have almost reached their aim.

Then one of the husbands takes a closer look:

- O: - What does it say at the top?
- (W): - "Gardening book".
- O: - Has Kl [his wife] been part of this?
- (W) - Yes.
- O: - Ah well, *reading* is easy... [Everybody laughs]

## Future Reading among the Men

For the men, there is no increase of reading in sight, at least not as long as they are physically active. Maybe they could swap their couch for a cosy armchair where they can sit down without falling asleep... Reading in bed, perhaps going to bed around eight o'clock instead of twelve? (Here two women say to the contrary, "No, that I don't believe"). They dream of reading at the beach during the holidays, having a nice drink in their hands. Indeed, unlike women's image where all thoughts of anything else were obliterated, the men's image shows daydreaming as an integral part of life. One of the women looks at the thought balloon above the bed in the centre. "What is that, over there then? A hot chick?" And the whole group laughs and jokes for minutes. "It's a dream about the good old days," says one man (O) and the group laughs and jokes. "We are still together, we have not got divorced", the same man explains. "One is dreaming, and the other is reading", comments a woman.



For the men, not all the musts will disappear; "A few musts, we must have". And the women observe and comment on this contrasting difference from their own wishes. The men would not mind taking off their watches, as long as they do not miss the sports on television. And the whole group bursts out laughing again.

## Pairwise Reading Practices

It is easy to believe that well-accustomed readers and little accustomed readers lead separate lives. But it is important not to stop at this image, but continue further and acknowledge that these men and women actually live together as couples. And it is through practice, and in relations, that diffusion and distribution of books and reading take place. With the Monday gang, I have been given the possibility to start off with the group perspective and increasingly approach reading as it is conceptualized and practiced in relation to a husband or wife.

In the following, I will draw on the interviews and exhibit the visual images that these couples have painted. (One couple, A-G and L-G, was absent during this

session.<sup>154</sup> And one painting is missing as some material was accidentally thrown away before it was thoroughly documented, cf. Chapter V). By presenting the couples' stories and images side-by-side, perhaps we can gain some further understanding of life with books and reading within marriage.

## E & L

E reads a lot, every night. She has several bookshelves, one in each room, even in the basement. She often reads many books at the same time. E is a very socially active reader; she recommends books and often lends good books to her friends. Nowadays she occasionally takes a little time off when she is cleaning the house in order to read a little, if the book is good. Her friends reveal that she likes to smell the books... E has ordered books on the Internet when she knows what she wants and the queues at the library are too long. She does not want books to cost more than SEK 200; that is her limit. The first year I met her, in 2003, she estimated having bought more books after the VAT reduction, and the second year, not.

E (image below) reads before going to sleep and she prefers to lie on her stomach and read (*top left*). Of the four reading practices she has drawn, two of them involve reading with other people: she often reads aloud to her grandson, who is a little more than two years old, and reads aloud every day in her work at the day care centre to a whole group of children.

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<sup>154</sup> From the previous group interview I had learnt that A-G seems to read quite a lot nowadays. She often gets a pile of books from her husband L-G (who was absent in the interview too), who selects them at the flea market while she looks out for porcelain goods. The books usually suit her just fine. She also likes to borrow books from E, but says she does not lend any herself to the same extent. She does not really own any books. AG read aloud for their two sons when they were little, but they in turn do not read much nowadays. She says she has begun to read more the last couple of years because she has not been able to relax enough and sit down quietly until now.



L (right hand image) read a lot of books as a child, the classic tales of *Pelle Svanslös*, etc., but today he reads books very rarely. He enjoys reading only in the holidays really, preferably on the beach, where you read a little, swim a little, and so on. In the holidays he can read two or three books at one go, sitting underneath a parasol. L finds it difficult to read when there are many things happening around him. He reads the newspapers alone at the breakfast table (not in the picture) and in the sofa in front of the television. He watches TV quite a lot according to his wife, but does not really agree himself. In bed, he sits halfway up, leafing through magazines. “No books. I don’t have the energy. I get so tired.”

## KI & O

KI’s mother was a real bookworm, and pored over several books at a time. KI gets ideas for reading by listening to the radio, for example. She has noticed that there is much more advertising for books now than before. She is a member of two book clubs, *Månadens Bok* and *Bonniers*, but does not buy from there; she reads the membership magazine at most. KI buys paperbacks and borrows books at the library. She also reads a lot of books, not least non-fiction, due to her work as teacher at the local college.

KI draws two pictures of reading in her drawing (which is missing, unfortunately). She often sits at a desk, both at home and at work, reading different kinds of things (books, papers, etc.) There the light is good for reading (white desk, halogen lamp). It is also a matter of getting together all that she has read to form something that makes sense [*vetting*]. The other image is a sun deck chair, but it could also be a bed, to symbolize reading fiction, which mostly takes place in the summer. One woman in the group asks whether she reads



mostly non-fiction, due to the size and central position of that image and KI confirms this.



O (picture) reads books very rarely, but says he would *like* to read more. He says that other people seem to think that reading is so pleasant. He did not read anything as a child. But his sister still reads a lot even as an adult. As for himself, he thinks not much happens in the books. Also he finds it difficult to see the text, especially in paperbacks. When O reads books, he is not very concentrated; several pages later he does not know what he has read, and he has to start all over again. He supposes that one has to be in the right mood to read. When he does find the “right book”, reading is easy. For example, he has read Liza Marklund’s *Gömda* almost without stopping. On the other hand he enjoys reading the table of results for floorball [*innebandy*], division 2, although he does not really understand why...

He reads for an hour every morning at the breakfast table, spreading out after his wife has gone to work. He has the morning news on television in front of him and newspapers on the table. After work he sits in the sofa, leafing through golf magazines and advertisements. Then he moves to the bedroom. Commenting that they of course have duvets covering them, he just wants to show what it looks like. His wife lies with her back and side to him. Their cat lies in-between. He reads golf books, non-fiction, etc. No way would he be able to read in a deck chair on their vacation; there are just too many things happening around him.

## B-M & I

B-M has noticed that reading habits are established at an early age; even as one-year olds, they come in carrying books. B-M finds it difficult to find books at the library. B-M has read the series “Rävungen” [by Torey Hayden] but reading about sad things happening to children is quite tough on her. She also thinks it is very sad when a book is about to end.

B-M (left-hand image) thinks immediately of reading to her grandchildren from when they were really, really small, one or two at a time. It is difficult for her to find a comfortable position for bed reading, and having bifocal glasses, she

prefers to sit in the corner of the sofa. After a while she slides down, half-lying there. Also, she reads more on her vacation, buying three or four paperbacks that she takes turns reading.



I. used to read books as a child and he seems to read a bit as an adult. He does not think that reading is “unmanly”. I. did not say very much in the large group but spoke a lot to O and L who sat on either side of him.

I (right-hand image) reads, of course, in bed “like everybody else”. Two pillows, and only one for sleeping. The time is about midnight. Secondly (bottom), he reads in front of the television, mainly golf magazines, and he finds he can read quite well there. Last, he reads on the beach on his holidays abroad with refreshments beside him.

## Km & H

Km (left-hand image) read a lot even as a child, although her mother did not. Km and E seem to be the most avid book consumers in the whole Monday gang. Km has a cupboard where she keeps those books she has not read yet, and she prefers when it is crammed with books. If the books start running out on her, she feels a bit anxious and restless. Km borrows books in the library and loves buying unknown books at the flea market at a low price (SEK 5 at the Red Cross). The books she thinks are worth reading she stores in different bags in order to lend or give away to friends. The other ones she gives back to charity. (Recycling! her husband laughs). As for new books, she prefers to buy them for the holidays; that feels more like a luxury... She says she has bought more books with the new VAT. The second year I meet her, she has not continued.

Km reads in her bed (left), with a bed lamp just above her head, and two pillows behind her back. Before sleeping she drops one pillow on the floor. The reading light should preferably come slightly from the left, although she does not know why. On her other side is her husband H, who has already fallen asleep. The next image shows her reading in the grandchildren’s room, when the children are tired after having played with their grandfather. The books are falling apart; they have been read so much. Kl. fixes them up with adhesive tape from time to time. Then there is reading in her armchair, where she reads after

having gone for a long walk, taken a shower, and made coffee. She often puts her feet up on a piano stool (which she could not fit into the picture). Her husband does not recognize the small table, and she explains she has made it up. (Normally she puts her cup of coffee on the piano stool). And then there is reading during the holidays, in the shade.



As a child, H. enjoyed sports and did not take to reading. As an adult, he found a series of books he really liked; they were reality-based and dealt with violent experiences from the Second World War. When their children were small, he was not allowed to read aloud; he lacked the right sense of dramatization [*inlevelse*]. Children's books [for the grandchildren] are expensive, notes H; around SEK 50 would be reasonable for a short book with many pictures.

H started to read books before sleeping. Today, H. (right-hand image) reads in bed, in the deck chair, on the toilet, and at the breakfast table. In bed, he lies on his side with book in hand and reads about three or four pages before his arm and mind get tired and he falls asleep. Nowadays he must read, or else he cannot sleep. If Km has turned off the bedside lamp before he gets to bed, his thoughts keep grinding. It happens often that he reads unfocused so he does not understand what he has read. But what he reads properly, he remembers for a long time. In the daytime, he does not have the peace and quiet to read; there are so many things to take care of: the car, the house, and the garden. He has no patience with instruction books/manuals; he would rather learn himself or listen to others. H buys many newspapers and reads carefully. He reads them either at the breakfast table where he eats alone every morning, or on the toilet (to the amusement of the entire group). "It is nice sitting there reading, particularly the ads, [reading] in peace and quiet."

In the pairwise interview, it emerges that H's book reading arose in connection with his relationship to Km.

H: - But reading, I did not start until we met.

Km: - I was the one who tricked you into it.

H: - Yes, really... at the library...

PS: *Tricked you??* [Both interviewees start laughing]

Km: - Or else I bought books for him and so... 'well, you could start...?', kind of easy like that. I know he is interested in the Second World War. So I bought books about that. [...]

H: - Since that I have been reading. Not just that about the Second World War, but I have got into other things too. Now I read every night. [...]

Km: - To be honest, then, I'm the one who buys all the books, even yours.

H: - Mm.

Km: - I know what he likes, pretty much.

And yet, they maintain that they really do not talk at all about the books or reading. They just read; "it is as natural as brushing teeth".

### Reading among Women and Men

It is interesting to note that women want to get away from all the musts whereas the men *want* to have a fair share of musts. I wonder if this can be illuminated by De Certeau's image of reading as a kind of tactic or even as an evasive manoeuvre. A tactic in De Certeau's sense does not encompass place, but disposes only of time. I think about E who puts off cleaning the house for a while in order to get a moment of reading. A tactical reader is always on the lookout for opportunities to read. And when the various musts decrease, the opportunities increase.

The men however, do not seek out pockets of time. For the men, reading seems more an accomplishment or achievement. For example, one man, O, mentions the importance of reaching the end of a chapter. Similarly, their work around the house is part of the strategic ownership of place. The household management they mention: renovation, carpentry, gardening, etc, make lasting imprints on the material reality. On the other hand, the women's household work seems to erode with time: the cooked meals get eaten, the cleaned room soon needs to be cleaned again, and the children grow up. In terms of erosion, the difference between "reading time" and other time may not be as large for the women as it would be for the men. Only if the men were to fall ill and have to stay in bed, would they consider increasing their reading more than today. Thus, for the men, reading a lot entails a certain degree of losing control over the physical world.

Moreover, the issue of erosion and memory could be one key to the various ways that men and women read. The women read swiftly and more intensely, using their short-term memory; they rush carelessly through the names of the characters, rarely learning them by heart, and they forget the events and stories. Men's interest in reading and television revolves around keeping themselves informed about sports events, results, news, etc. And as for fiction, the men read much more slowly, and what they read, they tend to remember more. Those events that are played out in fiction are not exactly of such nature that they must keep themselves informed or aware of. And they are rarely such occurrences that must be handled with long-term memory. If the men's minds are not given any perceived challenge, they seem to lose concentration and focus; their eyes read, but their minds wander astray.

## Reflection

My greatest learning from meeting the Monday gang is that well-accustomed and little accustomed readers often live side by side. Love and marriage do not necessarily consider whether both parties share the same reading interest. Moreover, the conditions for reading within marriage are subjected to a tacit agreement about when, where and how they can practice reading. In what situations is it reasonable to read books? Is it OK to have the bedside lamp on for reading when the partner or spouse wants to sleep? Is it possible to decide on TV-free nights? Is it a matter of course to share one's reading with each other, or not? Those kinds of decisions are taken within the relationship as a whole. Often the individual differences emerge in the relationship, and one understands oneself in relation to one's partner's values and practices. Compare, for instance, the dialogue between married couple Km and H:

H: You have patience, I do not have patience. I believe that is the same thing with books and so on. OK, I can read for a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, but you could read damn well for hours!

Km:- Oh yes!

[...]

H: - I could never go and sit down, as she does, in the armchair over there and read a book.

Km: - Oh, I sit so well there. With the blanket and...

H: - There are way too many things to do around here...

Km: - But I do not have those demands, and I think I can allow myself that..

Why shouldn't I?, I say. Something like that. [She laughs and he does too, but shakes his head at the same time.] But I don't work full-time either, I only work half-time. So I have the time to do such things. [---]

H: - And I never complain. It is just nice when she...

This couple emphasizes the value of getting to pursue individual interests even within marriage. The husband mentions that he has been practising soccer several times a week and he is grateful that his wife never once commented that he has been away a lot. It is not only about acknowledging differences, but accepting them. No one should have to experience being not accepted or harassed at home for one's interests, whether it concerns reading or something else.

Another reflection concerns the fact that there seem to be no solid boundaries between reading and non-reading. Somebody who has trouble concentrating when reading some books may read others without difficulty. Those who have hardly ever read can suddenly read a whole book with pleasure. If we acknowledge that book-reading is not static, but dynamic and shifting, then it would be easier for people to both start reading books and lay them aside if they do not suit them. And here the well-accustomed readers and their values and attitudes play an important part; they could facilitate for those who have not made their own way to books.

Together the spouses develop a shared set of values that are probably transferred to the next generation. Here I think of the woman A-G who felt that she and her husband had been bad parents that summer they had allowed themselves to become engrossed in reading. It was a rare occasion that she seems to recall with a certain degree of guilt. A little later, the same woman says none of her grown children read books, although she read much to them when they were young.

### Local Consumer Culture

Both married couples and circles of friends belong to a larger social context with different thoughts and values about which practices are desirable or not. In the Monday gang, the readers state, not without pride, that they come across books cheaply. Buying novels, children's books and magazines on the second-hand market is great; then you can buy even more. "They're not exactly disposable goods [*engångsvara*], books" (Km).

The fact that the book is not fresh from the printers' does not matter to some consumers, on the contrary (Schultz Nybacka 2005; Borgerson & Schroeder 2006). "Wonder who has read this book before? That is how I think." (Km) For this woman, who renders a "historian's tale" in her love for connecting to the past (Maclaran & Masterson 2006), a book can gain greater value if the former owner has left a scribbled note of some sort: "To Lisa on Christmas Eve"... Because the book has belonged to someone before, the reader becomes an integral part of a social context, a circuit of readers. In the anonymous plethora of second-hand books, one book suddenly appears with a unique, personal history. And in the book dwells another person with a unique, personal reading experience: "Wonder what Lisa thought of this book?" (Km) A book with coffee stains gets a value of affection that cannot be measured in money. In the Monday group context, buying books cheaply in second-hand bookshops and flea markets is nothing one has to hide from the neighbours. It is neither stingy behaviour nor necessary; it is simply both a little honourable and exciting. (Schultz Nybacka 2005)

I told the Monday gang about an article I read in the local newspaper that described people from Borås as having... hm... let us say, a well-developed 'sense of economy'. And when I asked them if they have a high awareness of and sensitivity to prices, they answered straightaway that yes, they have. That is the local market stall mind-set [*Knallementaliteten*], they say. The Borås area is cheap, compared to national levels. And according to Statistics Sweden (2005: 351f), the mean income is lower than in Sweden at large.<sup>155</sup> My impression was that it

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<sup>155</sup> In the Borås area, the mean income from employment and business is SEK 192 321 (226 029 for men and 161 399 for women), compared with SEK 240 633 in Stockholm (287 171 for men

is somewhat of a social virtue to get away with a low price; it is important information that should be shared with others. Like a social variant of the tactical consumer that De Certeau (1988/1984) described, they give each other a tip on where to shop and they value those who reject high prices for the benefit of all. Those who have large numbers of books are generous with their treasures: lending and exchanging what they own, or giving up what they do not want to keep. In that way they also attend to other people's access to books and their possibilities for reading. Hence, it is not a kind of economic sense or price sensitivity in an ordinary, simplistic sense as these words and concepts do not capture the social dimension and processes around price awareness. Instead of price sensitivity, perhaps we should speak of *price sociability*?<sup>156</sup>

## Afterword

When I reunited with the Monday gang for the second time, I asked them what has happened in the year that passed. "I read a book in Tunis", L confesses at once, and the gang gets a good laugh: "Hallelujah!" "And I finished my book about Tiger Woods", O states. "Well done, O!" a woman cheers on. "It is a large book with pictures", O explains apologetically. "Will you become a better player?" asks one man, I think it is H. "No, but... perhaps I read better?" O smiles.

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and 197 398 for women) and Sweden at large: SEK 203 257 (240 863 for men and 167 346 for women). (Statistics Sweden 2005: 351f)

<sup>156</sup> In the Swedish report, instead of price sensitivity [*priskänslighet*], I suggested the concept of '*prisivänlighet*' – approx. 'price friendliness' – that perhaps is closer to the heart of the matter.

# XI. The Sound of a Book: the Case of Audio Book Listening

*Our eyes are made for beholding and reflecting the beauty of nature,  
not for being worn out by reading of small print*

Octave Uzanne (1894)

*The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas  
for my body has not the same idea I do.*

Roland Barthes (1973)

## Introduction

Ever since people took up silent reading, book reading has been primarily visual and considered to be an abstract and reclusive affair. Besides the numerous types of print that could pass for going under the name of “book”, the VAT reform also encompassed the audio book – a book with a long prehistory of storytelling and “oral literature”. The only condition was that the audio book should not be an abridged version but contain the very same text as the printed book.<sup>157</sup> And yet, the audio book introduces into the world a difference in kind that have bearings upon reading practices. This strange phenomenon offers us a view to providing insight into the boundaries of books and reading. New practices and experiences are introduced; the space and place for reading are reformulated. The audio book can challenge or defy visual culture, including literacy, even blindness.

Thomas Alva Edison, who invented the phonograph, was a keen spokesman for recordings of books. Indeed, he held that the recorded sound would be more important than the printed word; the basic assumption was that human voice would be distributed directly, without the bypass of reading. Indeed, the phonographic cylinders would “speak for themselves” in Edison’s words (1878 in Camlot 2004). Thus the phonograph operated within the same tradition of

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<sup>157</sup> Shokoff (2004) also discusses the issue of abridgment for in the US, (unlike in Sweden, I shall add), audio books are almost with no exception an adapted form of text, and Shokoff holds it is sometimes for the good and sometimes for the bad.



the ancient Greeks who had envisioned reading aloud from scripted objects as bringing forth the writer's presence and fame through the voice of the obliging reader (see Chapter VI). The reader-listeners in the 19<sup>th</sup> century expected the author's true voice to render a presence and convey an immediate and participatory experience of reading. At the time, the phonograph was less understood as mediation, but more as a *repository* for nature's voice. (Camlot 2004) On top of being a repository for individual character and presence, the audio book was believed to be a 'time-capturing device'. Edison expounded upon its foremost value:

The advantages of (talking) books over those printed are too readily seen to need mention. Such books would be listened to where now none are read. They would preserve more than the mental emanations of the brain of the author; and, as bequest to future generations, they would be unequalled. (1878 in Camlot 2004)

Edison's understanding of bequest, however, was richer than Van Der Ploeg's (2004) definition of bequest value in the case of books. The phonograph would expand the reader's territory, and it was even deemed superior to the photograph because it could encompass longer moments of time. Its promise lay not in just remembering, but in the possibility of reliving the moments passed.<sup>158</sup>

At the time however, the question of the audio book as complement versus replacement was not easily settled. French author and bibliophile Octave Uzanne (1956/1894) speculated around the future of the book in his essay, "The death of books". Uzanne held that books are haunted by their (over)production: "Do you not realize, that already this flood of books must drown them. After us, book death." (Ibid. 41) The art of print had reached its peak of perfection and completion, he brooded, and thus, the phonograph would replace it.

Drawing upon observations of 20th century development, Walter J. Ong (1990/1982: 157) claims that the electronic technologies are not a threat to books. On the contrary, they contribute to the production of more books, which Ong does not seem to mind. Technological devices such as the telephone, radio, television and a variety of audiotapes are part of what Ong terms the age of secondary orality. This new orality also brings a participatory logic in its way of evoking a sense of community, presence and the use of formulas. But

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<sup>158</sup> James Camlot (2004) argues that the idea of the book as a fully-fledged entity is far removed from the early recordings' that contained an array of literary "scraps, gems, portions and pieces" - mixes of both high and low literature. They were recorded on cylinders and there was room for storing up to eighty-four cylinders in the phonograph's drawers. Indeed, the early recordings display great affinities with the printed books that were compilations of short texts for purposes of oral recitation. Both types of books "talk" in ways that are influenced by technology, culture and history. In other words, the relationship between recorded and printed books could be understood as complementary. Thus, it was not a matter of either this or that, but the audience was both "reading and listening".

the production, care and use of the electronic equipment is actually based upon writing and print, and thus this type of orality is more deliberate and self-conscious.

James Shokoff (2001) suggests that the relationship between the printed book and the audio book (or books on tape, as he synonymously refers to it) is best understood as that between print and film. First of all, audio book reading is performed by an actor, and the manner and mode of voice, interpretation, timing and production will determine the quality and value of the audio book.

Although books on tape continue to have umbilical and genetic connections to their print sources, they are ultimately born into the world as separate and distinct shapes from their parents. Like the rest of us former embryos, they deserve to be judged for what they are in and of themselves. (Ibid. 179)

An audio book is not a printed book. We do not expect grapefruits to taste like oranges and do not find fault with them when they do not, however much we might prefer oranges. (Ibid. 178)

Jerry Määttä (2009) approaches the audio book as a new product on the book market, while reflecting on the experience of listening, revolving around the sense of “paradoxical freedom” when one no longer determines one’s own reading in terms of interpretation and tempo. Indeed, the audio book has also brought forth its critics; Catharina Ek (2009) observes how the reader no longer has interpretive precedence with the audio book, but is exposed to continuous sensations and shocks from the outside. Määttä (2009) notes how disturbing mistakes are, for example in pronunciation, and refers to the various demands raised for increasing quality control by means of “proof-listening”. Shokoff (2001) in turn, hopes that the days of viewing the audio book as a mere derivative; surfing on the wave of the printed book, are numbered, and that a quixotic publisher soon will venture into original audio books.

### The Audio Book in Sweden

In Sweden, the first title published and produced as an audio book was Dagmar Enquist’s *Musik i Mörker*, performed by the author herself on twenty-four gramophone records and introduced in 1952. The first organization to specialize in audio books was owned by The Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired (*Synskadades Riksförbund*, SRF) and established in 1985, SRF Tal & Punkt AB, which changed its name to SRF Iris Kassettbok the following year. Their product is known under the name of “speech book” [*talbok*] and production was granted as an exception to the copyright laws, and it was not to be sold on the regular market but distributed freely through libraries. Access is only granted by presenting legitimate evidence of authorization.

Eventually, Iris Kassettbokförlag expanded and turned to serving the general market. The bookshops were slow to jump on the bandwagon, so CEO Christina Andersson started a book club. The first member recruitment campaign

was launched in 1992 and immediately gave 7, 000 members. The audio book was not fully appropriated by the traditional book business until 1999, when the Bonnier Group bought seventy percent of the shares in the audio book club Lyssnarklubben. Iris Kassettbokförlag promptly changed its name to Bonnier Audio. The remaining shares belonged to SRF, making the owners an odd couple in the tradition-bound publishing industry.

Upon the question of what makes the audio book a book, Christina Andersson (who incidentally became the first CEO of Bonnier Audio) explained (9 May 2003):

Because our consumers judge this to be a book, it is experienced as a book, and one has started here, and it is the author's literary creation that we work with. We kind of have to accept that we are primarily within the publishing company. Then that does not mean that we cannot find our way out to different distribution channels. But if we now agree kind of that this is a publishing product, content-wise...

There are limits however, to what type of content the audio book can encompass. From experience, Andersson gives a prime example of a genre that is impossible as an audio book: the classic Russian novel, long and complicated and with a myriad of characters that all go under several names.

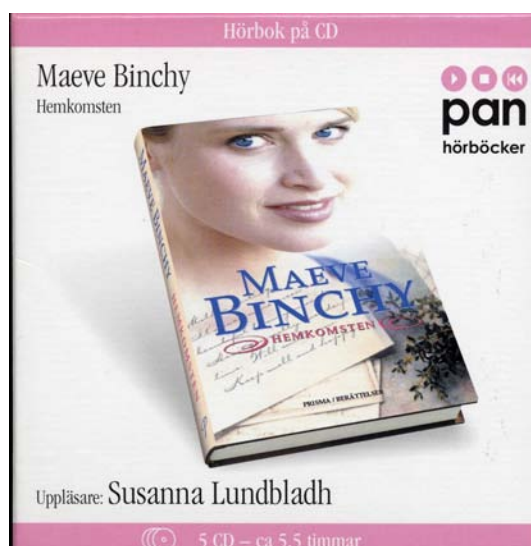
The visual presentation of the audio book has been a challenge following the technological changes from tape to CD. The content needed an appropriate book package. Sony DADC representative Ludvig von Bahr gathered together representatives from the leading actors within the Swedish audio book trade: Bonnier Audio, PAN Hörböcker, Piratförlaget, and Talande Böcker set out together to develop a new standard for Compact Disc audio books.<sup>159</sup> It was an attempt to create a new, attractive identity for the audio book and communicate it to the public. The new standard package consists of a box made of paper and conveys the message that the new audio book is different from the old audio cassette book on tape [*kassettbok*], and yet distinguished from the music CD. (Von Bahr, Sony DADC, interview 4 July 2003)

In 2002, the first year with the new VAT, the audio book publishing company PAN Hörböcker presented Maeve Binchy's novel *Hemkomsten* (*The Return Journey*, 1998) with a cover that would entice the prospecting reader (see below).

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<sup>159</sup> Regarding the naming of the audio book, there was a small trade controversy among the industry actors. Although they had all agreed upon "ljudbok", inspired by the Anglo-Saxon term "audio books". Svante Weyler, who was publisher at Norstedts at the time adopted the Germanic Hörbok (cf. German *Hörbuch*). A little note on the relative novelty of audio books: in 2005, my spell-check programme could not recognize the Swedish word *ljudbok* and suggested *ljudboj* – 'audio buoy' – instead!

Figure 2. This is not a CD



Reminiscent of how René Magritte's painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* challenged our perception and our way of thinking around representation, this cover seeks to represent Binchy's book as a CD book that is really not a CD but rather contains a "proper" printed book. Indeed, the audio book effectively "booked" the original hardback. Presenting the CD book as a package for the "real" book was a step towards making it a book in its own right.

In hindsight, Stefan Skog, who was Head of PAN Hörböcker, is quite embarrassed by the way they presented Binchy's book. Another beginner's mistake was to let the audio books on CD roll without a stop; they had to introduce separate tracks so as to alleviate for readers tracking where they had last finished listening (Interview, 2003). Today the publishers occasionally enclose a printed sheet with information difficult to convey with an audio book: glossaries, recipes, etc., especially in the case of non-fiction. (Määttä 2009)

The audio book was established on the market rather quickly. The Publishers' Association statistics are only available from 2002 but show a more than quadrupled (4.3) increase in title output up to 2008. It is expected that the lion's share of these titles are fiction.

Table 7. Audio book statistics 2002–2008 (Swedish Publishers' Association, Industry statistics 2008)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
New titles (No.)	82	109	168	190	264	344	354
Sales of new titles (M. SEK)	55,7	53,2	70,7	112,4	133,8	138	134,4
Total sales (M. SEK)	76,0	79,0	96,4	154,5	185,2	195,8	183,9

Sales have more than doubled (2.4) in that period of time. The greatest leap in sales was between the years 2004–2005, around the same time my empirical study was carried out. Towards 2008 sales fell back, probably due to increased filesharing on the Internet. (SvF, 2008) Based on the types of books that are fileshared most, ranging from titles of J.K. Rowling, through Stephen King to Stephenie Meyer, Määttä (2009) presumes the audience consists of teenagers with relatively small income and purchasing power.<sup>160</sup>

### Selection

As previously mentioned, I did not have access to an existent group of people. I decided therefore to turn to one of the audio book clubs for help in finding highly involved audio-book listeners. It was only natural that I turned to Bonnier Audio/Lyssnarklubben as I had previously made interviews with Jesper Monthán, who was then CEO, in connection with another project. Lyssnarklubben was the first of its kind and by 2004 when my empirical study was conducted, it was by far the largest; the number of members amounted to around 70,000. (Schmidt 2004)

After discussing several alternatives for the selection of town, my choice fell on Örebro because allegedly, it is the most average town in the whole of Sweden. Monthán provided me with a list of around thirty names of book club members living in the Örebro area and who had been members for two years and already consented to being contacted for the study. I picked a weekend with the opportunity for two group meetings (Friday and Saturday) and I booked meeting venues in cooperation with the Citizens' Office (*Örebro Medborgarkontor*) and the City Library and arranged for the highly important coffee [*fika*] to be served.

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<sup>160</sup> Though in Stephenie Meyer's case, her logic of authorship entails selling, giving and sharing in response to her fans at the literary market (Schultz Nybacka, forthcoming 2011).

I then contacted the members on the phone and invited them to whichever meeting would suit them best. The response was very good, the tone pleasant, and there was no difficulty in enticing them to join. Unfortunately, several people were either out of town or busy that weekend and a couple fell sick at the last minute. In the end, they were ten in total, and five people in each group, which rather qualifies as a “mini group” than a regular focus group. Apparently, mini groups are particularly suited for specialist perspectives. (Catterall & Maclaran 2006) Whether audio book consumers are to be termed specialists is, of course, debatable, but at least they had plenty of experience of reading/listening practice.

The Friday group interview went very well, the participants were open and the atmosphere was very good-spirited. This group consisted of people used to reading: one man, three women and a ten-year old boy who came along with his mother. After the meeting, they all said they had had a really good time together. The Saturday group comprised one man and three women and it worked very well too, although it was more difficult to get them going. It was more of a traditional focus group, perhaps because they had a somewhat less passionate relationship to listening/reading and books at large.

### Audio Book Buying and Reading Experiences

Several participants in both groups explained that they select new titles and authors with the help of the descriptions in *Lyssnarklubben's* membership magazine. One of them chooses titles depending on which actor reads the book; hence, this is a new way to broaden the selection. And it has happened that quite a few disliked a book solely due to the voice. A bad audio book is never a bad book, but it is the voice or interpretation that does not fit, the Friday group holds.

In general, they seem to think that *Lyssnarklubben* is quite expensive, although they confess to getting good value for money. They like shopping at the annual sale and then they stack up several titles. One man shops for books in an Internet bookstore and buys three or four audio books at a time. A woman in the Saturday group exchanges books with a colleague, so she never knows in advance what she is going to get. All the participants are glad that audio books are increasingly sold through the bookshops and the department stores. They would love to go somewhere and have a look at the books. The Friday group specifically just loves the atmosphere of a bookshop; the man think of it as a haven and one woman (B) finds it as peaceful as a church.

One woman tells that the costs for her reading increased after she started with audio books, since they are more expensive than other books. With the VAT reduction, things looked brighter.

Well I average between [SEK] six and eight hundred a month. [...] Books, they come in seasons, right. And of course I get considerably more for that money than I did two years ago. So it doesn't hurt me in the least. I am getting this one extra [book].

They think books should not cost more than SEK 200; one man says 220, to be able to buy one more or less spontaneously. And they find that audio books are really quite steep. In the Monday group, a woman explains how they solve the problem of access:

They go round. The speech books... The listener books [*lyssnarböckerna*] I think those have gone round to all my acquaintances. Colleagues at work and the family and... [...] But listener books, you still borrow them because you don't have so many of those.

As there is no abundance of audio books available to most readers, audio books circulate even more than other books. As for where the audio book groups store the books: the ones on CD are put next to the music CDs. One woman tells of an audio book in a different, taller box; it ended up among the DVDs.

The real bookworms in the Friday group seem to be enchanted to their senses by the materiality of the book. None of them value the audio books as much as reading a printed book. They all seem to be in a love affair with the printed book, with its body. How it feels like to hold, what it smells like when it is new, the feeling of opening up a new book... This type of love is not felt for the audio book.

They say the audio book experience does not generate as many images as reading does. They "see" the story before them more when they hold the printed book than when "just" listening. In contrast, Määttä (2009) holds the imagery is clearer with the audio book and stronger when he closes his eyes. I sent this topic further, to the Saturday group, and the response was different. They get as many images when they listen as when they read. More respondents thought the audio book was a complement of equal value to the printed book. One woman explains specifically that she usually has two books at a time, one printed and one audio.

Not surprisingly, it seems that it is the capacity for reading/listening while simultaneously doing something else that renders the audio book popular. Several of the respondents listen while doing their chores around the house: ironing, doing the dishes, etc. A few also like to listen in the car, although it varies from person to person whether they can concentrate on their driving. One woman says her husband completely loses track of the book when he drives.

A couple of people in the Friday group said they had come across the audio book in connection with developing problems with their eyesight. One woman, recently retired, had been injured in a car accident, which had caused her problems concentrating. It also affected her reading; the lines blurred and her thoughts wandered away all of a sudden. This was a matter of grief for her; she

had always enjoyed reading a lot and had read books during the course of her whole life. The audio books suit her well if she is up; otherwise she just falls asleep. Another woman had health problems resulting in impaired vision. One time at hospital, she was having trouble sleeping, and the nurses brought her audio books (*talböcker*, i.e. those meant for the blind) and encouraged her to listen; “maybe you can fall asleep to these...”

Most respondents avoid sitting or lying down when listening to the books, because they will fall asleep in no time. For some, however, this is the main advantage. To them it is peaceful to fall asleep to a pleasant voice; it appears that they experience a sense of being enveloped, a kind of embraced space between dream and wakefulness. The woman whom I interviewed for reading e-books also tells me that she has acquired a flat loudspeaker that she lays under her pillow. In that way, she can lie on one side and listen without disturbing her husband who sleeps right next to her. With headphones, she would have to lie on her back and she does not like that.

In the Friday group, a woman who suffers from sleeping problems tells us that she and her ten-year old son (who was also present) listen together to the same tape and fall asleep with the headphones on. She wakes up a little when the tape changes side, but often the tape just rolls and turns a number of times before she wakes again and turns it off. Falling asleep entails a bit of a problem, however, because there is no way of tracking where on the tape they listened last. They must rewind and fast-forward many times and it can be difficult to know what they have heard before and not.

Those who listen to CDs find this less troublesome because the audio books have tracks. The tracks, however, do not correspond to the books' divisions into chapters or sections and that renders it difficult to find the right place. Furthermore, one woman tells us she had introduced her parents to an audio book on CD, Fritiof Nilsson Piraten's *Bock i örtagård*, but they had not taken to it at all. It was terribly difficult to follow, they thought. Afterwards, it became clear that they had had the random player function that shuffled around all the chapters!

### Wearing a Book

It seems that all participants listen to audio books using headphones. This is interesting because the audio book has retained some sort of connection to the body; it latches itself onto the outside through the headphones that enclose the ears. The machine itself is fastened somewhere in their clothes.

Several of the audio book readers go out for long walks with a book in their ears. The Saturday group relates that there are disturbances in the headphones when they pass someone with a cordless phone or mobile. One woman has specifically picked out places for walking where there are few disturbances. She



says that when she is going out for a long walk, “then I wear a book”. She realized it was a funny way to put it and we all had a good laugh. “Well, that’s what you do!” a woman exclaims.

Uzanne’s (1956/1894: 35, my transl.) satirical account of the phonograph’s benefits once read:

Listeners will not feel the loss of the times when one called them readers; their clear gaze; their sound skin and cheerful spirits show plainly how beneficial it is with a reading-free life.

Something that many people value particularly is that with audio books one can “read” while the body is in motion. Even people in the other interview groups have mentioned audio books as part of their reading practices. One of those who participated in the pilot study for the experimental workshop, a man who rarely reads printed books, tells us that he has discovered audio books rather recently. Specifically, he is one of those who grasped the opportunity to exercise while listening to crime fiction in his headphones.

I borrowed some tape books [*bandböcker*] before and listened while I was out walking... and that was really ... that was top-notch! Though that depends specifically on who does the reading. But it was really kind of... [wonderful] Because I had decided that I would only get to listen to it while I was out walking to start getting fit, and I was able to be out walking for almost six hours! [Laughs]

There seems to be something about the audio book that not only emancipates the body but can also entice it into movement – possibly the free oral flow of words that inspires moving about. Also brought to mind is De Certeau (1988/1984: 170) and his thoughts about the reader as a traveller who moves across grounds that belong to someone else. He emphasizes that the reader’s creativity grows when the institutions that control reading lose in power. The audio book has liberated the reader’s body from the printed book and “the travelling eye” that has now left the text is allowed to move freely across the fields. According to some audio book readers, this appears to be a lively spring pasture for those who previously felt tied to the box. But perhaps it is also a flight from other consequences and limitations of the audio book?

A woman who is a member of the book circle in Lund reflects on the experience of reading/listening and the role of the reader who performs the audio book:

But we have never had an audio book in the circle... [No... the other members agree.] Shouldn’t we really..? Because I like to listen, it *gives* a dimension, but it also *takes* a dimension, I think. Last time I listened was - it was Selma Lagerlöf’s *Gösta Berlings saga* and Per Myrberg did the reading. And that is really fantastic! He is really... Wonderful voice and you kind of get to see the whole... He really describes it... But then again it is kind of his interpretation. So if we were to take a book here and get Per Myrberg to read, then we would all have been interpreted... Do you see what I mean? But if you read, then you leave the whole

field free, one is untied in another way. You've kind of penned yourself [*fållat in sig*], in a positive way many times, but you're still confined.

While the mind is in a pen, perhaps the audio book reader is roaming long distances now and then because the freedom of the body is the only real freedom given. Määttä (2009) observes how the audio book experience becomes imprinted on the terrain; he explores new paths in his long walks, because those he has tread many times are already filled with layers of contradictory memories.

Another image: consider De Certeau's (1988/1984: xxi) image of the reader as a temporary tenant. With the audio book, the listener finds that she or he has company: the actor-reader. It is either a delightful experience or completely unbearable. If the voice is sympathetic and pleasant, the listener will happily move into the apartment – or the pen! – and share the available space between the two of them. But if the voice is demanding or intolerable in another way, the listener will shut the door and throw away the key. In those cases, the printed book may prove more habitable. One of the audio book listeners said he had stopped listening to the audio book and was able to read the printed book with great results.

De Certeau (1988/1984: 174) holds that the written word accumulates, stores and offers resistance to time by setting up a place, and multiplies and spreads by reproduction. Then, like reading, listening cannot counter the erosion of time. One both forgets oneself and what one has read. One can neither own nor keep it. With the audio book, it is even more difficult, because there is no accumulated writing to behold. Hence, the audio book can make one lose one's foothold altogether. One man from the Monday gang said:

No, it didn't work for me. No. I don't know, I am kind of a bit unconcentrated and when I put on the stereo the second time I had no idea of what I had heard before.

The work does not let itself be surveyed, but is only actualized in real time. There is nothing to grasp hold of, nothing to cling to, and therefore the audio book can become completely incomprehensible. It is like cross-country running on the plains without a map and with a magnifier instead of binoculars; no checkpoint in sight, only vast areas that you can behold through a small hole, the condensed moment. The listener would need a map of the literary work with some landmarks regarding characters, events and places for better orientation and finding their own entries and directions in the text. Ong (1990/1982: 163) refers to Horatio's poetics and holds that the epic artist, or in this case, the oral narrator should begin *in medias res*, and the listener will find himself or herself at the heart of the situation. By extension, this calls for a new aesthetics for the audio book, one that takes orality as its point of departure. It remains to be seen whether audio books will ever appear as original publishing products and not just as reproductions.

## Afterword

A few years later, in 2008, CD books are commonplace and audio books are also widely available digitally, for example in the MP3 format. Digitalized audio books have been available for downloading from the Internet website *Pirate Bay* to the dismay and horror of many publishers. Indeed, when the new IPRED legislation was launched in May 2009, the Publishers' Association was the first organization to file a complaint against suspected audio book pirates.

By then *Bonnier Audio* had already launched a low-price edition of audio books – audio paperback [*ljudpocket*]. Previously, low-price alternatives had been reserved for print only. In the advertisement, the CEO Jonas Byström explains, “An audio pocket book is a CD book in a new, simpler package at a low price. [...] The titles that are published as audio pocket books are strong titles that at least twelve months earlier have been published in a traditional CD edition.”<sup>161</sup> Thus, this addition to the book family is surfing the wave of the audio book, which in turn is surfing the wave of the printed book (Cf. Shokoff 2001).

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<sup>161</sup> Advertisement in *SvB*, nr. 10, 2008.

## XII. Ploughing, Rushing and Raging: Reading Harlequin Romances

### Introduction

The romance genre can be seen as a challenge to any pre-conceived characterizations of the book. Lewis Hyde (1978) once argued that romantic novels are simple commodities, as they are based on specific production formulas regarding the novels' length (192 p.), the heroines' age and marital status, etc. Hyde is especially critical that the concept was developed as a result of market research conducted by an advertising agency. They are not works of art, Hyde holds, as they are not expressions of an artist's gift to the world. Along the same lines, novelist and writer Daniel Pennac (cf. 1995/1992: 173) would speak of "industrial literature"; and organization scholars Coser, Kadushin & Powell (1982) even term them 'non-books'.

In cultural economic terms, each new book is unique and constitutes a product in its own right. Each author can carve out a niche of his or her own, which undermines the prevalent idea of a competitive book market where books function as substitutes for each other. (Van der Ploeg 2004:12) In contrast, the mass-market romance does not operate at the level of individual titles. Instead, it is a matter of incorporating each book in a predefined, commercial concept. The primary bait for the reader is not the author's name. The author is subsumed into a global network of (English-speaking) writers within the frame of the publishing company brand name (Cf. Hemmungs Wirtén 1998). A characteristic of the mass paperback field is that it holds very few publishers. (Des-sauer 1998: 71)

A sociologist of literature, Escarpit (1970), distinguished between the popular and the educated circulation of books. In brief, the popular circulation allegedly encompassed the mass market books produced and its distribution channels, whereas the educated channels embraced the literature published for the sake of a more exclusive group of readers and critics – books that would flow through specialized, literary media and distribution channels such as book shops, etc.

Such simple demarcations cannot be easily perceived on the book market of today. The literary circuit model has been described as outdated and criticized by for its lack of universal relevance (Hertel 1997). It is also quite problematic to speak of “mass”, which calls forth an image of readers as a faceless collective. Also, as Dessauer (1998: 32) points out, to call a US paperback edition of 100,000 copies a “mass-market” commodity may be justified if compared to a hard-back cover edition, but if held in relation to the potential market, the concept of the “mass-market book” appears more like fiction.

Yet, the fact remains that the production and distribution of the romance novel is distinctive: the books are not for sale in bookshops, but can be bought by means of a membership in a book club; or like many other paperback books: in supermarkets and stores, corner shops and petrol stations. Perhaps one can characterize romance novels as emerging between books and magazines. They are published in a planned format in different genres at an even pace and at a fixed price. They are also directed at a specified market segment. With the Harlequin Publishing Group, (belonging to the leading Romance company in the world, Canada-based Torstar) membership resembles a regular subscription on a magazine. As the choice of genre is already made beforehand, there is no need for glossy membership magazines or particular “Book-of-the-Month” offers that are sold according to the principle of negative option (cf. Radway 1997; Steiner 2006). And unlike trade paperbacks, the Harlequin novels only have an expected lifetime of around two months.<sup>162</sup>

Given these differences from the traditional book sector, it is interesting to explore the acquisition of books and the practice of reading among loyal subscribers and readers of Harlequin books. Famously, Janice Radway (1991/1984) has conducted a widely acknowledged study of romance readers around the central figure Dot, selling romance novels in a store in the American mid-west, though her study did not encompass individual subscribers. The prospects for the mass-market paperback seemed really bright towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And yet, recent research suggests that even romance reading has declined in comparison to other literary genres. In the mid-1990s, the category of romantic fiction was the most consistently represented on bestseller lists, whereas a decade later it has practically disappeared – a decline that can also be discerned in library lending (Feather & Woodbridge 2007: 214). Knulst & Van den Broek (2003) explains this development as a consequence of a diminishing, ageing group of readers; the re-growth has not been sufficiently high.

## Romance Output

Although romance reading appears to be declining, the reach and range of romance output is increasing. Starting in 1992, the Romance Writers of America

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<sup>162</sup> Ewa Högberg, Harlequin, Harlequin presentation, 13 February 2009.

(RWA) have assembled figures on the romance industry. Measuring what titles count as romance novels is not easy, as the genres are becoming increasingly diverse, formats are listed differently and authors' career into general publishing. The first years only include those new titles that were marketed as romance novels. With the increasing "marketing genius" of crossover genres, statistics are not getting any easier, says the struggling editor Libby Hall. (ROMstat 2001) Since 2005, the RWA has had to rely on a different set of data, so the measurement is not fully comparable over the years. Nevertheless, the figures show an increase in output; for example in 2007, new titles went up by 25% (ROMStat 2007). The most popular categories of romance novels over the years are in the following order: series romances, historical and contemporary fiction and paranormal. (ROMStat 2006)

Table 8. US Romance market sales and title output 1999-2008 (Source: RWA statistics ROMStat 1999 - 2008)<sup>163</sup>

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
US sales (B \$)	1.23	1.37	1.52	1.63	1.41	1.2	1.4	1.37	1.375	1.37
New titles	2,523	2,289	2,143	2,169	2,093	2,285	5,994	6,400	8,090	7,311

In 2004, which was the year of my empirical study, the aggregated industry figures from North America show that the total romance output amounted to 2,285 titles (198 titles more than the previous year), generating 1.2 billion US dollars in total. Only religious literature/'inspirational', with sales reaching 1.68 billion dollars, top the romance genre in the US. (RWA statistics 2006)<sup>164</sup> The numbers of romance titles have risen by as much as 684 titles since 1992, when the RWA conducted the first survey and 1,601 titles were released (Hemmungs-Wirtén 1998: 69). The subgenre of historical fiction had decreased since 2003, but just by two titles. The other subgenres, "contemporaries", "inspirational" and "paranormals" increased. (RWA 2005)<sup>165</sup> New series are also added, thereby helping to increase the total number of titles.

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<sup>163</sup> In ROMStat 2003 here seems to be some confusion regarding the figures for the years 2001-2003. Here the numbers are 2001: 2,289; 2002: 2,143; and 2003: 2169. I have cross-checked these figures against each annual report and found that the ROMStat 2003 figures are not correct; there seems to have been some sort of slippage in the order.

<sup>164</sup> Inspirational are, according to the RWA, "[R]omance novels in which religious or spiritual beliefs (in the context of any religion or spiritual belief system) are a major part of the romantic relationship". ([http://www.rwa.org/cs/romance\\_literature\\_subgenres](http://www.rwa.org/cs/romance_literature_subgenres), accessed 2010-09-27)

<sup>165</sup> See the industry figures at Romance Writers of America at [http://www.rwanational.org/statistics/industry\\_stats.htm](http://www.rwanational.org/statistics/industry_stats.htm)

Of the 2,285 titles released in North America 2004, 1,117 titles were published by Torstar, the world's leading romantic fiction company with publishing houses such as Harlequin, Mills and Boon, MIRA, Silhouette, Steeple Hill. (RWA 2005) At that time, Harlequin books were sold across 109 different countries, greatly due to further penetration into the already-served languages. Harlequin had around 1300 active authors living all around the world. Torstar's total output was just close to 50% of the total market, which is exactly the same share as Eva Hemmungs Wirtén (1998: 69) noted already in 1995. Kensington, the second largest publisher, released 195 titles in 2004 – around thirty more than the year before, but nearly sixty titles less than in 1995. (Cf. Hemmungs Wirtén 1998: 69) Hence, although the cake of romantic fiction may have grown larger and the market leaders' bite is the same, relatively seen, the competitors seem to have lost ground.<sup>166</sup>

### Harlequin in the Nordic Countries

The Harlequin Stockholm office was set up by Staffan Vennberg in 1979 with some financial support from the Canada head office. It was called Harlekin (with a k) up until the 1990s, when the CEO Ulf Winberg aligned the brand with its original roots. Since 1999, they have supplied the whole of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland with books. The editors at the Stockholm office single out the books most suitable for the Nordic market. The Swedish market is divided into two separate divisions: retailing and the book club. In 2003, when my interview study was prepared, 216,000 people in Sweden regularly read Harlequin books.<sup>167</sup>

Anette Ekström, Managing Director of Förlaget Harlequin AB, claims that sales were more or less constant in the years 2000-2004. Allegedly, they did not advertise the VAT reduction on their books “until a couple of months too late”, and they have not observed any change in sales, although it is difficult to say what the sales would have been without the reform. Ekström does not believe that their loyal readers react to the reduction, whereas spontaneous book buyers could be affected by a lower price. In any case, she says Harlequin does not want a change in the wrong direction, i.e. an increase. The factors that directly influence sales levels are competition at the market and the change in readers' purchasing behaviour.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Indeed, in 2005, the list of competitors had changed. Harlequin topped the list with \$418 million dollars; then followed a range of general publishers that also want a taste of the market: 2) Random House (\$81 million); 3) Penguin Group (\$71 million); 4) HarperCollins (64.8 million), and lastly, falling back in ranking is the romance publisher 5) Kensington (\$37 million). (RWA statistics 2006)

<sup>167</sup> Information given by Ia Kindblom, Swedish Harlequin Office in 2003.

<sup>168</sup> Anette Ekström, Managing Director (E-mail, 20 December 2004).

In the years that followed, the turnover, profit,<sup>169</sup> and title output<sup>170</sup> have only increased:

Table 9 Förlaget Harlequin AB: turnover, result, profit margin and title output (sources: Ewa Högberg 2009; [www.allabolag.se](http://www.allabolag.se), accessed 1 Feb 2009, 22 Oct 2010)

	December 2005	December 2006	December 2007	December 2008
Net turnover (T SEK)	116 150	127 637	147 378	151 906
Turnover change (%)	3,83 %	9,89 %	15,47 %	3,07 %
Årets resultat (T SEK)	11 490	15 581	22 047	21 951
Profit margin (%)	11,42 %	15,25 %	19,36 %	20,09 %
Total title output (No.)	*	800	*	1200

\* No information available

The Harlequin Stockholm office states that they have broadened the range of genres since around 2005, including cookbooks, conceptual books [*konceptböcker*], lifestyle magazines for young women and “everything within fiction”. The Stockholm office has been looking into further possibilities, such as digital books and “downloadables”.<sup>171</sup> And during this period, head-office Harlequin has set up sales of, for example, e-books, audio books and pop culture collectibles such as notebooks with noteworthy retro-style covers. Högberg says Harlequin Enterprises is still concerned that young people will not start reading books at all due to the competition from other media products. Moreover, they no longer have much purchasing power as they spend more and more money on their cell phones.<sup>172</sup>

Harlequin’s profitability is high compared to the traditional publishing industry. By contracting wholesale press distributors Tidsam, Högberg says they do not have to worry about returns and they can print their prices directly on the books – a practice not allowed for books distributed in bookshops.<sup>173</sup> If Harlequin were to use Förlagssystem as distributors, as many in the traditional book business do, they would no longer be profitable, says Högberg.<sup>174</sup> Their profit

<sup>169</sup> [www.allabolag.se](http://www.allabolag.se), search word ‘Förlaget Harlequin AB’, accessed 1 February 2009 and 22 October 2010.

<sup>170</sup> Högberg, 13 February 2009.

<sup>171</sup> “About Harlequin”, <<http://www.harlequin.se/index.php?id=4&L=0>>, accessed 13 September 2007.

<sup>172</sup> Högberg, 13 February 2009.

<sup>173</sup> Tidsam is a wholesale company dealing with newspapers and magazines since 1899. Their sales arguments are that newspapers and magazines are products with high net margins – allegedly up to three times that of ordinary supermarket products – and little retail risk.

<sup>174</sup> Högberg, 13 February 2009.



margin has increased since some years back, reaching a record 20 % in 2008,<sup>175</sup> the year when the infamous financial crisis erupted. Indeed, the US romance market came through the rough times better than general literature. (RWA ROMStat 2008) Clearly some readers still need to be romanced.

### On Romance Readers

Reading (fiction) is often perceived as a self-induced pleasure, almost autoerotic, belonging to the sphere of compensatory or predictable satisfactions. (Long 2004: 13) Specifically popular fiction has been in the line of fire for critics who regard it as inferior entertainment for inferior emotions. According to Lundqvist (1976 in Hansson 1988, my translation), popular fiction novels are based on “frustration and vulgarity, feelings of inferiority and need for compensation, of despair and desperate violence”.

The scholar Margaret Jensen (1984: 140ff) remarks that there are at least a dozen stereotypes of what people read romance novels and then at least a dozen more about why women read them. Several studies referred to by Jensen show that romance readers can be found among women of all ages and in all strata of society. In Jensen’s own study, the only common denominator was that they all identify themselves as readers. Reading is their favourite leisure activity, and thus they are not typical TV viewers. Harlequin books top their lists, on average up to fifteen, twenty books a month, but they also read a range of other types of genres. Jensen (Ibid. 160) does not rule out, however, that the Harlequin novels appeal to certain types of personality.

According to a previous study conducted by Harlequin, their circle of readers was twice as large as the number of buyers, as the books are lent to others to a great extent. It is also in this way, through more established readers, that new readers are introduced to the romance genre. Jensen speaks of a kind of “romance network” that crosses generational limits and includes grandmothers as well as aunts. The women interviewed by Jensen (1984) often exchanged books with each other but a large group of women also collect the romances. Access to books is given in a number of ways: through second-hand bookshops and libraries, depending on the level of interest and the overall situation of life.

Radway (1984) approached women’s romance reading within a matrix of capitalist mass-production and gave voice to the readers’ themselves who charge even a commodity like the romance novel with meaning. Their acts of reading were seen as supplementing women’s emotional needs, and thus a mild protest against the heterosexual, monogamous way of life and its constraints upon women. Jensen (1984: 147) observes that for the romance reader, Harlequin

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<sup>175</sup> [www.allabolag.se](http://www.allabolag.se), search word ‘Förlaget Harlequin AB’, accessed 1 February 2009 and 22 October 2010.

gives both education and entertainment, but above all, reading gives “time out, time for self”.

According to Long (2004: 13), those women who are suspected of reading in excess are often either spinsters, who do not partake in heterosexual, “normal” family life, or housewives reading romantic novels. Whereas the spinster’s reading is seen as a potentially harmless escape for her empty hours, there is a general, but deep concern over the housewife’s reading habits, because it is perceived as a threat to social structures that shape the foundations for our lives. The sheer thought that these women might not be satisfied inside the legitimate norms and structure of family life and the real world is a very unsettling one; hence, “female reading requires surveillance”.

Hansson (1988) points out that there is among critics a stereotype that popular romance novels render readers *passive* through their standardized formulas and their superficial content. Similarly, Long (2004) notes that healthy outdoor activities are often prescribed to ward off excessive reading. We can take this criticism of passivity with a pinch of salt if we with De Certeau (1988/1984: 167) understand that the ideology of “efficient production” actually brings along the notion of passive immobility in consumption.

We can also relate the anxiety over romance reading to the prevalent fear among critics that American popular culture is spreading over the world. (Cf. Miller 2000) However, Eva Hemmungs Wirtén (1998) observed in her study of Harlequin Stockholm how not even the standardized mass-market book can be transposed into other languages, into other cultures, without adaptation. There is always a process of translation and editing – indeed, “transediting” – that adapts the text to its cultural context. For example, sexual content is transedited rather extensively to hit the right chord with the local audience.

Critics of popular culture speak of this type of reading as a form of compensation, “escape” or “daydreaming” as a consequence of serious lacks or deficits in their everyday emotional life. (Cf. Lundqvist referred to in Hansson 1988) Jensen (1984) suggests describing romance reading with Erving Goffman’s concept of “removal activity”, which he coined as an expression for those tactical activities that inmates in institutions will resort to in order to forget or to make time pass. I do not really agree that this image is easily transposed onto the readers without risking the understanding of the specificity of reading.

The concept of removal is quite the opposite of the accumulative logic of cultural experiences (cf. Colbert in Wennes 2002). Moreover, reading adds a dimension to life; it cannot take away anything, in my opinion. And starting from De Certeau’s image of the reader as a poacher, I believe the romance reader will often read when the opportunity arises. In this respect, I side with Jensen when she gives prominence to the fact that Harlequin books, with their easy-to-read and fast-paced style, make it possible for women to read under conditions that

normally are not suitable for reading. I believe this is very important to understanding the near gravitational pull of the books.

## Selection

In order to find participants in my study, I turned to Harlequin's Stockholm office and Ia Kindblom. Kindblom gave me access to a list of names and addresses of people living in the county of Stockholm and that had been loyal members for a long time and made at least 200 purchases at Harlequin. As a general rule, one purchase corresponds to one book package. Persons who had asked Harlequin not to sell their addresses to a third party were excluded from the list for ethical reasons.

I first sent a letter that explained the purpose and the focus group design of the study to around twenty people in different parts of the county. A couple of weeks later, I called the recipients on the phone early in the evening. Unlike the members of Bonnier Audio/Lyssnarklubben, most Harlequin subscribers declined immediately. One young woman explained she was bound to a wheelchair and did not want to participate in a group. I suggested that we meet somewhere else at her call. She sounded hesitant and insecure. I did not want to push her anymore. A couple of members would be out of town on the proposed date. I decided to postpone the meeting for some weeks. That made no difference. I dropped the thought of a focus group and suggested individual interviews instead. All in all, only four people were positive to participating in the study. One woman had to cancel our meetings one time after another. In the end, I decided to settle for individual interviews with the three persons who had first accepted.

The three interviewees all lived in single-households in the Stockholm area, but displayed great differences in other respects:

☞ Woman, around thirty years old, grew up in Falun, high-school teacher, unmarried, no children

☞ Woman, around sixty years old, born and raised in Södermalm in Stockholm, retired by agreement, divorced with one grown-up daughter

☞ Man, around 85 years old, born and raised in Östermalm in Stockholm, retired Financial Director in a multinational medical company; divorced with one grown-up daughter.

The two women accepted to come to Stockholm University School of Business for the interview. The man had some trouble moving about in the city, so we met at the local restaurant in his area. All three interviews lasted for about three hours, which is nearly twice as long as in many other cases. The conversations revolved around the everyday and life at large, including many serious topics. On two occasions the interviewees started talking about death and about peo-

ple they knew who had just passed on. They were deeply moved and started crying during our talk and it was difficult for me to hold back my tears too. I have chosen to first give an account of their individual stories, one after another. Then I will highlight aspects that the three readers have in common, mainly on the topic of disposal, and that seem that be particularly distinguishing for the practice of high-consumption romance reading.

## Three Avid Harlequin Readers

### Anna

Anna is in her thirties and a high school teacher in math and Swedish. She grew up in the town Falun primarily together with her father and brother, who both enjoy reading. As a child she found her mother's Harlequin novels, but wasn't allowed to read them since she was too young, and her mother threw the Harlequin collection away. When she was a little older she found stacks of Harlequin novels in a secondhand bookshop in Borlänge. She and her brother returned to the store many times to fill up their book collections.

Anna estimates she started reading even more books since she began working. This was partly because she had a better income, and partly because her need to read books to relax from the pressures of everyday life is greater now than when she was a student. She started subscribing to the *Historic* series, but grew tired of them after a while. The stories were too similar and the cowboys and the aristocrats weren't that interesting to her anymore. She stopped reading the books she got in her mailbox. At the same time, she got an offer from Harlequin to subscribe to a different series. Now she goes for *Romance*, *Passion* and *Exclusive* – a considerable amount of books each month. Apart from these, she also reads the hospital series *Duett*, since they are “not *that* stereotypical”.

She buys *Duett* in grocery stores, usually in her local Vivo, since the department store Ähléns “for some strange reason” has taken the Harlequin books off the shelves. That became a bit of a nuisance she felt. “The more places there are to find them, the better”. The supply of Harlequin books directs her grocery shopping, since she wouldn't go to two different places for her regular shopping. This becomes a bit of a problem for Anna during her vacation, since there are no evident guidelines for where the Harlequin books can be bought. She could not imagine going to the local bookshop and asking for them, since she knows the sales person would say “we don't sell those books!!!”

The Harlequin novels she can read any time; other books she reads mostly during the school breaks, when she has enough time to read a book in one sitting. She tries to avoid reading on the commuter train, even though she al-

ways carries a book with her. She likes to read in bed, under the covers. It is her routine to read a bit every night, even when she gets home late. She unwinds by reading; it allows her to relax after a day at work.

Throughout the years, Anna has developed a speed-reading technique, where she no longer reads letter by letter, but words by words and longer and longer sequences. She is now an accomplished speed-reader; she finished the University Entrance Exam reading comprehension in a very short time. She estimates she has read about 75% of the page and still gets it. Perhaps not with non-fiction books; she is a bit slower then, but at least with fiction. If she buys ten books at the Gothenburg book fair, she would have read three before getting back to Stockholm.

Because of her line of work, she tries to follow the publishing of youth and children's books and buys at least one per year, often many more. She is also a member of the Ordfront book club, through the Ordfront association. She remarks with a smile that this club is "totally opposite" to the Harlequin club. "They publish those books that I lack, so to speak. A bit more fact...some reports." At the book fair she visits many publishers' stands, – she mentions the Alfabeta publishing company, – and browses through the books. She has quite a library at home: her five large bookcases are filled to the brim and in her basement she keeps some cardboard boxes filled with books. She has books for every taste and lets others enjoy and partake in her riches, as they choose.

I can almost do that, considering how many books I have, take out a book if someone comes in through the door and say: 'Yep, you wanted to read this kind of book. Here you are.' It happens that my sis' sometimes come to my place and say, 'Hi, I'd like this kind of book'. 'Aha, OK... sure! Here!'

She realizes she has to start clearing out and disposing of some books. She may consider throwing away the Harlequin novels, but not the rest; she does not throw away "fully functional" books. Probably she will take them to charity (The Salvation Army) [*Myrorna*]. Upon being asked what her reading of Harlequin novels will be like in five years' time, she replies that she will probably slow down a bit or at least start throwing away old ones. That goes along with her life situation; if she were to meet someone and have children, she would have less time to read.

Anna tells me that she likes buying a book as a present. For her father, she buys books (crime novels) that she wants to read herself; she kind of "feeds him with books". When he is done, she borrows them. She buys books for her 13-year old brother who would otherwise only read Donald Duck paperback comics. Regarding children, like her friend's daughter, she feels a responsibility that they should have access to books and reading.

I have more or less assumed the role that 'I am going to give her books'. Then I guess she may consider me boring... but kind of, in some way introduce that. Because I know her parents are not that great readers.

When asked about the consequences of the VAT reduction for her gift-giving practices, she says it has increased slightly: she is more inclined towards buying books than anything else. She thinks the price of paperbacks was rather high before the reduction: SEK 70-75 is close to a hundred, which is too expensive. She thinks SEK 55-60 is an OK price for the top price categories.

Anna is also part of a book circle together with colleagues at school and they meet twice a term. The school pays for the books, paperbacks only. Through the book circle, she gets to read books that someone else has selected, which is exciting. It is great fun to hear what the others think, that they all experience books so differently. She also observes that the book circle has created a better concord among the teachers and facilitated for new employees to become part of the gang.

As a Swedish teacher, she is very keen to encourage reading. Her experience is that interest in reading varies depending on whether the pupils belong to a theoretical or vocational programme. Boys need not be less inclined towards fiction; fantasy could be a great introduction to reading, if the book is not too thick. She would never force her pupils to read a certain genre; it is important they make their own choice.

I still think that... they are books. Then if it is fantasy, crime, fiction... it does not matter really. The main thing is to read, not really what one reads. Perhaps. Although it is good if one perhaps does not get stuck on the Bert books, but - those are books, too. And all books are kind of needed.

## Ulf

Ulf was born in 1919 and grew up in Östermalm, a well-to-do inner city area in Stockholm, where he has lived the greater part of his life. As a child, he was mainly into sports of all kinds, which occupied all his time. He remembers lying awake with a flashlight underneath the duvet, reading adventures about cowboys and Indians that he got as presents for his birthdays and name-days. He began his working life in the military, became an officer and studied simultaneously at Stockholm School of Economics. He apologizes for swearing, claiming it comes from the military. After graduation he worked with the import and export trade in Colombia for three years, until the country was placed under a moratorium (embargo).

Back home, Ulf became an administrative director in a Swedish medical company that eventually was merged into an international group. In time he was promoted to financial director with responsibility for all the subsidiaries in Europe and the US. He married for the first time when he was 48 years old and had one daughter, who was 36 years at the time of the interview. He says he would also like to have had a son. Ulf has had three wives and three divorces. He admits to being married a fourth time, to his job, which he regrets today.

Due to his splendid fitness from early years he has survived cancer of the throat and he lives with cancer of the bladder.

He does not know exactly when he started to subscribe to Harlequin; it was after his retirement in 1984/1985. Before that he did not have time for anything else than newspaper and non-fiction in connection with work. He started to read Harlequin thanks to his daughter. When she was little he used to buy girls' books in the bookshop as presents. Then she moved to France with her mother for some years:

I sent down books to her in France. Of this *type*. And then I started to read them myself. And now it is the reverse, so that now I have that selection. And C, she usually picks out some when she is here, at home. Of the monthly crop and selects some, if she has the *time*. Because she has got her ass full: four kids, could you imagine??

Ulf reads the books at the speed of a racer. In the fifties, he took a class in speed-reading, which helped him through University College, and since then he reads with great concentration while his eyes run diagonally across the pages.

And that means that I can read one of these... what is it called... maids' novels [*pigroman*] they were called... in no time, I nearly said. I *rage* through them. And yet I know what they contain.

I ask him whether he enjoys the upbeat tempo in the books because he can speed-read them and he replies that I might be right about that. He reads them to relax, and therefore he reads in the afternoons, evenings and before going to sleep. The mornings are dedicated to reading general and financial newspapers, and historical accounts. He reads the Harlequin novels until he falls asleep at night with his bedside lamp lit. Ulf emphasizes that he does not read Harlequin novels for the sexual content; then he might as well have bought those porn magazines. No, he specifically appreciates the historical series with the strong sense of unity within the family. Upon the question of why he thinks women read more fiction than men, he says he believes that it is connected above all with the emotional capacity:

Eh, I find it easy to become moved. And at funerals – which I hate, it is cruelty to animals – then I cry. And at weddings I get so moved that I cry. [...] Well, of course, you don't exactly sit and cry over the Harlequin novels, but you give.., your senses are moved at least. Over some [books]. And [one] wonders what will happen.

Just like Anna, he does not think about the fact that the books will end happily. What is interesting is rather the way there; how the story will develop. Considering that he subscribes to *all* the Harlequin series, "yes, damn it!", he receives a large number of Harlequin books each month (around 24). When the novels arrive, the mailman rings the doorbell:

And really, that is what I am so damned angry with Harlequin [about]. That they heave out the whole series at one go, the same day, the whole serve. I would like

to have it spread out, so that I have these darned books on – I just can't sit and read them straight up, oh, oh – I have other things to do! But they show no mercy and the post office is concerned because they have – I think it is eight series or maybe nine, with two, three, four [books in each series]. They are downright unhappy.

Upon the question what he feels when he receives the package, he says, “Basically I am pissed off, but I have given up”, and laughs. The level of book buying has remained the same for years and has not changed with the VAT reduction. For him, it is not a question of cost, but of time. He thinks it is good if people can better afford books and students are able to buy study literature at a lower price.

## Liselott

Liselott grew up in a block of apartments designed for worker's large families [*barnrikehus*] on Södermalm in Stockholm about sixty years ago. First her grandmother became a member of the book club *Svalan*, then her mother. Then when Liselott could read by herself, she read her mother's books. Buying presents for her was never a problem; she always got books for her birthdays and Christmas. She borrowed book from the library open once a week in the area. When she moved away from home, she began buying books from the same lady at *Svalan*. The lady rang once a year and went through a lot of books. If Liselott had first decided to buy six books, she ended up with fourteen, fifteen. And like the other Harlequin interviewees, Liselott is a fast reader, faster than most of her acquaintances.

After her daughter was born, Liselott still read books, but did not buy as much; she did not have the time. But when she started working at Ericsson and became involved in the trade union, she started reading a lot of non-fiction and reports. Work also meant reading a lot of information in English. That is when she started to read Harlequin novels, as a counter-balance. So even in Liselott's case, it was not a matter of compensation for a deficit or lack, but rather as a complement or contrast. She had noticed them at the kiosk when she went to buy the newspaper. It was not until later she started to subscribe to the books.

When Liselott got divorced she started to read more again. During her marriage she could not read as much as she wanted.

And then I could read a little of such... smut [*kärringsnusk*] as they called it. Then, Harlequin and such...Fall into a day-dream; relax in a different way than when you knew that someone was standing there, hovering and looking, and ‘Oh, is it that kind of shit that you!’ And it is... a little nicer to relax with it. One was *allowed* to. It had not been prohibited, but... he clamped down on it.

Her ex-husband's dislike of her choice of books led to a conflict after the divorce because their daughter started reading them at his place. And now that the daughter is grown-up, she brings them to the house of her father's new



woman [*särbo*], who practically pounced on them. “So now he has another one who reads those... [Laughs] But now he does not say anything about it.” Sometimes Liselott also gives some books to her niece who reads them once in a while when the children have gone to bed. Then she takes another glass of Martini and has a cosy moment just by herself.

For her that entails a bit of sneaking. Well, she is married to a ‘real man’. So I believe he would tease her if he discovered them. He is real manly, he works in construction, he drives go-cart, he works a little on engines. And if you read anything at all, then you read a real crime novel!

Reading Harlequin novels then becomes something private. She would never read them on the underground during rush hour; she knows that they would be regarded as “trash” by everyone going to Kista where Ericsson is located; the engineers and others sitting there, read reports with diagrams. Liselott prefers reading them in front of the television with a cup of coffee. “Yes, then it is a matter of ploughing!” She gives herself over to reading, gets completely engrossed and involved. She does not identify with any of the characters but takes part in the events, although she does take the story itself with a pinch of salt. She emphasizes that she can read books in another way, with a little more distance, “But how boring!” She is not interested in being just an observer. The sexual content she often skips, she would rather just get hints at what is happening. But she thinks it has got a lot better now.

Liselott subscribes to four series in total: Romance (6 books); Exclusive (3); Historical (3), and Bestseller (2 every second month). Sometimes she gets it all at once, sometimes in parts. When she has read them, they are passed on to her daughter and then to the next person. When she is out travelling, she gives them to the girls at the travel agency, and they are so happy, “because Swedes rarely leave books behind, they take them back home”. But at her workplace, she made clear that she was not going to supply them with books; instead, they bought the Harlequins in a shop and shared them. At times, she took them to the countryside where she knows an elderly lady who likes them.

Going back three years, Liselott was made redundant from Ericsson after having worked for thirty years. She now lives on her contractual pension (from her former employer) [*avtalspensionär*]. Her income is not high enough for her to have increased her book consumption after the VAT reduction; maybe if she had still been working or if she could receive some sort of pensioners’ discount. For her part, the VAT reduction has meant that the books she buys have become cheaper; the prices came down directly. Today she spends nearly SEK 500 a month on the Harlequin books. Upon the question of what buying books means or is comparable to, she holds up the social dimension of books:

In a way it is like buying company, because it is company when you read. And then I would want a chance to renew that acquaintance like I sometimes do and deepen it.

She makes sure that when she buys books outside Harlequin she will select books that she will care for at a deeper level; she is not interested in just filling up her bookshelves. She is also a member of another book club and makes notes on what books she is interested in. And if she feels a bit down or depressed one day, she could go into town and look up where the book in question is cheapest. If the book has already been published as a paperback, she says she might buy two books, and laughs mischievously. When asked about the difference between buying one book, or two, she replies that:

In a way it is better to come home with one, because then I concentrate and read it; but if I have two! Oh, then I become like this that I *have* to look in the other!

So it is much calmer, really, to just buy one.

To buy one book seems to be goal-oriented and sensible. But by doubling and buying two books at least two parallel possibilities are open. Hence, it not only brings more variation but seems to increase her desire for reading. As soon as Liselott's birthday is imminent, she asks for books. She also buys books as a gift for her brother's four grandchildren, lately *Mulle Meck* for the youngest. She likes to have a look when the general store Åhléns has paperbacks on sale. Sometimes she is unlucky and finds nothing of interest.

Then there are those boring books that the LO [*Landsorganisationen*, The Swedish Trade Union Confederation] used to recommend all the time before. They are kind of a little *boring*.

*How do you mean..? Please tell me.*

It is so *real*. These kinds of *workers*. They are so boring! Even if things happen it is written so... it is so grey! There is kind of no... [...] it is so grey and heavy. Why should it be just because they write workers' history? They could write funnier.

She mentions Per Anders Fogelström's series as a good example. She has heard her grandmother and mother tell stories about their lives as workers', and Liselott thinks this storytelling within the family has been important for her interest in reading. She feels that she has become more broad-minded by reading books; she interprets people a little better now. Earlier on she often judged people beforehand.

At the interview Liselott wears a necklace with a small soccer charm, the Hammarby team, which has been an interest since before school, inherited from her family. As a little girl she played with the boys, but she was only allowed to be a goalkeeper. She has gone to Hammarby matches since the end of the 1940s. She loves that feeling; it cannot be described. It is *her* team.

So I do have some other interests than just reading, although it is... Although I think sometimes that if something were to happen, and if I wasn't able to read, what would I do then? Might as well lie down and die.

## Additional Observations

In the case of subscribers to Harlequin, it is not the readers that seek out books but rather the opposite: books arrive regularly to the readers. It creates a flow in reading and a kind of rhythm in everyday life; a monthly reading cycle with times of ebb and flood. The days around the delivery of the monthly package become very important, and the interviewed readers have similar ways of managing the pile of arrivals.

(Liselott:) So now I know that around between the 17th, 18th, 19th, depending on the Post Office, the books arrive. And then I pounce on them of course, because I have something new to read. Then after a couple of weeks I go to my daughter with them and she thinks it is great to read such things compared with all the work.

(Ulf:) I read on the back cover and then I sort them in different stacks according to interest and... eh... and then I take them in turns. Yes, among others, I like the historical ones. And so does my daughter too when she chooses and it is mostly historical. Then there are some *Intrigue* books and... I probably sort them differently almost every time.

(Anna:) You have a specific ritual when your packages are delivered. You open the package and then you lay the bills aside [laughs]... What it says on them and then I usually turn them all - I don't look on the front cover - I only read the back text and then I sort them into the order I'm going to read. [...] This says on the back, and this one I would like the most, it goes down to the bottom. This one I want to read the least; it goes to the top.

- *So you do it in reverse?*

- Yes, or else it would not be much fun? [Laughs] Then I would be able to read what I wanted to read first. That won't work! No, I can't have it like that. I have to take what I read the least on top.

And although the readers plough, rush or rage through the books, they do not gobble down the stories entirely. According to Hansson (1988: 24), there is a common hypothesis that fast reading would mean that readers do not stop and reflect on what they have read. In my interviews, however, Liselott gets so upset that she has to lay the book aside for a moment. The books give rise to a specific resistance that spurs the readers to draw their own conclusions. They become involved with a retained sense of integrity. They experience some kind of inner resistance towards how the characters behave:

(Liselott:) Because sometimes you sit and groan, thinking 'God how stupid they are!' So you almost want to talk to them [...]. Yes, and shake them around a bit. [Sighs with indignation] Look, some of those books, I can't understand how they can write - are there such stupid people? So silly? Well I have not come across that and I have met a lot of people during all the years I have worked with the trade union and at my job in general I have met unbelievable numbers of people all over Sweden. So that... sometimes I groan and think no, now I am putting it aside because I can't be bothered anymore, but then I read it anyhow.

(Anna:) That you can feel, that you want to steer the persons [characters] in a certain direction. ‘Why don’t you act in that way? Why don’t you go into that room and confront that lout [*karlsloke*]?’ Something like that.

The characters arouse anger and frustration in the reader and this means the interviewees become even more emotionally engaged in their reading. It seems their values and ways of relating to the world are constantly challenged throughout the books. For the reader, the dramatization creates a sense of inner tension and that this keeps them bound to reading.

One observation is that reading practices seem to require a fit between, on one hand, a certain degree of challenge, resistance or tension, and on the other hand, the reader’s individual capacity. In the case of the Harlequin interviewees, I agree with Ulf that having strong emotions seems a requisite for engaging in fiction this way, and all three respondents fit this description. Perhaps it would be easy to apply the often levelled criticism of popular literature and interpret Ulf’s interest in the strong sense of family in the historical series as a compensation for suffering a deficit, namely all his broken marriages. But since he started reading Harlequin after retirement, I suggest that it is not until old age that he has developed the capacity to really value a family. Before this capacity existed, he probably would not have found any pleasure in reading about it, whether a divorcee or not.

Secondly, the Harlequin interviewees are all acknowledged fast readers that have the capacity for an up-beat tempo. The accelerated reading means however, that they actively have to manage the quantity of books they receive every month. They cannot keep everything, but must see to the outflow as well. Notably, selling books is rare, probably due to their low value on the second-hand market. Hansson’s (1988: 47) study of popular literature indicates four ways of handling the books after reading, in the following order: saving, exchanging, giving away and last, throwing away. Interestingly, younger readers save their books to a larger extent, whereas older readers most frequently give away their books. Anna, who was the youngest, has been saving books but is considering starting to throw them away, although she is somewhat reluctant. Ulf, the oldest, gives some to his daughter, and as for the rest:

(Ulf:) I throw them away in the garbage room [*grovsoprummet*]. For I have a large paper bag that I pour them into and then... I have not yet thrown them into those paper-recycling... thingies standing. Honestly, I put them down there so that someone else might be happy to see them. And in my building, there is, aside from some goners like myself and some that walk with a wheeled walker, there are a lot of young people who go to college. [...] So there is always somebody who is amused and takes care of them.

In this way, what first appears as a simple case of throwing away is rather an attempt at giving to some unknown recipient. Compared with the ever-increasing practice of “releasing” singular books of fiction to be picked up by either friend or stranger (cf. Maclaran & Masterson 2006), it is an entirely dif-

ferent thing to release a stack of 25 books. It more resembles dumping, unless of course, the titles are released individually in 25 different places, which would take “book-crossing” to a whole new level. Interestingly, the romance network RWA lists the proliferation of used books as one of their main challenges for the future. (RWA statistics 2008)

When there is ebb in the flow of books, the readers become restless; they are used at practising reading. Liselott feels anxious and ill at ease when she has nothing to read. She says it is like a smoker having run out of cigarettes. The body and mind are used to ploughing and rushing; it becomes an incredible need to have an outlet for their extreme reading capacity. Since reading erodes, but books last, all three interviewees pursue re-reading to some extent:

(Ulf:) And when I have finished a book, then I put it in a bag... And if no monthly consignment has arrived from Harlequin, then I can go and dig around in that bag and re-read the same thing just to have something to read. I try to find one that I cannot recall what happened.

### Commentary

The regeneration of romance readers is clearly an issue for the industry, in which output has increased remarkably over the last decade, in the US as in the Nordic countries. Previous studies have brought to our attention that readers of romance are very well-accustomed, high-frequency readers with a broad spectrum of literature. (cf. Jensen 1984) The distinguishing features of romance paperback production and distribution coupled with the charges against the over-consumption of books make an interesting case for challenging basic assumptions of finitude and scarcity in reading books. The three high-consuming Harlequin readers in my study have minimized personal decision-making to the number of series for subscription, but have a very conscious and highly committed relation to reading books. (Cf. Warde 2005) Specifically, they are very experienced in organizing consumption of a cyclical, abundant in-flow of books. They read back covers, pouring over them, ranking and stacking the wealth books, to be followed by ploughing, rushing and raging reading.

The Harlequin romance readers not only tell of the addict’s compulsive tale of “addictive passion” for books, and the loner’s tale for companionship (Maclaran & Masterson 2006), but their reading builds upon their rich capacities for emotions, and their courageous curiosity in the face of challenging characters. They read the Harlequin romances in order to relax with something else. I think in the words “something else” we can discern the meaning of the accumulative logic, adding new experiences to those existent. Furthermore, all three seek out contrasts and complements to their Harlequin novels, bringing qualitative change in reading. For example, Anna joined the Ordfront club as a counterbalance. Perhaps this could suggest that the accumulative logic of book con-

sumption is heightened by hedonic reading. In other words, it is not a tale of addiction, but of addition.

Not only is reading a form of self-gift (Radway 1984: 91); they also feel strongly about passing on this gift to others, which is required of a gift. (Cf. Mauss 1924; Hyde 1978) All three interviewees, including the man, sense a strong responsibility for the literary fostering of others. They provide people around them with books through gifting, lending and disposing. In this way, they engage in a type of mentoring (cf. Holt 1995), although not while consuming, but rather beforehand. Though the circulation of used romances may be an issue with the romance industry (cf. ROMStat 2008), it is probably the wealth of used books that secures new generations of readers. Importantly, the interviewees also respect others people's individual rights to choose genres for themselves. Consider how different a teacher Anna is, valuing her pupils' practice of reading before the literary content, in comparison with stories told by the Nordic museum respondents. It is also interesting that Ulf did not hesitate to buy girls' books for his daughter, considering Flynn & Schweickart's (1986: xxii) observation that there is a general male resistance towards women's and girl's books.

Drawing upon Liselott's experiences, it is not self-evident that each and everyone is free to practice reading in one's own way even in one's own home. There are a number of ideas and strong opinions among people about what counts as appropriate reading and what is not. Some people claim to have the right to judge others' reading. It could happen in the family, as we have seen in Chapter VII about the Nordic Museum respondents; it could happen in marriage and even among strangers. Consider for instance, Liselott who would not read her Harlequin books on the train. Perhaps this certifies to reading being a practice with a certain degree of social impact, whether the individual reader wants to or not. One thing is clear: not all books are everyone's property [*allmansrätt*] in social spaces or public places. In this way, the opportunities for reading are fewer than they need to be.

## XIII. Circling the Paperback Market: the tale of Three Book Circles.

*I enjoy the stimulation of so many different views on one book.  
Surprising sometimes – given we are all women in the same age group,  
similar backgrounds, living circumstances, age of children, education, etc.  
Sociologists would probably regard us all as  
having similar reading habits and preferences!*

*Quote in Jenny Hartley (2002/2001: 80)*

### Introduction

It was a dark picture of books and reading that Habermas painted in the 1960s. Book clubs and paperback books only facilitate access to literature economically, and the literary market turns increasingly commercial at the expense of a vibrant literary culture. Half a decade later, it is easy to admit he was right in many ways. Following the paperback boom in Sweden, new actors have recently entered the paperback market, like the specific paperback publishers Pocketförlaget and Anderssons Pocket, alongside Pocketstället, an award winning concept that distributes paperbacks to territories where previously only mass-market paper books (like those by Harlequin Enterprises) were seen: supermarkets, petrol stations and the like. Due to the increased availability of books, Pocketstället argues that the consumer are given better possibilities to engage in their favourite spare-time interest, “namely to read!”<sup>176</sup> Crime fiction and “chick lit” prosper. Paperbacks are published as accessories – “bipacks” – to glossy magazines. In the summer of 2007, there were as many as 33 titles ranging from Agatha Christie to French novelist Anna Gavalda. (Cooper, 2007) Staged marketing events have become commonplace. For example, best-selling crime queens have been seen touring the Baltic on the large cruise ships where readers are given a chance to interact with their favourite authors in an altogether commercial setting. (Arvidsson 2006)

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<sup>176</sup> <<http://www.pocketstallet.se/index.asp?sida=om>, accessed 14 February 2007.

Contrary to Habermas's belief however, even in the new millennium, book reading groups still provide a popular form of literary life for everyday people. (Cf. Hartley 2001; Long 2003; Rehberg Sedo 2002, etc.) As is well known, people and commercial culture have become co-dependent (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007: 4). And reading is a prime example of this relationship. Even in the case of heightened interest in reading in 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, it most probably followed upon the expanded and increasingly excessive book market, among other things. Across Europe, factors like no famines, the population increase and urbanization contributed; even the "surplus" of unmarried women provided the basis for a reading population (see also Chapter VII). If we are to put modern collective consumer practices into a historical perspective, then book circles are exemplary and offer a unique point of reference.

Importantly, book circles belong to those phenomena that appear behind the back of all of the large-scale statistical inquiries into the condition of national readership. The Nordic Museum material from 1999 provides us with some clues to the book group phenomenon from the perspective of individual readers. Judging from the participants in the study, this type of reading has been an activity among women. Only one man makes any mention of it, a man born in a farmers' family in 1925 (Arne Isaksson Uppland, KU 18562) who tells that his wife was member of both book clubs and book circles all her life. Commercial book circles provided by bookshops are mentioned less, but seemingly popular. (Åkersberga KU18557)

Book grouping could also occur at the workplace. One woman, born in 1929 (Gothenburg, KU 18494) mentions that as they did not have much money to invest in their workplace book group, they bought paperbacks only. She has had this collection of books bound later in life. Similarly, a woman born in 1930 (Kristina Andersson, Varberg KU 18534) tells that her work mates were always interested in reading and they took part in a book group during working hours. She specifically mentions a 'reading circle book' [*läsecirkelbok*] she had bought in the 60s, *Daily Life with the Aztecs in Ancient Mexico*, [*Dagligt liv hos aztekerna i gamla Mexico*] that became important for her son doing doctoral research on the topic in the 1990s.

Another woman (KU18561) mentions that she joined a study circle through her elder sister at the end of the 1960s. The circle consisted of around ten women from a village to which she had recently moved. Through the books they came to talk about their own childhoods and they got to know each other on a deeper level, becoming many good friends. Christina Bergdal, born in 1942 (Linköping, KU18549) is a book circle member and declares that she enjoys talking about books with neighbours and others. It is equally important, however, to observe the breakdowns in the interest for book groups:

Sometimes I read of women in former times and their literary salons. But I do not want to partake in some literary club, partly I have no verbal capacity, and partly I rarely get any new inspiration for reading. I read too "old" books. No-



one reads Heidenstam or Hjalmar Bergman nowadays. I think. (Kristina Andersson, b. 1930, KU 18534, Varberg)

At the turn of the millennium, Jenny Hartley (2001) reported from England that there seems to be a veritable flood of book circles: “Groups spring into life as a Mexican wave surges through a neighbourhood.” (Ibid. 22) It is believed that there are up to 50,000 groups in the UK and 500,000 groups in the US. No one seems to know how many people are actually members of book groups. Whether Habermas likes it or not, these groups are helped along by the expanding paperback book market. As observed by Hartley (2002/2001: 46) and De Nel Rehberg Sedo (2002: 16), most present-day book circles have a paperback-only rule. And due to the low price of paperbacks, in the majority of the groups, members nowadays buy one copy each of the title and read individually. Hence, this renders book reading groups quite a position at the marketplace.

The rising numbers of book circles make an attractive target for both trade and non-trade actors. Barstow (2003: 15) notes that *Barnes and Noble* and *Starbucks* were quick to capitalize on citywide read-ins. They sponsored discussion groups and provided marketing merchandise tie-ins, ranging from “tote bags to chocolate bars with book cover logos.” Rehberg Sedo (2002) has found among Canadian publishers publishing guides, websites, posters, bookmarks and so-called shelf-talkers to be used in bookshops. Hartley (2001: 7) claims the local bookshop may provide the necessary meeting venue for special interest groups (gay, poetry, science fiction). And Elizabeth Long (2003: 77) observes that the large book retail chain makes books more easily accessible, which in turn helps nurture and sustain the reading groups. In Sweden, Mathias Engdahl, who is founder of the bookseller Pocket Shop, expressed a keen interest in book circles, seeking to find ways to communicate and interact with them. And yet, he is aware of the delicacy in the relationship between the book circles and a commercial bookseller like himself. “I believe one has to approach them with much caution and respect.”<sup>178</sup>

Also, new types of actors are sighted in the book business, such as Toronto-based Book-club-in-a-box that started in 2002, producing reading guides for selected literary award-winning books or critics’ favourite titles. Most of the times, they select books from Canada, but on their web site they encourage suggestions from their customers as to what books they should produce guides for.<sup>179</sup> Interestingly, we notice here that the everyday life culture of reading groups not only thrives on the copious market of paperback books, but they also influence it, indirectly by inspiring publishers to cater for their needs, but also directly through expressing their reading desires.

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<sup>178</sup> Mathias Engdahl, paperback seminar, 19 March 2007.

<sup>179</sup> <[www.http://www.bookclubinabox.com/](http://www.bookclubinabox.com/)>

## Previous Research on Book Circles

Studies on book clubs have emerged within a range of scholarly fields, from Literature to Sociology to Consumer Research Studies. Although they differ in methodological approach, they mainly revolve around the same kinds of questions: the extent of the phenomenon, organizing practices and group identity. Jenny Hartley's (2001) research builds on a large-scale survey and some participant observations among reading groups in England. DeNel Rehberg Sedo (2002) has provided both an ethnographic study of book clubs in Vancouver in British Columbia, Canada and a quantitative on-line study of both on-line and face-to-face reading groups. Her main interest lies in the interpretations of books in collective contexts and argues that the book club is providing people – especially women readers – with ways of connecting in a time of perceived individualism. Together, whether on-line or face-to-face, they build and share a sense of community, increase their knowledge, and nurture their love of books. The books are the impetus for getting together, Rehberg Sedo (*ibid.* 16) observes; the social bonding that occurs within book groups is mostly an effect.

Elizabeth Long (2003), who is a sociologist, has conducted a systematic outreach and exploratory case study on white women's reading groups in the Houston area in the U.S. Long (2003: xvi) argues that studying book clubs as a form of cultural practice, we can gain a balanced understanding of the relationship between individual and society – although she does note that women's reading groups have not been connected to obvious political engagements. Jane Missner Barstow (2003) has done a comparative study of reading groups and college literature classes, a study that draws on participant observations and her experiences as a college teacher. Petra Söderlund (2004) has investigated communities of readers on the Internet, and she has also participated in one reading group meeting in a small town in Sweden, transcribing their conversation. Inger Eriksson (2006) has followed poetry-reading groups in a hospice setting, and the role that poetry plays for people dealing with experiences of sickness, life and death.

Consumer researcher Avi Shankar (2006) saw the whole book group phenomenon as an interesting chapter in the world of books, and was enticed by goading and cajoling to write it himself. He draws greatly upon Hartley's study and is intrigued by the 'group-ness' aspect of it, and puts it in connection with Maffesoli's tribal view of society. In the book group, women can reconcile their different, often conflicting 'tribal' identities and affiliations (related to family, work, friends, etc) and experience the force of *puissance* – the vitality and energy of a mass of people. Shankar, however, has not conducted any empirical work on the book group, but applies a 'male outsider perspective' on the phenomenon.

## Selection – or Being Selected

At the beginning of my empirical study, I just did not know how difficult it is for a circle to open up to an outsider. I did not know that there is something about book circles that sets them apart from ordinary study circles or hobby groups. It did not dawn on me until after a meeting with the first group I had approached. It was a group of women around thirty years of age and I was to meet them through a friend of mine, Pernilla, who was a member and had vouched for me. First I had to wait some months before they were ready for my visit. I finally met them in the early autumn of 2003. Pernilla could not make it that time but she encouraged me to go anyway. I thought my being a woman of the same age and with small children would provide us with some joint experiences and help me blend in smoothly. The only difference was that I had some university background in literature.

It was an interesting meeting, but not very fortunate. I had hoped to join their meetings as a participant observer; after all, Hartley (2001), Long (2003) Söderlund (2004) – all have managed to attend singular reading group meetings without active participation, (although Söderlund admittedly gained access via her mother). But Pernilla called me afterwards, saying the group had decided they declined my further presence. Apparently, some members had felt very uncomfortable about an outsider being there. A little sad, I accepted defeat candidly and apologized, understanding that there was something about the book group phenomenon that I did not yet grasp fully; there seemed to be much more sensitive processes involved than I had first realized.

I decided to look further for a new group, determined not to repeat my mistake; next time I would suggest a different, more ethnographically inspired method of reading (Boyarin et al. (1992) that to my knowledge had not previously been applied to book groups. Shortly after, another friend, Karolina, recommended me to a group she knew of: a mixed book circle in the age range 30-40 years. After a few weeks of tense waiting, a man called Svante phoned me and asked me to join a meeting and tell the members all about my research interest in reading groups. The only prerequisite was that I should bring a bottle of red wine to the meeting. On our first meeting, they accepted me as a temporary member on equal conditions; I would read the same books as they, follow their set of rules, discuss as openly as they, and last but not least, contribute with red wine.. In hindsight, one woman (A) said laughingly, “Not everybody gets to join like you did! [...] You were practically *drawn into* our group.”

With the help of friends and acquaintances I gained access to three book circles in total. The groups differ primarily in terms of sex and age. Another difference is the manner in which they chose to be part of the study. I have sought to be humble and accept that the book circles decide the extent and terms of their involvement, which in turn has influenced my choice of method:

☞ Women only, 60-65 years (Lund) – group interview

☞ Men only, 35-45 years (Stockholm) – group interviews, singular individual interviews

☞ Men and women, 30-45 years of age (Stockholm) – ethnographic study with singular individual interviews

The members of the mixed group and the all-male group are participating together in a visual creative group. Due to the variety of methodologies involved in meeting the groups, each section will acquire a different character.

### The Issue of Terminology

Two groups that I have interviewed call themselves “book club” which is a rather confusing term, especially after considering Habermas’s critique of commercial book clubs. According to the dictionary, a “book club” is “an organization that sells books, usually at reduced prices, to members who undertake to buy a minimum number of them annually” (Webster’s: 84). It rather brings to mind *The Book-of-the Month Club* (Radway 1984), which was the model for the Swedish *Månadens Bok* (Steiner 2006), than a voluntary social gathering.

It remains unclear, however, what we should call the groups. The 18<sup>th</sup> century reading society was known by a range of names: reading cabinet; reading circle; reading association, reading institute, and later society, club, casino, museum, “*Ressource*”, and harmony (Stützel-Prüsener 1981 in Östholm 2000: 29). Long’s (2004) study is named *Book clubs*, but then she refers to ‘reading groups’ throughout the whole book, a word used also by Hartley in her investigation into groups in England. Shankar’s (2006) essay speaks of “book-reading groups” or “book groups”. In Sweden, Söderlund (2004) writes of reading circles [*läsecirklar*], which probably should be understood against the background of the study circle tradition.<sup>180</sup>

In an everyday social context, a circle denotes “a group of persons sharing a common interest or revolving about a common center” (Webster’s: 135). Thus I have come to favour the concept of ‘book circle’ rather than reading circle, because it is more the book that is at the centre, and not reading. At least, the meetings rarely involve reading. Many circles have started with members exchanging books with each other; here reading plays a secondary part. Moreover, the concept of book circle better captures the fact that books, like art, harbour a power of organization (Cf. Guillet de Monthoux 2000: 44) The groups revolve around the book, and over time new members can join and old members take leave and yet the circle moves on.

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<sup>180</sup> For an overview of the Swedish tradition of the study circle, see Gogoulakis (2001).

## Paperback Prerequisites

The body of CCT research builds on the basic assumption that all consumption is mediated through markets. Previous research into book circles has looked at what types of genres, titles and formats groups read, and fiction and the paperback are by far the most popular among groups (cf. Hartley 2001). And in general, more readers of paperbacks claim they have become more interested in reading books compared with other readers. (Antoni 2004: 29) Yet, to my knowledge, no book circle study has made any mention of the supply of paperback fiction. The statistics presented below give an indication of the paperback output in Sweden between the years of 1998 and 2008. Although book groups are not limited to newly published titles, the supply on the market is an important resource to draw from.

Normally, the members of the Swedish Publishers' Association account for around 70 % of the total book market for general literature in Sweden. But in the case of paperback books, it is assumed that they account for 60% of the sales and only 50% of the paperback publishing because important actors like Harlequin and Bra Böcker are not members. (Sjögren 2006: 12) In 2006, two new specific paperback publishers saw the light of day, *Anderson Pocket* and *Pocketförlaget* (a sister company to *Pocketklubben*, est. 2003), joining long-time specialized *Månpocket* at the market. The table below shows a stunning increase of aggregated titles and sales on the book market:

Table 10. The number of new titles in different categories published in paperback 1998 – 2008 (Based on SvF Industry Statistics 2008)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Fiction	296	303	338	393	415	423	427	396	480	362
Percentage fiction/total	86,2	84,2	83	81,5	77,4	71,7	68,1	63,4	66,9	61,1
Non-fiction	37	39	39	54	78	95	117	133	119	152
Juvenile	10	18	30	35	43	72	83	96	119	78
Total	343	360	407	482	536	590	627	625	718	592
Percentage fiction/total	86,2	84,2	83	81,5	77,4	71,7	68,1	63,4	66,9	61,1

The total number of published paperback titles has close to doubled in this time period. As a tentative rule-of-thumb within the industry, around 70% of these titles are fiction. (Sjögren 2006) This was the case by 2003 and 2004 when my study of the book circles was conducted. But over the decade, the relative share has decreased substantially, peaking in 1999 (86,2%) and reaching the bottom in 2008 (60%). In absolute numbers, the total output of fiction was highest in 2007, 2005 and 2004 (in that order). The number of non-fiction titles

has increased by more than four times in that ten-year period. However, the total numbers of paperbacks are expected to decrease in 2009 and following.

## Three Book Circles

### The Lund Ladies

Everybody greets me warm-heartedly upon my arrival and they shake my hand in turns as we enter the hallway of the house. A large quantity of goodies is served up on the generous kitchen table. We all provide ourselves and take a seat in the sitting room. The group meeting starts up immediately with a discussion around the book of the evening, a recently published novel about the life of Paul Gauguin. Now no one seems to take any notice of my presence. I get a bit confused and wonder if I should start recording. But then I would have to interrupt in a way that would be anything but smooth. So instead I sit there, enjoying my meal in silence and listen in on the discussion, awaiting the moment when they are ready to talk to me.

The conversation is interesting with many angles. One can tell that they have a long tradition and experience of book circle evenings and meetings in general. They go straight to the point in a way that Long (2003: 69) has recounted of women's book circles: that the members are skilled organizers but enjoy a less formal atmosphere in the circle. It is an active discussion and they are quick to fill in each other's talk, although they also listen carefully to each other. They have a more coherent conversation than the book circle in the town of Mora that Petra Söderlund (2004: 117) observed. It could be due to the fact that the ladies in Mora were little accustomed to discussing a joint reading experience; they usually met to speak of their individual reading experiences and exchange recommendations. The ladies in Lund were very skilled in all these matters. And they often ask each other questions like "what was that book...?", "what is the name of the author who wrote...?" The circle seemed to be regenerating a collective memory, veritable recollections.

After little more than an hour, a woman turns to me and asks me to tell them why I have come to visit. Moments later, they tell me their story.

The book circle in Lund started among neighbours and friends in the local area; they all had small children around the same age and met nearly every day. The model was brought from Halmstad where an acquaintance had been part of a group that she often spoke about. In the beginning, all had been part of the group, both men and women, and they exchanged books with each other according to a specific schedule for a couple of years, until they decided that they would all read the same book and start discussing them in turn together. Then

all the men left, except for one, Åke. He stayed a couple of times, but felt a bit lonely after a while and stopped coming.

Then there were at least seven women, they think. Only one woman is from Lund originally; the others have moved to Lund, which is an old university town. Consequently, they are all well-educated; they are medical doctors and teachers, etc.<sup>181</sup> When their children were teenagers, the women shared many thoughts around family life. Now that the children are all grown-up, they focus more upon the book. Not only on the book, though; they connect easily with personal experiences, women's role, childhood memories, etc. One woman in the group perceives this as a specifically unmanly way to discuss and thinks, therefore, that men have problems with this kind of conversation; they have trouble following.

Many are acquainted with other book circles, even in other countries, and they remark that the book titles often correspond to each other. Today they do not shun hardback books any longer and they select their books very much from literary reviews. But often it is more fun to read the reviews afterwards, they say. They have run themes on different countries, for example, China and South Africa and on a variety of topics, like nuns and religion. They have had opinions on the endings of books, and a couple of times they have written to the author (one was from China) and even received replies.

They have also raised the question whether they should start reading poetry, and one woman says she thinks that would require a new constellation of people. Her point is that they all know each other so well that they would be able to tell who would think this, and who will think that. Another woman reacts immediately: "Do you *think* so?? I don't think so. Do you really?? I would not be able to say so." The opinions diverge in the group: yes, well, no... "No, but perhaps more in the manner of reasoning." "Then I understand more what you mean..." This exchange is reminiscent of Shankar's (2006: 122) reflection that especially for women, who have to reach consensus nearly all the time, being a book group member means being free to express their differences of mind. The relations are equal and secure enough for this kind of allowance. In this way, the "book group represents an island of confrontation in a sea of compromise".

And even if the group is homogenous in sex, age, education and general life situation they have different ways of providing themselves and others with books. A couple of members state that they prefer to borrow books in the li-

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<sup>181</sup> Lund commune has the second highest share of inhabitants with university education in Sweden (45%), compared with Stockholm (31%), which is number 6 on the list. All towns with universities have higher shares, due to students staying after graduation. (Statistics Sweden 2005: 563) The mean income in Lund is SEK 202 875, just below the national mean level of 203 257. Women's mean income is slightly higher in Lund compared with the rest of Sweden, 169 717 to 167 346. (Ibid. 351f) The difference is not very large though, especially considering the larger share of well-educated people in Lund.

brary, where they can stay a whole day and just browse. It is clear that, for many, the paperback boom has brought a change in acquisition and appropriation. One woman tells that she buys a great deal more books since she started to shop in a place where they give four books for the cost of three. It is like buying a magazine, she thinks. Someone says that she bought four copies of one title in order to give as presents and the book only cost SEK 26.<sup>182</sup> And a paperback is a good present, they all agree. They reflect that they no longer shrink away from buying books, specifically paperbacks and particularly after the VAT reduction, buying is rendered possible in another way, and books are more accessible now. They are also great to bring along when travelling.

One woman, however, says she cannot read paperbacks because the print is too small. Either she goes to the library or else she will give herself the hardback as a form of self-gift. “But I think they are too heavy, those”, another woman inserts. A third woman agrees; they are difficult to read in bed.

“Where should one put them? The shelves are all full”, reflects one of the women who did not buy more books after the tax reduction. Somebody replies that one can always take books to the local charity organization. There is no money in used books, they all agree. One woman exchanged four large shopping bags full with books for a single long-longed for book in the window of a secondhand bookshop. Another woman was moving to a new home and she took a lot of books to the secondhand shop where she was offered SEK 50 (around 5 euros) for the lot. The book group is quite stunned at the fact that used books are worth so little money.<sup>183</sup>

One woman explains that she has a bookshelf at home with one and a half metres of books, which visitors can choose freely from. Most books have been given to her as gifts and she has never read them. The group is quite taken aback by this strategy and they all laugh at her blunt frankness. “OK, then we all know that for sure!” Supposedly they will think twice before giving her books as a gift again. She replies frankly that she does not give herself the time to read books that she doesn’t think she will like. Van Der Ploeg (2004) holds that the alternative cost of reading books is high for people with high incomes because their little available time is very valuable. My impression is that they are less prone to forcing themselves to read a specific book but will read simply because they desire to.

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<sup>182</sup> This title was probably published by En Bok för Alla, which received state subsidies until 2007.

<sup>183</sup> In contrast, new books are often considered quite expensive by the consumers. Previous to the tax decrease, a new book in the book shop could easily cost around 30 euros (SEK 300) of which VAT would be 6 euros, the Book shop gets 14 euros; distribution and marketing cost 2.5 - 3 euros and the same amount goes to the author. This leaves 4.5 euros for the technical production: the share of paper for 1 euro, printing for 20 euros and bookbinding for 1.5 euros. (Jerke-man 2000: 100)



One woman mentions that in her experience, the circulation of books has increased:

I flew down to South Africa some weeks ago and then I had brought [inaudible] with me these kinds of books on the way down. And when I had read them, I left them at my son's place, and then I took some that he had bought from some people who were moving back home again, so I brought them along when I flew to the next place. And then I left them in a place on Mauritius; I could just put them into a bookshelf and already, there were books from all the corners of the world, and that people had left behind and that you took. And so I took some books there and then came home again...

The circulation of books is obviously not limited to an enclosed system within the home grounds, but could travel globally across boundaries through nodes that are either part of social networks or connected to specific places or deposits.

When the group interview is finished and all prepare to go home, one of the women leans over resolutely and says to me in nearly a whisper:

You know, I also have *another* book club. With my colleagues at work. There we read other kinds of books than we do here and we discuss in a little different way. We have met for some years now. But I haven't said anything to my friends *here*. The discussions are so personal in these groups so I am afraid that they would be hurt if I met others...

### The Stockholm Gentlemen

One autumn evening in 2003 I meet four members of an all-male book circle. In total they are five men who get together around once every two months and they take turns in hosting the meetings. I got in touch with the book circle because I know one of the members, Johan S. since the parental group on the maternity ward back in 1997. The circle had consented to my coming for an interview in connection with a session. Unlike the women in Lund, the men kindly but firmly declined the presence of an outside visitor/researcher during the discussion; they cherished the moments engaged in an all-male talk. Instead, I was given approximately forty-five minutes for this mini-group interview. We all had a nice cup of tea and a sandwich together, and sometimes a baby was heard crying in the background. After my last question, I was politely asked to leave.

The book circle started in the autumn of 1999 on the initiative of one man, Henrik, whose wife was already in an all-women group. He was experiencing a kind of *yen [sigg]* for reading books, but he did not take the time for it. He also wanted to meet with friends, or rather, "book pals", and brought it up with his friend Johan S. Having just finished a long and demanding degree, Johan also wanted to get back to the habit of reading fiction. It was slow "getting it to flow" smoothly again and there a book circle could help. At the first meeting,

there were seven or eight men, and not all were accustomed book readers. They dropped out rather quickly, however, and it has been tough recruiting new members. Four years after the start, the founders are the only original members; and now all members are accustomed readers. The sessions have drawn in between two and eight members. They have raised the question of whether to invite women into the group but have decided to remain a purely men's circle. Just as the all-women circles engage in discussions around women's roles (Long 2004), the men enjoy talks around what it means to be a man today.

The book circle has brought a change in reading for most members, and they all attest to buying and reading books they would not have read otherwise. Johan Å finds his reading has decreased over time due to work and having children. Johan S. says the circle has helped him maintain a rather constant level of reading over time. Henrik mentions reading novels rather than easy-to-read crime fiction, and he reads more consciously than before, more easily and swiftly, and he even finishes the book... Daniel O. has simply added the books for the circle to his usual reading, so he both reads and buys books more now.<sup>184</sup>

The only criteria for book selection are that they must be fiction, and secondly, available in paperback so that neither price nor accessibility is a barrier to reading. One of the more recent members, Daniel O., feels constrained by the paperback-only rule; he wishes to introduce more recently published works. They have read books by Swedish and non-European authors, but very few women authors. They feel this is a shame really, and bring it up as a possible theme for the future. Johan S. smiles and also says it would be great fun to read "real crap"...

Posing the question of why they think men tend to read less fiction than women, I am curious about their reply. One reason, responds Johan S., is that men tend to like doing things together, for example, playing boules or whatever. In other words, the assumption is that reading fiction is a solitary activity. They wonder if their upbringing could have more importance for men than for women, specifically, whether you are "entertained by the intellectual head-butting" or not. Daniel observes that most men that he knows, people who only read Robert Ludlum and Tom Clancy, do not willingly talk about existential stuff.

And then I kind of think that there are many who think that it is disturbing with all the complications in life: to sort of, to *read* about them too; one shouldn't go round and poke about a lot.

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<sup>184</sup> This information on the all-male circle's individual book buying and reading was brought from a small survey by e-mail in December 2004/January 2005 in order to update the information before my report to the BPC.

Here it appears clearly that reading as practice brings an addition to everyday life; it brings a new dimension. If you are having a rough time, it could be twice as rough to read about it. This actually makes it a tad boring to socialize with men outside of the closest circle, says Daniel, it becomes superficial. And men who retire end up on the couch, and there is little more to their life after that, whereas women start up, get out, go the opera, etc.

I think I have seen this so clearly, there is something... some problem with men, that they don't read books. "They"? Or "us"! That *we* don't. [Laughs]

This response also shows the problems of posing questions around broad categorizations such as men/women, readers/non-readers as they tend to hide more than they explain. For Daniel, the category of "men" becomes disconnected from the immediate everyday experience of being a man himself. When he laughingly discovers this estrangement and includes himself in the category, he still applies the strongly stereotyped category of "non-reading men" to himself, although he is in fact an exception to that very category.

I ask them whether reading books makes them happier. They reply no, not happier, but one gets a richer life. For the all-male group, it seems the book circle itself is a way to collectively handle the additive logic of reading. Johan S. reflects:

It is important to have a history, I think. Because if one thinks, if one goes through... There are certain books that we have read and that have been more important than others. That you kind of... build on. Reflections or that you can remember them together. That is what I think. In that way it is important to have a history, to move on.

Henrik adds that the group itself but also every single member has a history of experience that they are now beginning to get to know; "We are starting to become a bank, or such." Through the book circle, they gather their resources together. Johan S. holds that each and every one acquires a subconscious [*Omedveten*] bank in the back of their heads that can be used at work. Hence, they regard the reading experiences not as completely eroding with time, as De Certeau (1988/1984) once held, but they accumulate and unknowingly form resources to be used. Moreover, he explains that, among other things, he has used the book circle as an idea to build projects at work. Here the accumulation can generate new actions and practices. The book circle ultimately revolves around attempting to delay the erosion of life, and reading experiences not the least:

For me, it also feels important that... it feels fun to retain some, something, a little longer in this changeable world.

The book circle is about finding different ways to increase the proceeds from reading. The book is something which they tackle, they take on [*ta sig an*]. In the dynamic, ever-changing existence, it becomes important to maintain a rhythm and direction that help them to handle the flow of life and erosion of time.

- It is very nice to have – to have one of those recurring things that you feel that you can travel in. I like that.
- It gives some kind of time horizon.
- Yes, it does. At the same time, you gather up in your “bank” your own...
- ... unfinished books that you haven’t had the time to finish..!

In this way, reading in book circles appears to entail both a linear and a cyclical logic at one and the same time, and it manages to pool a resource of experiences that remains not fully consummated. In other words, the breakdown of book consumption (cf. Holbrook 1987) comes across as an integral part of book circle reading.

Regarding time and reading, Bianchi (in Hutter and Throsby 2007) reflects that reading gives a sense of managing one’s time. One man in the book circle says reading books is about priorities:

There is, you can – there is always a little time here and there to sit and read instead of, and when you’re putting [the children] to bed. There *is*. If you think about it.

He might as well have said appropriation, in alignment with Chartier (in Dosse 1999/1995). It is about finding the openings that render reading possible, and then one needs to be somewhat of a tactician or a poacher in De Certeau’s sense, seizing the moment for reading. Interestingly, Johan Å. speaks of the contrast between the book circle and the life he leads with work and small children; it is a whole life *outside*. He seems genuinely surprised that he actually has the possibility to conduct a grown-up conversation with other men. It is like a water hole, confirms Johan S.

Before we round off the interview, Daniel admits that he does not want to tell the colleagues at work that he is a member of a book circle; they would not understand. Henrik, on the other hand, has spoken about the circle at work (he is a psychologist), and he received a variety of reactions, ranging from curiosity to utter lack of sympathy: “What kinds of friends do you have??” Someone else had expressed the opinion that it is “unmanly”. But that says more about that person than about me, Henrik says.

### The Stockholm Mixed Circle

On a Friday evening I found myself going across town to the south of Södermalm to meet up with Svante at the underground station near Mathias’ apartment where the meeting was held. I had described myself on the telephone: quite tall, dark hair, brown eyes, and I as to look for a man with brown hair and glasses. There was no difficulty in meeting up at the underground station; Svante approached me at once, and two women, Cilla and Anja, introduced themselves, happily smiling.

Due to bad last minute planning and a stroke of bad luck, I had not been able to get hold of red wine in time. Every anthropologist knows that bringing gifts and sharing food is very important when building trust and reciprocity. (Cf. Mauss 1924; Cialdini 1993/1984) It was not a good start to come empty-handed, thereby breaking the first rule of admittance. Regretfully, I told them that I had not brought a bottle with me, apologizing sincerely. They were genuinely disappointed and continued to discuss wine. When we arrived at Mathias's flat I was merrily welcomed. Svante introduced me and quickly added that I had no wine. Deeply embarrassed, I confessed my disorganization. In the general rustle and bustle of finding out who would be turning up, wine seemed to be taken into account. "Isn't Ann W. coming tonight? Oh, no! And we're already one bottle down tonight!" I remember thinking, is it a wine circle in disguise?

The light was dim and cosy with candles. On one end of the room was Mathias's bookshelf, filled with books of many different kinds. Mathias had cooked the meal for the evening and we were sitting around the coffee table in his small living room, balancing the plates on our laps. He was remarkably tall in comparison to the furniture and the proportions of the room, stooping over the bowls of salad as he served each one of us. Anja and Cilla relaxed in the sofa. Svante was seated next to me; both of us sat in wooden chairs that seemed high compared with the low table. They were curious about me, and asked me questions about my research interests. I told them a little about myself and of my research interests. Eventually I asked them permission to continue my story after finishing the delicious meal.

In the meantime, those who had already finished eating briefly told me their story. The group had started four years earlier and consisted of three men (Svante, Mathias and Jonas) and five women (Cilla, Anja, Ann W, Ann E, Ingela and Karin). Jonas and Karin form the only couple in the group and they were spending a year abroad, in USA with their two small children. Ingela, being an opera singer, rarely joins the meetings as she has both national and international engagements from time to time. Ann W was absent that night, but that apart, I seemed to have met the core of the group. Many friends, lovers and acquaintances throughout the years have made enquiries about joining the group, but they have tried to maintain the original group as much as possible. Thus, letting me join their group, even for just one night, was really an exception.

My guess was that they were all old friends from the start. It was not until later that I learned that they are from different parts of the country, ranging from Lund in the south of Sweden to Uppsala north of Stockholm. Ann W and Jonas knew each other from school back in Lund, but most of them had become friends at different workplaces, one of them being a government ministry. Only one in the group is now unemployed, Cilla, who suffers from burnout syndrome. Approaching her 45<sup>th</sup> birthday, Cilla is the oldest member of the group, and she has two teenage sons. During the evening I am told that Svante

and Anja used to be a couple, but they had broken up two years earlier and remained friends. One or two are involved in relationships outside the group, but apart from Karin and Jonas, all of them in the group live in single households.

Although quite sincere in their interest in good books and discussions, they did not come across as the strictest among reading groups. Hartley (2001) mentions groups that have sprung out of, for example, literary societies and men's clubs, and some are quite rigorous about their formal features. In contrast, this group has few rules. For instance, they allow members to take part in the meeting even though they haven't finished reading the book. The discussions start by letting each and every one express their opinion and experience of the book. They tell me that they are often prone to butting in on each other's talking space, cutting short the individual presentations in order to spark discussions. They struck me as quite intellectual, concerned with societal issues, and verbal (an impression that was strengthened by the display of witty humour with a self-ironic touch). Those who had attended the previous meeting spoke with joy and not without pride about the great time they had discussing Michel Houellebecq's novel *Platform* that deals with the issues of Western paedophilia and Thai prostitution.

They were generous with the wine, seeing as I was a guest, and by the time I put forward my wish to either interview them or join in, I was tipsy and my cheeks were flushed. I had prepared official-looking paper work with a formal description of my project, but it remained in my bag the entire evening. The documents felt strangely out of touch with the friendly atmosphere, though I did pass on my card so as to give some token of my professional identity. "Fair enough", said the group to my proposition, whereupon they thought it would be a good time to start the discussion around the book. Svante asked me if I had read the book in question, and I said no. I explained that I thought my reading the book could be interpreted as if I had already chosen for them how I would participate in their group. I wanted them to decide on what terms I would interact with them. They nodded approvingly. When the evening drew to a close, Svante argued that they needed a new member while Karin and Jonas were abroad, someone who could bring some new input to the group. "Good point" somebody said, and I was allowed in. *Access granted.*

Looking back, some methodological aspects require further comments. There is a widespread rule-of-thumb that the researcher spends at least one year in the field (Salzer Mörling 1998: 59). But what is really the "field" of the book circle? Just as in the ethnography of organizations there is no "village square" open to public display at all times. Closest at hand is the dinner table, where all conversation is open to all members of the group. Then there is the small-talk in the kitchen, words in passing when reading group members assist in helping each other with laying the table, etc. This is fairly accessible to me, but not really the odd off-the-record grab-a-cigarette in the backyard. It is difficult to know how

to approach them in this situation without being intrusive. I have refrained from feigning that I am a smoker.

## Bringing Book Circles Together

As the different book circles expressed curiosity about one another, I decided to bring the two Stockholm based circles together for a joint visual session, starting first with a focus group. Opening with a question about whether book circles are suitable for everyone, the meeting soon became an opportunity for mutual interviewing about issues important to them. How often do you meet? How many members? What types of books does your group read? How do you select titles?

Johan S. confesses that he finds his group almost too homogeneous; they very rarely think differently or disagree on a book. During the talk in the group, he gets the idea of having a book circle together with immigrant academics; he thinks the form would be perfect for getting to know each other.

Regarding the question of book circles being for everyone, the first response comes from the mixed circle. Certainly not, says Svante, but for many people, yes. Many people react with envy when they hear of it, he says, thinking they should start one too, or asking if they can join in. Not everyone read books, Ann points out, and that is of course a prerequisite. Svante adds that one also needs to enjoy talking about the books as well. Several other agree with this point, saying that one probably needs a verbal capacity to enjoy the meetings. It is not only about experiencing the books on one's own, but also being able to formulate one's own experiences, thoughts, emotions, and enjoy others doing the same. It would probably suit more people than one thinks; Anja reflects, it does not need to be so "intellectual" or whatever people may think it is. Johan S believes that above all, one has to enjoy meeting and socializing through and around books.

## The Role of the Book

Groups seem to increasingly form around a shared hub, the book, that joins them together and around which members revolve. Over time, members may move on, while the circle remains. The book is the point of departure and it gives rise to various types of conversations from time to time. The members do not have to meet each other and exchange pleasantries about everyday life; they can "start in another end" (Henrik). Long (2003: xvi, has observed that reading groups "bring people into new relationships with themselves". For example, the mixed group said that they have gone through a long period of time reflect-

ing on their childhood, going over it again and again.<sup>185</sup> Often the discussions allow for much more openness than other ways of meeting other people.

It could be the same group that meets over and over again and yet the meetings never look the same. One book circle member from the all-male circle states that what is important for the emerging discussion, is “more what book it is, than which of us meet”. This testifies to the organizational powers of the book. The book becomes a joint “point of reference” and most of the time it is a matter of “what the book can lead on to”, where it takes the group. And yet, it is a matter of *passing through* the book, because at some stage in the discussion the circle will let go of the book and continue on its own. The book does not take command over the readers; it does not create a totalitarian concord among members. On the contrary, all studies emphasize that the manifold perspectives are decisive for the survival and fortunes of the book circle. The book circle helps to organize reading in daily life; the recurring meetings create a rhythm of life.

Recall that one German word for reading groups in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was *Res-source*, a concept that I relate to resource. A resource is not the same as private property; a resource is rather understood as “something that lies ready for use or can be drawn upon for aid” (Webster’s: 633). In contrast, the notion of property is derived from Latin *proprius*’ meaning ‘one’s own’. (Webster’s: 596) Importantly, book circles are making the book a resource for venturing issues around life itself. For many members of book circles, it is a matter of tapping into plenitude. The book circle is for Johan S a “watering hole” [*vattenhål*], reminiscent of the poetic tropes of water and abundant wells in literature.

At a public seminar on book circles in October 2006, the most pressing question among the audience seemed to be how other groups manage to “get as much out of the book as possible”, not in terms of exchange, really, but almost as if the book were a fruit, filled with juice for everyone to drink from. Moreover, for book circles, reading books becomes a re-source, that which surges up again and again and again.<sup>186</sup> By extension, the book market is used as a resource for venturing new titles for collective aid or use or in the book circles. Hence, the question of selection becomes very important.

## Book Selection

The groups in my study tell me that around half their meetings is taken up by the discussion about what books to read next. According to them, “that is half

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<sup>185</sup> And I recall one evening when we suddenly discussed embarrassing memories of nudity within our childhood families; a topic that rendered many laughs and amazement: “How on earth did we end up here?”

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Old French *re-* again + *sourdre*, to spring up < Latin *surgere*, to rise.



the pleasure”. They are well aware of the abundance of literature available at their fingertips, and because of that they look around for the best grazing grounds. They listen around for recommendations, talk to others, and go out looking for books in the shops, read the literary section in the newspapers, etc., in an attempt to get the most choice and tastiest part of paperback fiction. In the mixed group, picking out the next book to read makes for a small, lively market in itself: display of suggestions, negotiations, haggling, laughing, contestations, arguments, disappointments and sentiments of joy.

The main tension concerns the practice of selecting books for reading.<sup>187</sup> It is an “eternal quest”; a “process in and of itself”. (Rehberg Sedo 2002). For an individual book buyer it is a question of choosing books to read, but for book circles it is a matter of “choosing how you choose” (Hartley 2001: 46). In other words, the selection process is in itself surrounded by additional selection processes. This could be seen as another example of the additive logic of consuming books.

Book circles resolve this issue by means of rules based on: *Collective selection* – drawing on a range of open battles or anonymous suggestions in order to reach consensus; *Individual selection* – one member at a time decides the book to be read (a model that the mixed book circle in my study smilingly coined as “dictatorship”); *Outside selection*, that is, letting external agents, circumstances or events determine the choice. Each of these forms belongs with a certain set of problems, so the issue of selection is not easily resolved, but will remain an interesting dynamic force within the book circle.

Groups that seek to escape the dictator, preferring consensus instead, are faced with the problems of how to allow for as many perspectives as possible in face of the threat from homogeneity. The collective principle keeps the selection within a certain limit – the majority rules. For example, in the mixed group, Ann’s recurring suggestion of reading Kerstin Thorvall’s (1993) novel *När man skjuter arbetare* is voted down each time by a collective “Noooooo!” The all-male book circle admits that they have hardly read any books by women writers. Kerstin Ekman, a revered author and former member of the Swedish Academy<sup>188</sup>, springs to mind as a notable exception from that rule. Sometimes, the consensus principle could stretch the territory for the individual member. One man in the mixed group, Mathias, had never read a book by a woman writer before he joined the group. This man also reflected in the individual interview on the overall difficulties of reading more avant-garde types of books in a society and consumer culture so deeply concerned with mainstream and consensus.

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<sup>187</sup> The decision-making process in terms of book selection is often a collective process at the heart of the book circle and for lengthier studies, please consult Long (2003); Hartley (2001).

<sup>188</sup> Ekman left the academy as a protest in connexion with the Rushdie fatwa in 1989.

Groups that apply individual selection are likely to extend reading for the members as they will read books that they may not otherwise have even opened. In the mixed group, we experimented with “dictatorship”, as it was half-jokingly called, and each took turns in deciding which books to read. After a round of the whole circle, the group decided to go back to the consensus principle with collective selection. Most members missed the vivid negotiations around books; they felt they lost the overview of books out on the market, and they missed the inspiration for individual reading; the books that were not picked out by the group were left available for reading outside the group.

In her survey, Hartley (2001: 99) asked whether book circles use the readers’ guides and discussion notes provided by publishers. Most replied no, some had had a few experiences that often reminded them of schoolwork. They do not want to regard themselves as either literary students or passive consumers. As two group members replied, “we would rather find our own way through” and “it’s the thrill of the chase” (Hartley 2001: 101). Reminiscent of tactical poachers (cf. de Certeau 1984), they prefer to seek their own ways.

### Disposing of Lacunae

For women, Long (2003: 72) remarks that the book circles have become “a cultural form that can help them to come to terms with many of the lacunae, complexities, and contradictions in their lives”. If coming to terms means resolving or perhaps reducing these lacks and complexities, then I do not agree with her. Women, just like men, seek an outlet for their will and desire to have important discussions with their fellows. The difference in perspective is that I do not see any particular lack on the part of the members. The experienced need for a book group is not grounded in an actual lack or emptiness; it arises when there is no channel for something that is already there: a will, a desire, a force... In that case, the book circle can provide an opportunity for release.

The book group offers its members a way of reading “with many eyes” (cf. Nietzsche). And if the perspective still proves too narrow and the interpretations too homogeneous, the group members will most likely rethink and reformulate their goals and means, their strategy and tactics. They will even drop out or regroup, all in order to put up resistance against the forces of herd formation. Another way is to follow the additive logic of books and reading. For some, one group is not enough; they could easily add another one. Think of the woman in Lund who confessed to being a member of another book circle at work.

Groups thrive on existent resources. As Long (2003: 91, italics added) herself is aware, “groups grow out of *existing* social or institutional networks”. Members are recruited among friends and friends of friends, neighbours, parental groups or within institutions such as the workplace or through other professional af-

filiations or auxiliary organizations. (Ibid.) Consequently, it is rarely a lack that gives rise to book circles, but rather that conditions are right. This applies to the conditions of the book industry at large. Long (2003: 77) acknowledges that if there are many trade actors like book stores and libraries in the vicinity, books are more easily accessible, which in turn makes “the local environment more hospitable for the formation and sustenance of reading groups”.

Adding to this picture, even publishers are brought closer to the book circles. In April 2007, Månocket launched a special promotion of titles directed at the book circles. These titles were selected for book circle discussions and featured some bonus materials, such as an interview with the author. Indeed, reading groups have become very important to their business. In one instance, Månocket has even been influenced in its title selection. They received a phone call from somebody who explained that s/he was a member of a reading group and promptly asked when they were going to publish Julian Barnes’ novel *Arthur and George* (2005).<sup>189</sup> Until then, Månocket had had no intention of buying the paperback rights for that novel.<sup>190</sup> Publishing the book, however, it was the first non-Scandinavian title to be promoted as a book circle paperback, quickly followed by a non-European title (Hisham Matar’s *Ingen i världen*). The list now comprises a mix between Swedish and foreign authors.

Importantly, the book circles do seem to have a generative impact on their surroundings. In the all-male group, there were three parallel all-women groups within the immediate family. Thus, it is not just a matter of overlapping social circles (cf. Coser, Kadushin & Powell 1982); rather, setting up one book circle soon leads to the formation of another somewhere else.

## Reading Outside of Life

Interestingly, Hartley (2001) describes the groups in her survey in terms of age and sex, almost as if they were separate, living beings: for example, “seven-year-old all-male urban group” and “fifteen-year-old all-female group”. In my study, too, the book circles kept track of approximately how long the group had been

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<sup>189</sup> *Arthur & George*, Swedish translation by Mats Hörmark, and published by Bokförlaget Forum in 2006

<sup>190</sup> The director of *Månocket*, Louise Bäckelin, told me this anecdote 27 February 2008, just a few weeks before the trade magazine announced she would leave the company for its new competitor Pocketförlaget. (see also Winkler, 18 March 2008) The conditions for Månocket have recently become tougher since the larger publishing companies, especially the Bonnier group, declared that they would keep their titles for publication within their own sphere. This move should probably be understood against Bonnier publisher Jonas Axelsson’s contention that it is increasingly the paperback editions that render titles profitable (20 February 2007). Furthermore, three years later Bonniers announced their strategic takeover of Pocketgrossisten. (Cf. Winkler, 10 February 2010)

around. The all-male and the mixed group were both “five years old” at the time of the interviews – the mixed group had just celebrated their anniversary with a lovely three-course dinner and sparkling wine – and the ladies in Lund told me they were approaching their “mid twenties”. Indeed, the book circle takes on a little parallel life of its own and it will recast the identity of all the members.

Hartley (2001: 22) claims, “A reading group isn’t just about reading, it’s about reading in a context, a context which is fostered by the group, and which in turn affects the whole experience of reading.” Hereby Hartley directs her attention to the outward picture: to society in which book circles allegedly make up an active part and to life at large. This line of thought builds on the model of the book as a representation – an image of the world. (cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1987/1980: 23) Book circles as I know them, however, do not engage in reading *in* a context so that reading is somehow embedded *within* the world. One member of the all-male group, Johan S., speaks of the group as a “breathing hole” [*andningshål*] in everyday life. Johan Å, another man in the same group, clearly states: “The reading circle is completely outside of the life one leads.” Thus, for the circle, reading operates epiphenomenally, *on the outside*. It is about moving on the brink of something important.

The book circle instead draws a momentary boundary or limit with everyday life. That could be one reason why we rarely find spouses within the same reading group. It is not that the members do not enjoy their spouse’s company or that they share little private secrets in the group (that some spouses may fear). It is more a way to create a relation to and connect with what is outside one’s life.

Moving on the outside of life does not mean that book circles escape *from life*. Indeed, life experiences account for a large share of the groups’ topics. The members of the two Stockholm-based groups agree on the intimate nature of the meetings. Although quite embarrassed, one woman (AS) in the mixed group often refers to the ‘therapeutic’ value of the meetings as she seizes the moment to reflect upon her life at large. Similarly, Inger Eriksson (2006: 289) found in her study of poetry reading in a group at a hospice that they “do not seek to escape from their reality but to stay within it”. We need not interpret this as an ontological statement about reality as such, but could reflect on the relationship between reading and *life*. For these patients, reading poetry was a way to stay *alive*. Perhaps reading provides an additional life? Johan S in the all-male circle says:

I read wherever really, and this is my reading curve. Right now it is just... like a *cardiac arrest*. [The group laughs].

Indeed, the connection with mortality is ever-present in the act of reading, especially since there are only so many books you can read in a lifetime; death sets the limit (Bloom 2001/2000).

The connection of reading to the outside also affects the experience of the relationship between culture and nature. Johan S. expounds:

I am close to nature when I am reading, in a way. I like... In some way I associate reading a lot with seasons of the year and... outside in some way, although I am inside.

De Certeau (1988/1984) holds that readers spend time on the inside of something that they do not own; the text is to the reader what temporary housing is to the tenant. Here emerges another understanding: reading books renders possible the paradoxical experience of being inside and outside at the same time. It creates the boundary between the two concepts and simultaneously encompasses them both. Moreover, the cultural practice of reading is far from removed from nature; it is very much connected to, or at least close to, nature.



## Part IV. Towards Bookonomy

*This part presents a synthesizing exploration of book reading as consumption practice and a conceptualization of its logics and underlying pattern.*



## XIV. The Art and Logic of Reading Practices

*Next, we will explore what logic and artful dynamic characterizes readers' own use of books and in what ways voluntary readers individually and collectively employ the value of the reading and the book in their situated reading practices. This chapter uses a visual method as a means to put the analysis of reading practices in a new light.*

### Introduction

It has been argued that if we really wish to think abstractly or theorize about reading, then we have to start reading, then stop and think about what we just have been doing. (Stock in Boyarin 1993: 270) This may prove to be very difficult, especially since even the brain does not recognize reading as reading, but only as the total sum of small innumerable operations of thinking (Ibid.). And yet, it is not really possible to equate thinking with the doing of reading. Reading is far from being an abstract operation of understanding; rather, it means that the body is involved and that one establishes relationships with oneself and with others. (Chartier 1997/1995: 20) Reading is foremost and primarily a practice that is embodied in gestures, spaces and habits (De Certeau 1988/1984; Chartier 1995/1992: 15, 1997/1995).

Consumption as practice occurs often and on many sites (Warde 2005: 140), and it will embrace notions that build both on routine and on desire, emotion and embodiment. (Ibid. 136) Practices will take forms that are conditioned by the institutional arrangements connected with time, space and the social context. Therefore, we should steer clear of any attempts at characterizing reading by means of its effects that are supposedly universal. According to Stock, the only way to move beyond the limits of our present understanding of reading is to continuously expand the archive of reading practices known to mankind. This approach entails an ethical stance in that contemporary practices cannot be the universal measure or normative standard for the different roles that reading plays elsewhere and in other times. (Boyarin 1993: 270)

It is practice, and not goods, that will gratify consumer wants. One of the strongest lessons from theory of practice is that the key to changed behaviour lies mostly in the development of practices (Warde 2005: 140). In other words, a reform such as the VAT reduction may induce more purchases, but if we are



searching for both quantitative and qualitative changes in reading, we had better continue to investigate reading in terms of practices. Importantly, the practice perspective on consumption will steer clear of both the single focus upon consumer decision-making (choice and behaviour) and consumption as an expression of a personal (and indeed social) identity. (Ibid.)

There is a certain logic and art to practices (De Certeau 1988/1984: xv) and consumption practices belong with internal dynamics and external conditions (Warde 2005). Thus, we are not seeking the functions of, or purposes for, reading.<sup>191</sup> Following Schatzki (1996), Warde (2005) emphasizes the consumers' understandings, procedures and engagement. An important issue concerns how, for the individual, moments of consumption map on to one another (Ibid. 144). Taking inspiration from Miller's (2006) anthropological perspective, we will pay attention to value used every day by people, and this will not simply be an abstract notion of value. It will be a matter of what this use of value *does*: in practice and in society. In this way, we will gain an understanding of how the use of value does not destroy any value, but on the contrary generates *more* value, and *new* value.

In order to capture the elusive elements of engagement, multiplicity (Warde 2005), and boundaries (Wenger 1998), we must acknowledge the artfulness of practices (De Certeau 1988/1984). Considering that practices consist of both doings and sayings (Schatzki 1996), Warde (2005: 134) suggests that analysis should be directed at both practical activity and its representations. In other words, the event generates its own representation, which then becomes a part of it that cannot be dissociated from the event itself.

This chapter uses several types of data, including the images resulting from the visual method, as means to put the art and logic of reading practices in a new light.

### Excesses and Anxieties

Arnold Bennett's (1909) advice for developing a literary taste was very simple and straightforward. He exclaims: "Buy without any immediate reference to what you will read. Buy! Surround yourself with volumes, as handsome as you can afford." In my interviews, those who rarely read books expressed anxiety over having too many books at hand. One little accustomed reader in the trade union Metal dpt. 135, a woman in her thirties, said that if she has two or three books that she wants to read at the same time, she experiences fatigue and gives up. Hence, reading is conceived of as work or as a resource investment that is too heavy to undertake, even regardless of the returns. Whereas accustomed book readers rarely regard reading in economic terms and often seem to be

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<sup>191</sup> For research into the different reasons for reading, see Furhammar (1985).

aroused by the sheer amount of books. When I asked Liselotte, the Harlequin reader, about the difference between buying one book or two, seeing that she laughed so mischievously, she replied that:

In a way it is better to come home with one, because then I concentrate and read it; but if I have two! Oh, then I become like this that I *have* to look in the other!

So it is much calmer, really, to just buy one.

Buying one book appears to be need-driven, goal-oriented and sensible. Buying two books is more than she can read at a time. By doubling the number of books, curiosity is heightened, as at least two parallel possibilities are open. Moreover, she perceives remaining calm and acting upon the use-value of books as *morally* better than grappling with the intense desire of reading two books. Indeed, the urge to buy books may give rise to consumer anxieties. At best, it belongs with gift-giving. Recall from chapter VIII the Nordic Museum respondents who bear witness to their desirous book buying:

I buy frightening amounts of book. When I look at my bookshelves I can't believe that I have bought all this. And moreover, because when I think I need to clear away I try to take away those that I don't think I will read several times. Then I take a period and read some selected books a second time, then I give most of them away. (Kerstin Bexby born 1939, Hälsingland, KU 18529)

## Taking Stock

An important element in consumption as practice, consuming as experience, is according to Holt (1995) the activity of accounting, by which consumers apply an interpretive framework to make sense of the specific consumption context. The practice of accounting has not caught much attention, says Holt, although it is a fundamental, integrative part in everyday life. When there are many facts, rules, and conventions, various interpretations can be made. Here accounting emerges as a rewarding activity for both the novice and the expert. It gains importance as sense-making grows more difficult; accounting then involves facts that enhance the context and increase the understanding of the specifics.

In my data I have discerned another type of accounting related to the practices of reading and writing. It is more connected with the economic meaning of accounting, specifically the manner in which one engages in stocktaking and inventory.

I write down every title in a booklet since some years back. In a yearless calendar I enter the title and the author and which year, when I finish a book. Since 1991 and up until today I have read 413 books. (Woman, born 1950, Dädesjö KU 18484)

Ever since school age I have been "book-keeping" my read books in alphabetic order. That is my "secret vice". When I rest my brain I sit down and write from

memory all the titles that I remember with a certain letter. On S and D there are nowadays up to 200. I remember the titles by not always the content. But some I remember! (Woman, born 1935, Norrbotten, KU 18561)

Here accounting emerges as bookkeeping in its most literal sense.

In my interviews with the male metal workers, one man, Kurt, a little above 50 years old, tells how, alongside reading Western paperbacks in junior high school, he had a thing about [*“dille på”*] writing and copying information about sports from what he had read. He carefully jotted down the match results, and who had scored the goals, and importantly, the number of spectators. He kept many thick folders filled with squared paper so that he could have the space to write more. He covered football, bandy, and ice hockey – just about every sport around. Extending to the English league, Kurt bought booklets with all the facts and copied them into his own paper. When co-interviewee Mikael asks him why he should write it when he already had the figures, Kurt says he had wanted to have it for every season. Reflecting on the contrast to youths who engage in fictional TV games nowadays:

That I do not understand, because I want reality myself. Not that kind of fantasy. I am busy with what has been already and what is coming. [Laughs a little]

Another great interest is geography, and Kurt has written down facts about different countries: provinces, states, etc. This kind of writing feels like day-dreaming, Kurt says. He enjoys planning for future events more than the event itself.

De Certeau (1988/1984: 135) describes how the enterprise of writing begins with a blank page where one plots the text. Writing is not just a game, it has a strategic function; information items are “collected, classified, inserted into a system and thereby transformed”. The aim of writing is to act on the environment and transform it, concludes De Certeau critically. “It stocks up what it sifts out and gives itself the means to expand. Combining the power of *accumulating* the past and that of making the alterity of the universe *conform* to its models, it is capitalist and conquering.”(Ibid.) If this were true, however, writing would have been capitalist long, long before the invention of capitalism itself.

### The Accumulative Logic

In the case of reading, it does not operate according to a competitive logic by which the experience of one good more or less destroys the need for another. On the contrary, reading books is a *cumulative* experience: “The more one reads worthwhile books, the more one gets out of reading, the more one is able to appreciate the context and the more one develops an appetite for it.” (Van der Ploeg 2004: 5)

The more one reads and writes, the more one wants to. Knowledge of all kinds. One awakens curiosity. (Woman, Haninge, b. 1955, KU 18506)

This view also emerged in my interviews, for example, with a couple of male metalworkers in Sandviken. Upon the question if they ever perceived reading as a chore, one man born in 1976 replied:

I think like this, the more you read, the better for yourself. With vocabulary [*ordförråd*, 'stock of words'], and you learn. I regard it only useful to read.

In the mini group of mothers, two women associated language and vocabulary directly with thinking. And by reading someone else's writing one discovers new ways of thinking and one can also decide for oneself how much thinking one can engage in. It also stretches across time and space in that one can experience the past, the future (said smilingly) and other cultures.

This captures what Colbert (1989 in Wennes, 2002) describes as an *accumulative* logic of art experiences that stand in stark contrast to other products and commodities that work according to a competitive logic whereby the use of one product more or less eliminates the need for another. In other words, the economic logic of saturation, by which marginal utility is declining, is not easily applied to reading. Kurt tells how watching nature documentaries on television often arouse his curiosity, and how he can spend hours on end reading through encyclopedias after the programme. "One thing leads to another...", he emphasizes twice.

One woman, Liselotte, who is a member of Harlequin, reported that she often sets out to buy one particular book when she is feeling a bit down. If the book happens to be available in a cheaper paperback edition, then she may even buy *two* books, Liselotte exclaimed in the interview, laughing mischievously. Buying more than she had planned not only brings more variation but seems to simultaneously draw on desire and to increase the desire for reading. This veritable 'joie de lire' is further strengthened by the feeling of richness and wealth. The example of Liselotte shows how the issue of readership cannot be understood merely on the premise of individuals' need to read. Indeed, the concept of desire has a strong bearing upon readers' use of value.

The similarity between book consumption and the desire for collecting has been observed by Maclaran & Masterson (2006) and Borgerson & Schroeder (2006).<sup>192</sup> Baudrillard (1996/1968) speaks of *serial motivation* in consumption and all the examples of that he provides are taken from the book world; the book buyers' inclination to purchase all the titles in a series of publication (regardless of any real interest) once they have been hooked; the readers who can only read comfortably when surrounded by all their books; *et cetera*. In order to explain

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<sup>192</sup> Collecting is, according to Marina Bianchi (1998), a specific form of consumption with its own set of rules and functions. One characteristic is that collecting must be seen in its totality, as a form of system. Therefore singular parts cannot be lent just like that because this changes the meaning of the totality.

the nature of collecting as distinct from the concept of accumulation, Baudrillard has drawn on the Latin word *colligere*, ‘to choose and gather together’. (Ibid. 103) Reading is the prodigal example of the processes that Baudrillard seeks to explicate. However, Baudrillard is blind to the word’s further relation to *legere*, which according to Svenbro (1999/1950) means to read, and therefore he does not see that it is central to his line of thought. Importantly, as we saw in Chapter VII, we must not rule out the implications of understanding ‘reading’ in terms of picking, gathering, and collecting. In other words, they may well be connected on a level of basic function or everyday use of economy, language and reading.

Although reading is bound by space (Chartier 1995/1992) and time (Cf. Van den Ploeg 2004), there is no actual limit to how many books one can read in one’s life, although no one can read them all. Ultimately, death sets the limit. (Bloom 2000) With that realization, readers change their practice of selecting or picking:

In the autumn of life I sift a lot. If I start reading a book and it does not concern me, I put it aside. Certain books that I could not appropriate 20-30 years ago are suddenly interesting. (Kristina Andersson, b. 1930, KU18534)

But life is short, one has to make priorities. [...] There are so many wise, good and instructive books that I can’t read them all, and I don’t want to waste precious time on flatness. (Man, Sundsvall, b. 1922, KU 18475)

Reading books is time-consuming. Reading must be fitted into the lives of people among wide-ranging activities: “work, travel, shopping, cooking, eating, washing, cleaning, child care, holidays, sport, other forms of leisure, seeing friends, sex and sleep”. (Van der Ploeg 2004: 5) As time is more precious for high-wage earners, Van Der Ploeg observes that their alternative cost of reading is higher. It is also a matter of what one reads. Reading the Nimis book in Kullaberg (Cf. Chapter VI) is probably less time-consuming than reading the printed book about it.

## Re-reading

For Keynes (1953: 105), any consumption that is satisfied by objects that are produced previously is understood as a “disinvestment”. And yet, in the case of books, reading older titles can be valuable in its own right, due to their bequest value and sense of otherness in terms of time and space. Specifically, re-reading is a common element in the reading experience, according to Nell (1988), based on hedonic value connected to the daily reading time. It is not the most common mode of reading. Avid re-reading also belongs with a strong need for security. Re-reading may also be adopted as a tactic to overcome the unexpected. “Double reading” may be performed so that skim reading is complemented with a more thorough read. (Ibid. 251) Gudrun in my study, for example, ex-

plains she does not take much notice of the details in her first read. If she likes the book, she may re-read it at once. Some people prefer to re-read after some time has passed, mentions Nell (Ibid.) Put differently, re-reading as double reading is another expression of the additive logic, and could also help to take stock of details.

One woman in the group of mothers, Josephine, mentions how children enjoy re-reading:

I also think about how they like to read the same, – the same book that you yourself find tremendously boring to read after a while. I get a feeling that you read a book once and then there is something they *like*, and so you read it again and again, and probably, they consequently associate with new things. And then you get to work up that inner world in some way. I think. I suppose you get *new* images in your head, you kind of see new things. And that's what is fun.

### The Additive Logic of Reading and Erosion

Ong (1982) described oral literature in terms of a form of additive, even redundant logic. The question is whether or not this oral characteristic was transported into written language, and then into reading practices. At the extreme ends of reading, every page is added, one after the other:

I don't know *how* many nights I lay awake and read just because it was so difficult to stop reading. Thought all the time: –“Just another page...” They were **many** nights anyway. “Reading at a stretch” is clearly the form of reading that I have devoted myself to most. (Woman, Ronneby, b. 1979, KU 18482)

Reading has certainly been regarded as some type of (silent) production (Cf. Fish 1980), and not just as consumption, albeit an active form of consumption (Cf. Furuland 1997). Reading books operates in accordance with an *additive* logic, by which one experience is easily added to another.

Also, reading a book is a potentially *memorable* experience, as proposed by Van der Ploeg (2004) and Chr. Hjort-Andersen (2000). One woman in the mixed book circle notes that some reading experiences last very long and exert more influence; hence it need not be a question of reading many books. To Henri Bergson, the concept of *duration* is a multiplicity that stands in opposition to metric multiplicity or the multiplicity of magnitude. It is not that it cannot be divided, because it can, but not without changing at each point of division. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987/1980: 483f) The duration of the experience of a book may be divided, into units of time for example, but the experience will be qualitatively very different.

De Certeau (1988/1984: xxi) says that the readings that we produce cannot willfully be stored. We cannot save them for future activation and use. Hence, reading is connected to a kind of *erosion*: while we read, time is eroding and our forgetfulness makes us incapable of stockpiling our readings. We may stack up books in bookshelves. But we cannot protect ourselves from the erosion of

time unless we buy the book that then becomes “no more than a substitute (the spoor or promise) of moments ‘lost’ in reading”.

Spiggle (1986) studied comics as a way to explore consumers’ material values. The comic strip below captures and expresses the logic of erosion at work in work in book consumption and the practice of reading:

Image 1 Medelålders Plus, by Sven-Bertil Bärnarp (2008)



- I read such a fantastic book last night! Unforgettable!
- It is called... what was it now... and it is about a man and a woman... and a dog...? Or maybe it was two women and a cat...?
- I was totally spellbound! You must read it.
- Who wrote the book?
- The book?

Ramírez (1995), however, opposes the common view of memory as container (Cf. Lakoff & Johnson), but argues instead that memory belongs with activity. Memories cannot simply be stored, but need to be activated. Conversely, for consumers in a surplus society, erosion of memory along with disposal and waste may be prerequisite for the activity of purchasing books. One woman (KU18524) born in 1938, explains promptly:

I do not have any interest in investing/spending money on books, because I never re-read them. I remember too much for that to be interesting.

## Reading and the Others

Not only do we forget what we have read, and even forget ourselves in reading (De Certeau 1988/1984: xx), importantly we also tend to lose track of those around us when we are engaged in deep reading. This kind of forgetting of others occurs even when parents are reading. Gudrun is a well-accustomed reader, sixty years of age and a mother of six. She enters the book completely, and experiences them fully:

*The Lord of the Rings* was terrible; I got very hungry! [Laughs] I don't think I left the sofa for about a week. [...] I don't know what the kids did meanwhile. They must have done something.

Reading with engagement could entail a negative relation to regular food consumption. For an avid reader such as Gudrun, the joys of reading may compensate for hunger and lack of parental control. But for parents less accustomed to reading, this kind of pleasure poses a problematic situation that is not so easily resolved. For instance, one woman recalls with a tinge of bad conscience what happened one summer when she and her husband encountered Jean M. Auel's *The Clan of the Cave Bear* series.

But think of those Ayla-books... You see, we did not read that much when the children were younger. And I know that we were out with the [holiday] trailer somewhere in Bohuslän and what boring parents we were! Because we read these books, you know. I don't know what the children did, because we were completely...

One woman, born in 1929, readily admits that she reads on and off, and that her reading has been sporadic due to her tasks of taking care of her home and children.

The worst is that when I read I can't stop until I am finished. Therefore I have to make sure that I have nothing else when I read. When the children were small I got one "book-reading day" on my holidays. I live inside the books and neither hear nor see, laughing and crying. (KU18494, Gothenburg)

Facing 364 days a year when she cannot read as she pleases, this woman valued her special book reading day very much, being aware of it as a form of self-enhancement with an undeniable hedonic quality (cf. Schwartz 2001). Another person who also values reading highly says that it is an "extremely egotistical experience", especially since it is not so easily shared (Man, Hammerdal, b. 1941, KU 18486). This poses a challenge to the cultural value of reading. Furthermore, if not even keen readers manage to legitimize their reading in everyday life, then how could less accustomed readers? For example, the fathers that belong to the target group of Åke Dansk's trade union project 'Read to me, Daddy!' (*Läs för mig pappa!*); how would they be able to justify spending their time reading?

Nina, a mother of two young children, became literate at a very early age, and is a highly accomplished reader. Nevertheless, compared with her favourite activity, watching films, she finds reading books rather heavy.

I suppose that is the thing with the book, that it is a *performance*. That now I'm going to read this book. That is probably what you feel at the beginning, but when you've got into the book it doesn't feel like that anymore, and then it is



easy to read. But before... well, I start reading the book because I want to have read it. And after that there is only that job, kind of.<sup>193</sup>

For Nina, reading is an engagement that demands a certain undertaking, especially at first, before taking any pleasure in reading. The desire to have read many books is not matched by her motivation to actually read them. And for the unaccustomed reader, here Olle from the Monday Gang in Dalsjöfors, the sense of undertaking and performance is heavy and frustrating:

Then when I lie and read, then I think: can't the chapter be finished so that I can concentrate on the next. There is none. I just read and read and read...

Here the additive logic of reading works against the unaccustomed reader who is exasperated by what is perceived as a never-ending text. Thus, the endings of chapters are welcome as they create bridges where the reader can be both pleased with his or her performance, and lured to continue into the next chapter.

### Childrens' Reading

These accounts need to be considered in relation to children's reading. Today there is much anxiety that the time parents spend reading to their children has decreased. According to The Children's Barometer [*Barnbarometern*] of 2002/2003, shortly after the VAT reduction, the reading time for children of the age of 3-8 years has decreased over the last two decades.<sup>194</sup> The book still reaches the largest audience on a daily basis, but the average time given over to reading is just above a quarter of an hour, compared to television at 84 minutes a day.

Interviewing two parents who had immigrated from Kosovo before raising a family of four boys, Zoye, the mother explains that every night at 7.30 pm. the children have half an hour of reading. This time is not devoted to homework at all, only "extra reading" books that the children have borrowed by themselves in the library. Indeed, they *must* read every night; it is a good thing, Zoye says. And then she often sits with them reading, although she is actually not too fond of sitting down reading herself. It was not until after the second child was born that she found her way to the library. She also reads aloud for the youngest boy, just above one year old, and the older boys often come and listen. The children only read books in Swedish, never in Albanian. When asked about it, Zoye reflects that maybe it would be a good thing to do. In the interview with the father, Agim, he says the supply of Albanian books was very limited when they arrived; it is much better now.

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<sup>193</sup> Nina, individual interview, 23 February 2004.

<sup>194</sup> The survey has been conducted since 1984.

In the group of mothers with young children, time was not the primary issue. And one woman, Ingela, also moves beyond the question of children acquiring a larger vocabulary by reading, and the issue of the content; instead, she brings up the act of reading itself and the peacefulness and restfulness of experience. She emphasizes the closeness of reading with children, as they are sitting together, often with the children in her lap, or lying down, looking in the same book together. Perhaps this is what conveys a sense of harmony. It is a practice that belongs with everyday routines and such things. It is also highly connected to security, she holds.

Another woman, Heidi, continues this train of thought and speaks of how children can learn to deal with these experiences:

Or just that they meet unknown things, and then they have an adult, probably, beside them. Someone who can give this security so that they can meet such... strange things like Emil's father [famous literary character] who of course is terrible. Then you could meet someone like that, together with Mum. For example. Or Dad!<sup>195</sup>

Interestingly, the sense of security mentioned here is not indicative of Conservation, as Schwartz' (2001) model posits. The practice of reading for children brings together an intimate experience with openness to otherness. In an individual interview, Nina confesses that she herself is a more curious and open-minded person after reading as a child than she would have been otherwise. She emphasizes the importance of children's reading, because they are brought up in a rather restricted environment:

It is rarely *many* things. If you read you always get opinions from other parts [of society] and then you get much greater opportunities to [ex]change... But I kind of think it is... better to give children *Bamse* [children's comic] only until they are thirteen, rather than trying to push something on them that they are not interested in. Then they just lose the desire [for reading].<sup>196</sup>

Nina herself relates her moving to Stockholm as a consequence of reading the teenage magazine *Veckorevyn*; it had nurtured that dream within her and showed the possibilities. In the quote above also emerges a certain ethic for reading that renders more views possible than what exists in the child's immediate environment – regardless of what environment that may be – and yet, a limited but loved access is better than an undesired load. This point is worth considering when we are to value the quantity and quality of reading matters for children. Nina continues:

So I think that you can read just about anything. You will find that which – you pick out only those things that feed your own dreams. And somewhere – if you read enough, it is there, somewhere.

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<sup>195</sup> Heidi, group interview, 15 January 2004.

<sup>196</sup> Nina, group interview, 15 January 2004.

Reading *enough* is what matters, according to Nina, enough to pick whatever nourishment one finds. Recall once again from Chapter VII that in Latin, the word for reading, *legere*, also means, picking, collecting and gathering. Thus, reading would entail picking up and gathering those bits and pieces that are valued specifically. Indeed, it is not only a question of hedonic consumption, but of epistemology: gathering something is also a mode of understanding.

## Geometric Logic

Manguel (1999: 26) does not agree about reading as an arithmetic experience but holds that reading proceeds in *geometric* progression. Over the span of a lifetime, as the quantities of books read increase there is also a qualitative difference in reading. Similarly, Ahlmark & Brodin (2000: 38) ask themselves whether or not the advancement of reading proceeds *stepwise*.

The first book that I read and that set off my book interest was probably Sidney Sheldon's books. Nowadays I read all the good books that I come across. (Woman born 1964, Trångsund, KU18504)

The reading habits have developed the whole time. Now I read more non-fiction than previously and more horror books, less romance, more psychology, more about the Second World War, more books that are about what I am trained for. You know better now what you want to read about and what will particularly interest you. (Woman, born 1972, KU18522)

I read all the time, but the demands do increase the more text one consumes. (Woman, born 1950, Dädesjö KU18484)

It is difficult to say whether these qualitative differences in reading could qualify for the refinement of consumption that Patten had posited as a consequence of increased affluence. One man in the mixed book circle, Svante, clarifies that reading entails a conflict between the forces of just being pulled along, to being washed along [*sköljas med*] and there being some kind of resistance.

The arithmetic and the geometric progression need not be posited as simple contrasts, but could work as complements. My thoughts go to the Harlequin reader Anna who joined the Ordfront association and read more serious books on societal problems alongside the romances. In some severe cases of reading – approaching perhaps a condition of 'hyperlectia' (Cf. Fischer 2003) – readers, who find themselves with nothing to read, will read *anything*.

At home there were not very many books. I do not remember that I ever got a book for Christmas or as a birthday present. But we kept a weekly magazine – Our home – and my grandparents had Allers so that was my reading matter. A playmate's mother has told me that when my friend saw me coming, she always said: "Hide all the newspapers because Gullbritt is coming!" Apparently I read wherever I could get at it. (Woman, born 1938, Dalarna KU18565)

My everyday life consists of always reading, on the milk cartons, newspapers, brochures [sic!], posters etc. My husband usually comments this with – I have never ever seen a human being read as much like you do, on everything that you get hold of. IMPORTANT. (Woman, born 1957, Västergötland, KU18507)

As a child I experienced a horrible frustration if I didn't have a book to read that I was busy with. I called the condition "book deficit", and then I really could read anything; I remember for example a German dictionary. (Woman, born 1976, Stockholm, KU18525)

### Complementary Logic

Reading has often been described as 'escape' (Cf. Niles Lind 1936 among others) or 'daydreaming', due to serious defects in the reader's emotional life, especially in connection with popular literature (Cf. Lundqvist in Hansson 1988). Many readers testify to the image of escape, although rarely with the same moral fervour of condemnation. In the case of romance reading, Jensen (1984) describes it with the help of Erving Goffman's concept of "removal activity" which he coined to describe the tactics that the people at the mental institutions will use in order to kill time or to forget. I do not agree that one could easily apply this image to the reading practice, without losing some understanding of the specific value of reading.

In the group discussions among metal workers, Kurt, one man who rarely reads fiction, asks the accustomed readers if they read more or less if they are feeling bad. "For me, there is no difference", says Mikael (b. 1965). "Not for me either", says Anita (b. 1965). "All the time..." Mikael smiles. One less accustomed reader, Hans (b. 1961), says that if he feels bad, then he does not want to "take in anything" [*greppa in någonting*] because he has enough with what he is doing anyway. One woman agrees. Similarly, in the all-male book circle, Daniel observes that men in particular seem to find the different complications in life highly disturbing, and then to read about them as well is unbearable.

This approach to reading may not be static, belonging only with different categories of people, but its inherent dynamic could perhaps be understood with the logic of reading. Cilla, a woman from the mixed book circle and mother of two sons, suffers from burn-out syndrome after coping with intense years of career, childrearing, divorce and cancer, all at the same time.

I cannot take in... any impressions. [...] I am existentially full. I can wake up in the morning and [makes a gesture and sound of nausea] kind of feel... I don't want any impressions. [---] I am filled up, so to speak, I don't have any space to take in anything. Sorry to say. And it is really a shame. Especially when I am in this nice book club! [Laughs] At the same time, I am there without reading. Because I do have opinions anyway! [Laughs]

The tough life experiences she has gone through have more than filled her cup. There is no more room inside her for additional input. I asked her how she feels when reading books, and especially how she experiences it with her body:

I cannot concentrate; I don't understand what it says. I cannot... [I] don't connect. And it becomes incomprehensible. But how it feels in my body, I don't know. That I cannot describe.

With the burn-out syndrome, reading becomes difficult and impossible to take hold of and grasp. And yet, as shown in the previous quote, Cilla still has a lot of opinions; in other words, she has retained her subjective capacity for judgment and taste. Regarding the bodily experience of reading practice under present conditions, she is unaware of it and cannot tell. It seems as if the body does not get involved in her (failed) attempts at reading.

In another case of illness, reading may even help relieve the symptoms. Gudrun, who suffers from fibromyalgia, says the difficulty in concentrating makes it easier to shift from reading for work and reading for leisure, "because you forget what you doing over there". And reading technical literature in order to solve a problem eases her rheumatic pains; "it works better than pain killers".

Importantly, for many readers, rather than compensating for what they do not have, they seek to complement and produce a contrast to what they already have at hand:

I am probably influenced a lot by what I read but maybe differently in different periods. It is like with music, if my mood is terrific I'd rather read "heavy" books that demand reflection and consciousness. Gloomy moments call for "lighter" books. A lot of humour and love, warmth and gardens are what is needed then. (Woman, Alunda, b. 1951, KU18565)

This seems to suggest that reading books adds a dimension to life: a complement or contrast. The accustomed readers do not seem to mind this; on the contrary, it is the foremost value of reading. Mikael for instance, holds that he needs to read because he has a family; reading is a way of creating and entering a world of his own. I interpret this as meaning he is already committed to the family, and needs to add his personal dimension.

In this way, reading is not primarily about escaping, but about adding experiences to life. Goffman's concept of removal is the opposite of the additive logic that I discern in reading practices. Reading adds another dimension to life. It cannot remove or subtract anything, according to my view, least of all emotion and practice.

When Van der Ploeg (2004) speaks of books as experience goods he does not mention, however, that it is in fact perfectly possible to combine the activity of reading books with other types of activities. More than a quirky aspect of reading practices, this holds potential for increased reading and for literary business. For example, in Margaret Jensen's (1984) study of Harlequin romances, she

observes that with their easy style and upbeat tempo they could be read under conditions that are not usually suitable for reading, such as when cooking and caring for children. This I believe has contributed to its success. Any book, however, has the potential capacity for taking hold of its readers.

If it is very captivating, which must not happen too often, I bring it with me while the potato water comes to the boil, so that I can read a couple of pages extra. (Woman, Närke, born 1928, KU18542)

This woman is obviously wary of the capacity of books to hold readers in a grip. Simultaneous reading and cooking may be possible, although somewhat difficult at times. There are other, easier opportunities for combining reading with other doings. Typically, travel and waiting are prime examples, and much less problematic. In the Stockholm underground, many commuters are seen deeply involved in reading books. And with the advent of the audio book, one can even “read” a book while driving a car!

### E-booking

The e-book is “a completely different thing” than the printed book, according to the avid reader Gudrun, and yet, it is of course a book. It does not matter which form it is, she says; it is still the work of a writer. On the other hand, in Gudrun’s case, reading an e-book only takes place at the desk where she has her computer. Sometimes, she finds it hard to sit at the desk, and she dreams of having a projector so she could lie in bed and read instead.<sup>197</sup> The reading hardware available a few years before was still too clumsy, too expensive and too specialized. Jan, the other e-book ambassador, admits that reading e-books is not very comfortable. The screen is flickering, one has to scroll and therefore use a mouse. “You sit completely tied to a screen; it is difficult leaning back in a chair in a comfortable way, and changing [body] position.”<sup>198</sup> Unlike the audio book then, it seems the e-book may have released the text over the Internet, but it was not yet deemed liberatory for the practice of reading.

Both Gudrun and Jan attempted to read Stephen King’s novel that he sold in portions over the Internet, and both got tired of it before the end. Gudrun says that they were just ordinary files, and remarks that it was written in a strange way, “just as if it *wasn’t* a book, but was *going to be* a book”. It was difficult to tell what was “round-talk”, and what was the book itself. It seems it was as much about how one makes a book, and it was difficult to get a grip of.

When Jan makes an e-book, he gives free access to the book, but emphasizes that he maintains his copyright; access is a gift to the reader. At the time of the

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<sup>197</sup> Interview, Gudrun 11 March 2004.

<sup>198</sup> Interview, Jan, 19 March 2004.

interview, it was still not possible to give an e-book to someone as a gift. If you've bought the book, Gudrun says, you should be able to make use of it as you want: print the file, give it as gift, etc., as long as you don't make a hundred copies and sell them. Considering the moral aspects, it would be better the more people who read, she reflects. Borrowing an e-book from the library could be different because it is free. Borrowing e-books is easier than buying, says Gudrun. And for Jan, actuality is the most important thing. "When one doesn't read them, they are dead, I think."

## Reading Places and Artifacts

Book historian Armando Petrucci (1999/1995: 362) quotes a study among Italian readers conducted by Pietro Innocenti. Innocenti concluded that the most-preferred place for reading is at home, and if they had one, in a room of their own. Of eighty persons interviewed, only four people preferred to read at a library. Very few people desired to read outdoors. Some people preferred reading in bed, others in an armchair. Many people mentioned trains as their favourite place to read, almost as much as the armchair at home. Twelve persons preferred to read at a desk or at a table.

The Nordic Museum inquiry list data included in my study comprise around the same number of informants (78) as Innocenti's study. Although place was not a primary topic for inquiry in the museum's original letter to the respondents, I have nonetheless made notes of all mentions of places. Adding to this topic, we should be observant of its relation to artefacts (cf. Reckwitz 2002) and different modes and ways of reading (cf. De Certeau 1988/1984)

Only one man mentions library-reading explicitly; he reads either at home or at the Royal Library (KU18508). One woman mentions reading at work, at a children's daycare centre (KU18535). An older man prefers to sneak-read in bookshops (KU18494); others read in the loo (KU18475, KU18493), in the bathroom (KU18475) or in a special writing cabin [*skrivkoja*] (KU18493). One reader, an older woman even recounts she used to read in a small box-room [*skrubbi*] (KU18544). As a girl, one reader used to sneak away to read in the basement, in the toilet, behind the blackcurrant bushes or in the library (KU18510). An older man speaks of reading out in the green grass or in bed as a child. (KU18499); the same goes for an older woman as an adult (KU18559). Others mention bedreading only in their childhood (KU18507), some in adulthood (eg. KU18529; KU18546). A young woman alternates between the bed and the sofa (KU18522). For some, the armchair is a preferred place for reading books (KU18549; KU18566); especially along with a reading lamp on the floor [*gohlamp*] (KU18546).

Many readers mention multiple places where they read. One woman reads in bed, in the corner of her sofa, in the deckchair and on the beach (KU18500). Similarly, another woman writes that she reads by the television, at the kitchen table, in the deckchair; in other words, the places “where she has the time” (KU18515). Another woman writes she can read “everywhere”: in bed, at the dinner table, in the sofa, on the train, and even on the bus (KU18527). For another woman “everywhere” means reading in the queue in the food store, at the doctors’/dentists’, when shopping [for alcohol] at Systembolaget, and in bed (KU18534). And in yet another case, it may be on the soft carpet in the living room, among other places; on the bus, or in the car, amounting to between five and eight books every week (KU18557). Two women divide their place of reading in accordance with the reading matter (KU18566): reading books in the sofa and weeklies at the kitchen table (KU18524) or in an armchair (KU18539). One woman recalls reading car magazines in her elder brothers’ room (KU18553).

One older woman would rather read sitting up in bed, and preferably with a cup of coffee (KU18513). Another woman prefers lying down, reading her newspapers and magazines (KU18520). A third woman used to lie down reading, but nowadays she sits up reading in different places (KU18517). In this way, the practice of reading in a particular place is intimately connected with the ways and means of using the body. There are different modes of reading; a young woman who tries to read for two hours every day is curled up in the sofa or huddled up in front of the fireplace in the cabin, or reads while travelling (KU18538). As phrased by a woman in the Nordic Museum inquiry lists:

If the book captivates me it is with me everywhere, at the sink, the stove and the dinner tables, naturally in bed too but there I prefer to have a “trivial book” the really interesting ones I like to enjoy in a bright and clear state of mind. (Lena Lindström, KU18566, woman, born 1951)

The psychologist Nell (1988: 250) has already commented on people’s joyful experiences of reading in bed. This situation contains the distilled delight connected with reading: having some time of one’s own, forgetting everyday hassles, and relaxing. He observes that bed reading is addictive. Many of his respondents cannot sleep without reading at least a little. This aspect has emerged in my material too:

To fall asleep without having read is the toughest thing ever, completely unthinkable for getting a good sleep. (Woman, Haninge, b. 1955, KU18506)

Social reading, however, does occur sometimes even in bed:

Most often I read at night in bed. I read aloud so that my husband also hears. He can read for himself but he is lazy and rather listens when I read aloud. (Woman, b. 1936, Skåne, KU18523)

Interestingly, exclusively private bed-reading practices are indeed something rather new in a historical perspective. It was not until the 1950s or 60s that



members of families, especially in the countryside, had separate bedrooms. Before then, the whole family often slept in the same room. (Bäck 1994: 19) Furthermore, bed-reading calls for specific practices that in turn involve other important, hedonistic elements and artifacts:

I'd rather read at home in bed with lit candles around and some good music on the stereo when I read a book. (Woman, b. 1979, KU18478)

I think reading works best sitting in bed, gladly with a cup of coffee. My husband doesn't read much (books) so I read when I am home alone. (Woman, b. 1943, KU18513)

Indeed, some artifacts play a vital role in the practice of reading. These artifacts are not arbitrary but belong with the embodiment of practices (cf. Reckwitz 2002: 212), and with place. One woman has arranged a reading-corner in her home with a special bookstand (KU18497). One young respondent speaks of reading under a blanket (KU18487, b. 1977). An older woman mentions reading in bed; she keeps the Bible within reach on her electric organ. (KU18523) One woman tells she used to read in bed, now she reads at the kitchen table where she has mounted a magnifying glass due to failing eyesight (KU18532). Thus, subjected to the breakdowns of the body, new artifacts are introduced into reading practice.

There are, of course, methodological limitations to portraying consumer practices based on the inquiry list respondent letters. As a complement to the letters and interviews, the drawing sessions can even help the researcher to visually express relations and conditions that are not readily visible.

### The Otherwise Silent Artifacts

So far, we have seen that the practice of reading is connected with a wide array of artifacts other than the books themselves: material objects (such as beds, toilets, tables, chairs, armchairs, parasols, duvets, blankets, lamps, etc.) and vehicles (planes, trains, buses, and trams, etc.). Some theories of practice draw according to Warde (2005: 150) upon Latour's actor-network theory that encompasses all actors, even non-human objects – the actants or 'the missing masses' as it were – (Cf. Schatzki et al. 2001); and these material objects as determinants in the practice (Cf. Pickering in Schatzki et al. 2001).

One woman, Anja, whom I have met several times and interviewed in a group and individually about her book purchasing and reading, surprised me by drawing and mentioning special things that has been connected to her reading practices for around ten years. This had not emerged at all in our previous talks.



Here is my little divided work. [Anja giggles and everybody laughs with her.] My biggest association is really that I think of my gold-coloured cushion that I drag along whenever I read. And I don't know why I think of it when I read, but for me, that is my reading; that cushion. And then, now this last summer I have been sitting a great deal underneath – I live by Långholmen – and I sit a lot underneath a tree and read...quite a lot. So the cushion is really much more indoors. I sometimes take it outside with me too. [General giggling]<sup>199</sup>

One member in her book circle concludes that the cushion is like a kind of comfort blanket? “No, not at all! It is pretty hard and... pretty uncomfortable [laughs embarrassedly]. It is not at all one of those soft, cuddly, fluffy pillows.” After a round of reasoning, she arrives at an understanding of the cushion as foremost giving her the *support* she needs to read. Observe how she crossed out the bed; it was not at all as important a place for her as she first believed. Her drawing aroused associations that eventually created a different image of her reading than any of us had expected. Both the tree and the cushion were new to me; she had not mentioned them before.

With this account of various artifacts involved in reading, Palm's (2009) conceptualization of a literary work as arti(f)act may have to be reconsidered. Reading literature involves many more artifacts than the work per se; and conversely, the work involves many more activities, or rather, practices, than just reading. The line is drawn in the subjective experience of the consumption practice. Notably, our chosen methodology will not only enable research in this area, but will often set undue limitations in the exploration of practices.

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<sup>199</sup> Anja, interview, 10 October 2004.

## Distributive Logic and Modes of Reading

Anna-Karin reads a lot: non-fiction at work and fiction/crime in her spare time. “Fiction”, she writes in the upper left corner as a headline, “Anywhere, in-between other activities.” Reminiscent of De Certeau’s tactical consumer who seizes moments of consumption in passing, Anna-Karin grabs hold of reading whenever and wherever she can. She decidedly reports when and in what places and spaces she reads.

Interestingly, she also describes her reading in terms of the movement of her body, either on the move or at rest: “On the bus, the train, the plane – on the move” and “In the coffee shop” and “on the beach – [being] still” and she emphasizes the large sunshade with a red crayon. “In bed – still” and “In the armchair – still”. Then she puts down the maroon crayon and places herself “out in the grass”, still smiling. In the last image, she sits at a desk, drawn in cool blue. “At the office At a desk NON-FICTION”. And her smile is gone.



Aristotle argues that there is a distinction to be made between transition movement and pleasure. If we are to break down a movement or transition into small parts, then each part is incomplete. Even in a relatively homogeneous movement such as walking, each part is also different in kind from the other parts, and also from the whole. Pleasure, however, is complete at every moment it exists. If it should end sooner or last longer, it would not become any better. Hence, pleasure is not a transition with Aristotle, for transitions take time, aim at certain ends, and is complete in the full time of duration, or when the ends are attained. Had pleasure been a transition, then we would always be longing for its endstate. (Ross Aristotle foreword: xxi)

As shown in the image above, Anna-Karin does not place herself in situated contexts, such as, for example ‘in my leisure time’, ‘in my working hours’, ‘on

my travels'. Nor does she claim to read *for* some purpose either, like 'for relaxing', 'for amusement', which would imply some sort of instrumental value utility. Rather, she emphasizes the importance of doings and space in view of different literary genres. Pleasurable reading is what surges up in between activities, passes through them, even binds them together. And when in motion she seems to add her reading on to objects: "On the plane, bus, plane – on the move/en route"; "On the beach" – even when she writes "in bed" or "in the armchair" she is adding herself to the pieces of furniture. Connecting with Svenbro's observation (mentioned in Chapter VII) of how the distribution of reading either entails including oneself in the process, or simply adding itself to the writing, we can now reflect on reading as a distributive logic of practice, which is both additive and inclusive (even when it comes to artifacts such as furniture).

Reading could also join in alongside other activities. This other engagement (cleaning, cooking, travelling, etc.) denotes a finite activity or a final destination. Reading books can be practised infinitely alongside: while reading, Anna-Karin went home on the bus; while reading, Maria went to the toilet; while reading, Joakim went to sleep... In the case of the Harlequin readers that Jensen (1984) spoke of, perhaps not so much a matter of 'while cooking, she read a book', but possibly the other way around: while reading, she cooked dinner.

In this context, the book is a potentially powerful object that calls for organization, not only of reading, but also of other practices. One woman in a group interview, Eva from Dalsjöfors, confesses that reading a good book sometimes affects her dealings with chores around the house:

But I am like this that if I'm going to clean for example and I have a really good book, then I can sit down and read for half an hour because I think it is so deadly dull to clean. [...] I could go and break off my cleaning time just to sit down and read this book that I think is crazily good. Half an hour, three quarters of an hour.

Readers become deeply engrossed in their books even when they find themselves in concrete everyday life situations. Nina, a young woman in her early twenties, illustrates as follows:



One can readily tell from these images that this young woman grasps many opportunities to read: in the kitchen, on the tram, in bed, and on the living room sofa. The additive nature of reading is readily visible. For her, reading is part of the general flow of life. She often reads a book intensively for some three days and then she rests for another three days before she picks up another. Sometimes she cannot really recall what she just read. Although previously mentioned in the interview, she does not draw those situations or moments when she and her boyfriend, who very rarely reads books, lie next to each other in bed and listen together to an audio book. Once again, we can discern the methodological importance of collecting complementary data on both doings and sayings (Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005), for they will not give the same answers.

Reading is just not a cognitive activity, but also a bodily practice. (De Certeau 1988/1984; Chartier 1992) In the readers' accounts not only different embodiments of practice (cf. Warde 2005) emerge, but specifically different modes of bodily consumption. In the first image of reading in the kitchen, Nina has drawn how she puts up her feet on the chair opposite her. Apart from conveying a meaning of reading when she is alone at the table, she also shows us that her reading is embodied, and moreover, in different ways in different settings.

### Otherwise Unmentionable Reading

One reading practice just as intimate as reading in bed and which Petrucci does not refer to, and which does not emerge in any of the interviews, is the practice of reading in the toilet. Interestingly, no one in any of my interviews had mentioned bathroom reading at all. Nor have I found reference to this practice in any grand-scale statistical survey, scholarly book or article on reading. But are there any other indications that reading does take place in the bathroom? As

mentioned, among the Nordic Museum informants, some do explicitly mention reading in the toilet or in the outdoor loo [*“das?”*]: one man born in 1922 (KU18475); another in 1928 (KU14893) and one woman born in 1937 (KU18510).

In the painting sessions, however, two people, one man and one woman, created dual images: either reading in bed, or sitting in the toilet, pants down, reading.<sup>200</sup>



Joakim is a single man, just turned forty years old. He reads only in the evenings: in bed before going to sleep, and in the bathroom while going to the toilet. In fact, his entire leisure time reading takes place here, along with what he reads for work outside of his day job. His image of reading in the toilet makes for a couple of good laughs in the group, especially about the length of time he spends there. He also makes jokes about the consequences of his diet that give rise to much merriness.

He explains that he has a shelf in his bathroom where he stacks comic books and computer magazines. Books for his ordinary work are not present at all. That is something altogether different, he says: not so much of a reading, but more as a form of *seeking*. Then, looking at his own drawing, he comments that his choice of colouring was perhaps too realistic. The colours blue and grey do not quite capture the atmosphere of his reading. Reading is not as cold as it appears here, he says. Not at all.

Maria is in her late thirties, married with one child. In the middle of drawing, Maria starts laughing and says she is drooling; she is enjoying herself so much! The whole group starts laughing too. Like Joakim, she draws two images of reading: in the bedroom and in the bathroom. (It sometimes happens that she reads in the armchair [*länstol*], too, but that is so rare, so she has left it out). The

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<sup>200</sup> I showed these images in a presentation on “Readers and Method” panel at the 2005 SHARP conference in Halifax, Canada. The small auditorium of scholars was rather taken by surprise; they stirred in their seats, exchanged gleeful glances and chuckled amusedly. This just shows that some aspects of reading practices remain largely uncovered and need to be further explored.

colours are warm brown, cool blue with clear orange and green. The first image shows reading with an extendable bedside lamp. The bed is placed next to the window with the blinds drawn, and a desk with a shelf on top where some books, boxes and baskets can be found. The second image displays Maria on the toilet, pants down, reading and smiling.



She explains her reading is different in each place; in bed she reads things that demand concentration, whereas on the toilet she reads more for entertainment, along with Clas Ohlsson product catalogues.

... And really suspenseful books, the kind I can't tear myself away from, those I take into the toilet, and then I pretend that I'm sitting there and pooping and so, just to get some time by myself. [Laughs] And then they call: 'Hey, what are you doing? Why aren't you ever coming out?'

The group laughs heartily at Maria's account and Joakim, who is great friends with Maria's husband, inserts, "Look who's talking; he can be in there for ages himself!" And Maria laughs even more. Actually, it was not until Maria became a mother that she started to take fiction to the toilet; before it was mainly short articles and catalogues. When being asked if there is any irritation in her husband's question, she says no, only concern about why she suddenly became so quiet.

Indeed, today reading in the toilet is a natural way of "booking" (in a double sense) a private place for reading in everyday life. This practice is closely connected with social boundaries. Although close friends and family members may be curious and inquisitive about what happens in the bathroom, they could hardly force their way in or stop someone from going to the toilet.

Like reading in bed, reading in the toilet proves to have changed enormously over the last century, due to transformations in the standard of living. In Sweden, even as late as the 1930's, very few people had toilets in their houses, especially in the countryside. Most people had access to a wooden outside toilet [*dass*], either separate or next to the barn or to a shed, with a place for sitting down and evacuating the bowels in a carved hole. The specific characteristic of these *dass* is that they have two or three holes, often in a row. Often, one hole

was smaller and thus reserved for a child. Regarding the specific feature of several holes, the historian Kalle Bäck (1994) describes the *dass* as a joint forum for intimate communication. According to his study,<sup>201</sup> based on interviews, these talks at the outhouse had two functions and meanings: one connected with social contact in a wide sense, exchanging (private) confidentialities, one connected with either fostering or emancipatory purposes. It was part of the moral formation of the citizen.

Bäck (ibid. 61) concludes that national public schools may have turned people into good and loyal subjects, but the *dass* was one of the places where they were fostered into citizens. Approaching the turn of the millennium, Bäck (1994: 60) observes that the bathroom is regaining its social function, judging by advertising catalogues that flaunt bubble baths, saunas and the like. But there is always just one toilet.

This historical account of going to the *dass* as a form of social practice is very important when we consider the practice of reading in the same setting. People were used to personal exchanges, and getting the latest news, along with information and instructions on how to lead one's life. When printed magazines became more widely accessible, many started to stack them in the *dass*. It is quite likely that the magazines took over some of the social and fostering functions that were previously catered for by collective visits to the *dass*. These magazines were then complemented by books:

At my summer *dass*, there is always a stack of magazines that demand re-reading. There I read last summer *Kapten Nemos bibliotek* by P.O Enquist, for example. [...] And in my bathroom there is also always a book. (KU 18475)

Here we are also reminded of the *depository* logic of book consumption and reading practice that we encountered in previous chapters (VI, VII, VIII) and that organizes how books are continuously stored and slotted in different ways even outside the bookshelf.

## The Book as Organizing Principle

It seems that the place for reading is not as easily discussed as Petrucci posited in his comments to Innocenti's study. Place belongs with different reading practices that are embodied differently, and connected with a range of non-arbitrary artifacts. In many cases, place also varies with the type of reading materials. Furthermore, place in connection with reading practices is multi-various, especially in the case of very accustomed readers. The book, however, is not just an artifact among others, but can be seen as the organizing principle of

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<sup>201</sup> Bäck explains that he never dared to apply for a research grant for the *dass* area, for fear of being ridiculed.



many other practices and artifacts. This specific logic is captured by one woman (Karin) in her pilot study drawing:



Thinking first that the task of mapping her life with books was rather difficult, Karin then turned the book itself into a map. She says it is about how access is gained to books. First it is about listening to others, portrayed in the upper left corner: listening to what they have read and what they enjoy reading. She does not seek out new books herself, but mainly listens to others. She says it is not so much what the book is about, but rather she singles out what they think of it, combined with what she knows of that person, and together these impressions form an image of the book and whether it would suit her too.

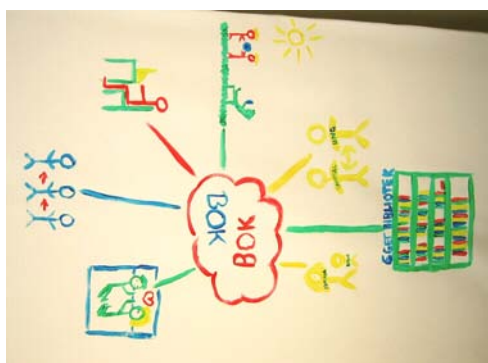
Karin mostly buys her books in bookshops, being “really bad at going to the library”. One reason is that she has not yet worked out how the books are sorted and organized in the library. In the bookshops, she strolls around, looking at the backs of books in the shelves, picking one out at a time, skimming a bit. When she visits other people’s homes (upper right corner) she always looks through their bookshelves for books and how they are organized – that is to say if they have any books at all. She thinks this is a good way of getting to know people. This reflects the experiences of some Nordic Museum respondents (cf. Chapter VIII).

When Karin is abroad, one of her greatest pleasures is to visit bookshops, regardless of whether she speaks the language or not, because through their selection she gets a sense of that country’s relationship to writing and literature. Last but not least, Karin really enjoys getting books as gifts; then someone else has done the selection. But there is no guarantee she will like them, she says laughingly. She does not engage much in book giving though, because she does not want to give a book that the recipient may not like. When asked about the risk involved, she replies that it is important for her that presents are something that the recipient finds worth having. She will buy a book as a present only if she

knows beforehand that a specific author is appreciated. In the general case of books, however, this is too uncertain.

What emerges in Karin's image is not only a visualized version of a consumer's cycle of acquisition, consumption, possession and disposal processes (cf. Arnould & Thompson 2005), going round from the upper left to the bottom left corner. Her image of the book as a map suggests that the book is an organizing principle: binding together the scattered practices of book-talk listening, bookshop browsing, bookshelf scanning, and book giving. Indeed, each of these practices conveys a sense of organizing that has bearings upon the logic of books and reading, even in the case of its breakdowns. Consider, for instance, how Karin does not connect with the organizing logic of the library, or how she avoids giving books as gifts, due to the uncertainty of their value to the recipient.

The young women in Gothenburg placed the book in the centre, with Nina's story on one side, and Camilla's on the other. Although these women have very different experiences of reading, the book manages to be the shared hub. Camilla begins with the image at the bottom left, emphasizing the practice of reading together with one's partner, and both are enjoying it, making a reflection that one may read more if both are interested. The next image (middle left) captures friends giving recommendations, discussing and exchanging books. The figure at the desk (top left) portrays writing a book of one's own, which would be great fun, Camilla says. The following picture projects (future) children playing, and somewhere the parents are lying in a sun deck chair, reading.



Nina continues in the bottom right image, showing that ideally, she wishes to have a "good relationship with one's child together with books, reading a lot together", going a lot to the library, buying children's books. Here she draws upon her own joyful experiences of having access to books, not as coercion but as possibility. She wants to continue this tradition with her own future children. Indeed, in the top right she has painted two figures, one Old [*Gammal*], the other Young [*Ung*], because she hopes she will continue listening to her mother, but also to anybody who is older, and their recommendations of books and genres she would not encounter otherwise. Her last image is of having a library

of her own [*Eget bibliotek*] for all her books (one day when she buys a house). Considering her childhood with many library books, perhaps this is understandable. She enjoys buying books and having them.

### Ambiguities of Reading Space

There is an ambiguity about the reader's sense of place: to begin in one place such as the armchair, desk or bed at home or at the library or on the train (Cf. Innocenti in Petrucci), which then becomes a reading space, where other non-accessible places become accessible spaces. Birgitta, a participant in one of the audio book groups, claims that she already has in mind the specific place for reading when she buys books. Leena, another avid audio book listener, says that reading belongs with both a specific place and experience. Even the author is included in this notion. In her imagination, crime novelist Robert Ludlum belongs with Greece and sun and the salty waters. As expressed by De Certeau (1988/1984: 118), the labour of stories is constantly transforming places into spaces and spaces into places. For example, Mikael, metal worker from Sandviken, describes, speaking of Henning Mankell's best-selling Wallander series:

Well I have been to Ystad, although I have never been to Ystad. (Mikael, b. 1965, Sandviken)

Reading space often actualizes a place within the book (for example, a city or house, or whatever), and transforms it into yet another reading space.

The passage from place to space need not be altogether harmonious. It could also put the book to the test. Karin, in the mixed book circle, speaks of how reading thrives in places and under conditions that are not completely ideal. Sometimes a small, irritating element is needed. And if one can manage to get into the book despite that irritating element, then one knows the book is really good. Cilla in the same book circle mentions how reading on the bus works fine, despite her burn-out syndrome. Then she sits up, "not too comfortably, but nice enough [*lagom skön*]"<sup>202</sup> The reading experience become more intense, she says, despite the disturbances and people around. Then she usually manages to disconnect [*koppla bort*] the surroundings. Indeed, sometimes it is the only situation when she can read. It is both passing time *and* a moment of concentration.

### Reading with Oneself

When Nina is reading on the tram she often "buries" herself in the book, she "dives" into her "tram book", "goes down into her own little world", becomes invisible. Because if she looks around, she may make eye contact with a drunk-

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<sup>202</sup> Interview, Cilla, 18 September, 2004.

ard or so – not she has anything against speaking with them, she says, but some days she just doesn't have the energy to get involved. "If you have your nose in a book, then you... people don't care about you and you can sit there in peace with your book." This tells us something about the qualitative mode of being of reading. "You are kind of also not-becoming a threat or so, to anyone, or on the whole, when you... [read]."<sup>203</sup> Nina's example makes an interesting case for understanding reading in terms of setting up and maintaining boundaries vis-à-vis the world.

"That is the whole point of reading, it really is to be alone..." one man, Johan S explains. Interestingly, his wife has offered another view of individual reading: "When you are reading, you are *with yourself*", she says. Similarly, Furhammar (1985: V) also reports that his informants speak of "being alone *with* themselves". In Swedish, both expressions are possible. In contrast to a reflexive reading consuming, where one reads to oneself, Reading 'with' oneself captures a conjugatory, additive value.

For well-accustomed readers, this understanding can be extended to encompass other people too. Joakim finds that reading is an activity which he enjoys engaging in together with someone. He has previously had partners who do not agree, thinking it rude. When asked how this difference is expressed, he describes how they tell him: "Do you *have* to read? It is us together, right? *We* are here now!" Joakim finds this really bothersome. He enjoys reading together as one can attain that joint sense of calm [*rö*], which he desires.

### Bounded Reading

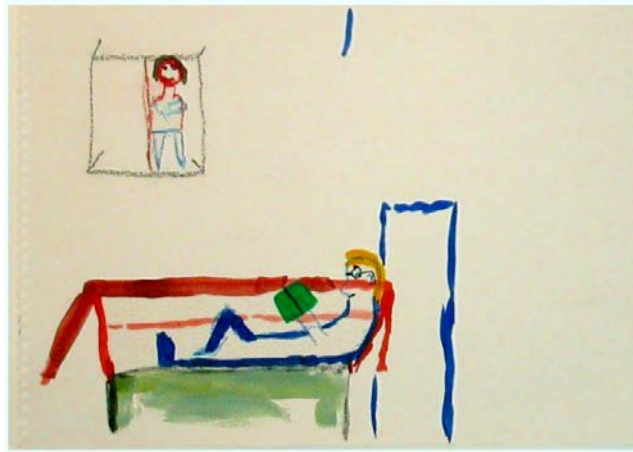
In my pilot study, a married couple of 33 and 43 years of age, respectively, participated and that gave me access to their stories of how they handle books and reading in their relationship and at home. The woman, Anna-Karin, reads a lot: non-fiction at work and fiction/crime in her spare time. Anna-Karin's husband, Ingvar, grew up as an unaccustomed reader. It is not until now that he has discovered that he needs glasses, so he has recently got himself a pair of glasses for reading. He also suffers somewhat from dyslexia. During recent years he has been encouraged by his wife to read books. Mostly, she buys them for him as gifts. He reads when she is at home.

When husband and wife are drawing images of their reading practices, they paint themselves separately. Ingvar gives a short comment on his image of reading: "The sofa, and in the bed. Mostly in bed."<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Visual session, Nina, 31 October 2004.

<sup>204</sup> Pilot study, 10 Sep 2004.



In Ingvar's drawing, his new glasses are promptly put in place, but his wife is rendered absent. Observe the image of the bed in the upper left corner, where Ingvar is reading in the double bed, alone. In fact it appears to be quite solitary as no other person is present. When asked where the other person is when they read, if there is anybody in that bed space, Ingvar replies: "We form a reading group; we can read both at once." – "Both and", Anna-Karin inserts. The couple are often together in the same room, although doing different things. Most of the time, Ingvar watches television, while Anna-Karin is reading. Lately, it has become more common that they both sit together and read. Often they both read a while in bed before they go to sleep.

Interestingly, just next to him, Ingvar has drawn a line that demarcates the boundary between his enclosed reading space and his wife's. Here, Anna-Karin is conspicuous by her absence. The same kind of boundary recurred in one of the later group interviews, where male book readers managed to capture an image of marital bed reading (see also Chapter X):



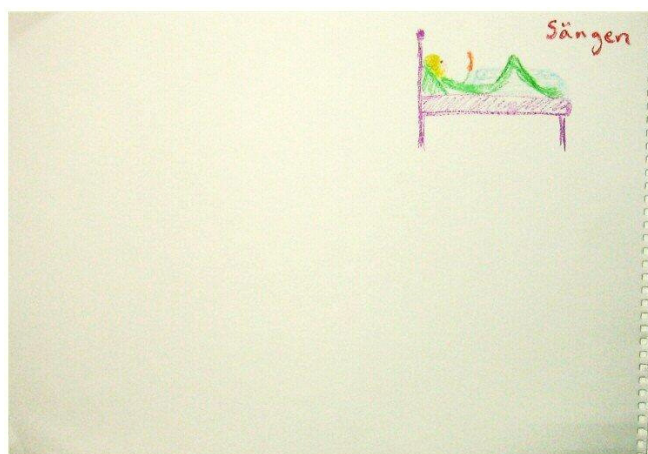
To practise book reading is also a way of booking personal space for reading. Here, the wife is present and she is the one who is reading. The man on the other hand, lies wide-awake and dreams of a sunny beach where we find a palm tree and a curvy female figure...

The lines that divide the spaces of these double beds evoke a kind of distance between husband and wife: each is safely contained within their slot. Each bed space is transformed into some sort of enclosed pen, in which each of them connects with the desires of the outside.

### Reading Inside the Outside of Life

Reading provides us with a secret scene, a place that we can get into and leave at will. (De Certeau 1988/1984: 173) As described in Chapter XIV, one man in the all-male book circle (Johan Å) remarks how the book circle is also completely outside of everyday life.

Camilla, just above twenty years of age, tells us that she reads very rarely. She belongs to those (rare-reading) informants who testify to having received more books as gifts, following the VAT decrease (Cf. Schultz Nybacka 2005). She is a bit concerned about how to proceed with the drawing. After I said she could draw in any way she wants, she starts drawing with a crayon in the top right corner. And then she comes to a halt.



“Wherever you happen to be, that, for you, is the centre of literature.” (Bennett 1908: VIII) One can tell by one look at Camilla’s drawing that reading is not a central part of her life. It even strikes me as rather *peripheral*. And yet, reading requires a specific way of living for Camilla. On the rare occasions that she does read, she lies in her bed. Then she is all tucked up with a down duvet and lots of pillows and a little lamp lit. Sometimes she listens to music with the volume turned down low. She will not even answer the phone when reading. Usually

when she really takes to a book, she feels sad when it ends. Longing for the end of a chapter draws on reading as transition (Cf. Aristotle), whereas enjoying reading and feeling sad when the book ends is a pleasure in reading that decries its simultaneous movement and transition.

### Reading as Delaying Personhood

Karin, who participated in the pilot study, reads at home in her sofa, but mostly in the summer time, lying in a deckchair on the leads in the countryside. The image of the landscape is not only about reading the book, lying there is as much an existential mode of being.



“I nearly always read when I am lying down”, reflects Karin. It does not matter whether she reads fiction or non-fiction. Curiously she asks the group: “Is it because the head will get peace and quiet [*få lugn och ro*]?”

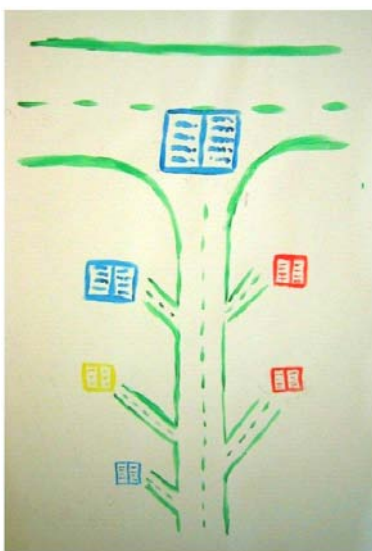
In Nietzsche’s view of the body, it is the ‘head’, the most fragile organ of them all, which has appropriated the body. Klossowski’s (1997/1969) reading of Nietzsche emphasizes that all meaning is formed in an upright position from which we derive the criteria of what is high, low, before, and after. Moreover, it decides to what extent we humans count as persons or not:

The cerebral activity, thanks to which the human body adopts the upright position, winds up reducing the body’s presence to an automatism. The body as body is no longer synonymous with itself; strictly speaking as an *instrument* of consciousness, it becomes the homonym of the ‘person’. As soon as the cerebral activity diminishes, the body alone remains present, but in reality it no longer belongs to a *person*. Although it retains all the reflexes from which one and the same person could be reconstructed, the ‘person’ is absent from it. The more these purely corporeal manifestations assert themselves, the more the return of the ‘person’ seems to be delayed. (Ibid. 27)

In this case, if reading when lying down entails laying the head to rest, then most important of all, reading emerges as a way of delaying (de-laying) the ‘person’ within the body. In that way, it is easy to understand the ancient Greeks’ opposition to reading, as they held subjectivation in high regard and saw reading as imposing on personal integrity (cf. Chapter VII). Again, with Klossowski, “[E]very human being can lie down, but it lies down because it is certain that it will always remain the same, and that it will be able to get back up or change position.” (Ibid. 28) In order to accept lying down to read, one must be certain that one can get up and compose oneself again. This may be a greater challenge than expected. When Karin pondered about her rendering peace and quiet to the head, the group burst out laughing. Ingvar, who does not read much, replied quickly: “So that one can fall asleep if it gets boring!”

## Support for Future Reading

When it comes to the question of how the future reading is to be actualized, the young women visualize a road ahead with very many choices of direction [*vägval*], where books are always in mind. Nina says she cannot see there would be fewer books in her future, only more and more... They describe the forking roads or side roads [*avfart*] in a sequence and how one is bringing books of different colours wherever one goes.

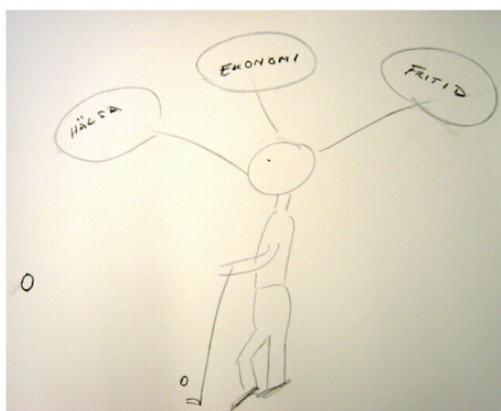


Some choices entail more books than others, depending on where one is in life: family and children, traveling abroad, etc. Today, there are so many choices in life, they say, not just A or B, but the whole alphabet all at once. Under such



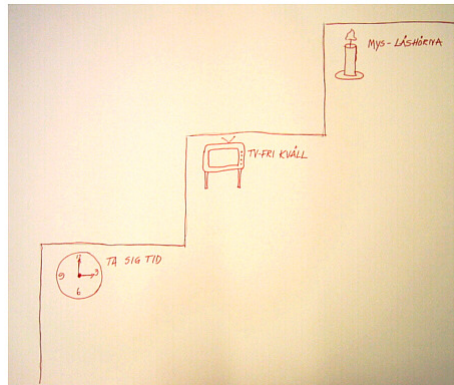
stress, being able to relax with a book now again could mean that “one catches up at least a little with oneself”.

The men in Dalsjöfors, little accustomed to reading books, place an image of a man in the centre. The man is standing in an upright position, holding a golf club, aiming at the hole (left).



Three factors have bearings upon their reading, according to these men: health, finances [ekonomi] and leisure. These factors reflect to some extent those proposed within economics: that income and leisure time influence book consumption (Cf. Hjort-Andersen 2000; Van der Ploeg 2004). These factors are also constitutive parts of the large-scale statistical surveys conducted annually on national levels of cultural habits. The drawing adds to this image by introducing health as a determinant for reading. If these men were to end up in a sickbed, they think they would probably read more. The image and factors, however, say precious little about the everyday life practice of reading. To be sure, the men say they will not end up in that cosy armchair after all: they will be found at the golf course, in the garden, football, by the boat, doing handiwork.

In contrast, well-accustomed readers seem to draw on geometric logic. Avid book lovers such as the ladies in Dalsjöfors suggest that the way to achieve their imagined reading proceeds in three steps: 1) to take time for reading (symbolized by a clock); 2) to have an evening every week without television (symbolized by a television!); and 3) to create a cosy corner for reading [*mysläshörna*] (symbolized by a lit candle). Judging from the discussion in the gang, the toughest step to pass by is that of TV-free nights, especially among the men.



The reading corner, we learnt in Chapter X, should have a nice armchair, a good reading-light, and have room for a cup of coffee and a lit candle. Here the group of men also visualized a good lamp and an armchair to attain a suitable reading position for not falling asleep. Going to bed early is also mentioned as an alternative for keeping awake in order to read more.

The book circles draw an image where it is about finding a moment for oneself, wherever the place. Instead of a three-step model, they draw a staircase as an image of *stepping down*. Reminiscent of how De Certeau (1988/1984) speaks of how readers move into texts like tenants renting an apartment, we see in the well-accustomed book circle readers' image (below) that reading is indeed a temporary room of one's own (cf. Virginia Woolf), if only for a little while.



Place is important, the book circle readers hold. It is about allowing oneself to be in an environment that one thrives in; it could be a physical room or an inner room. Not everything is simply an uneventful journey, they maintain; one needs to take care of that which is *now*. Taking oneself seriously, making it nice [*göra det fint*] around oneself, cleaning up to get that nice reading-feeling [*läskänslan*]. It is about creating harmony and balance, a certain sense of symmetry.

The image also shows an open window, letting in fresh autumn air into reading and life. Must do this in order to take part of what reading *gives*. Creating a shortcut to a state-of-mind. Also creating an environment into which one can invite others, book clubs, life, encounters.

It is important to have an inner room when life is tough, when life becomes chaos. The inner room is a room to go/get back to, bringing one's little pillow, one's comfort blanket. Clearing up the clutter [*röja och rensa*]; '[A]ll you need is a good vacuum cleaner!' [Laughter] It is about seeing oneself: what do I need? What do I want? And then realize this, *do* this.

Sound and music also belong with reading. Sometimes conditions are demanded that are not completely ideal: a small element of irritation! If one can take the irritation, then the book is really good. It could be a matter of internal or external disturbance. It takes an inner disturbance for reading to operate; sometimes it takes an outer disturbance to get it going; a sense of orientation towards kicks. In the ideal cases, perhaps more in harmony with oneself. In short, a balance between reading as performance and reading as rest.

### A Surprising Turning Point

The abductive approach to science entails being open to surprising observations. At one point in the research process I asked the participants to draw a collective image of their future reading. Well aware that the future is "impossible" (Cf. Derrida; Caputo 2001), I still ventured the concept as a way to discuss reading outside of the present. Scholars within marketing and consumer studies speak of projective or enabling techniques as a way to approach consumers' desires and feelings (Cf. Belk, Ger & Askegaard 2003), and perhaps this can be used in terms of temporality too, where consumers project their experiences forward, into the future. In my study, the focus group with members from two different book circles was quite taken by surprise by the assignment. The response ranged from enthusiasm to apprehension – would a collective image even be possible? After all, they didn't all know each other. I left them to themselves, and went down to the kitchen, prepared a tray of coffee for them, waiting.

Upon my return the atmosphere had turned around completely; as it seems they had passed through what Chrzanowska (2002, referred to in Catterall & Maclaran 2006) has described as stages of forming and norming and entered the performing stage all by themselves. Instead of sitting down around the table, arms folded across the chest for relaxation as much as for defence, the participants were standing up, engaged in a vivid interaction. The room was vibrant abounding with energy! I was even more surprised when I caught a glimpse of their painting. Most previous images had been figurative, and I had

not seen anything like this one before. It was abstract, burgeoning, colourful, and dynamic.



It started with a wave: letting oneself be pulled along, lifted up, tumbling around, ending up in endlessness, an open endlessness, not completely confined; comprising so much, so many emotions. Before going back into the wave, it is more multifaceted, more colours in the wave, then falling away.

To reach the fantastic reading experiences, one usually – unfortunately or necessarily – has to read rather a lot. Different kinds of things, and some books you don't even know *why* you read or what to do with; you arrive at that perhaps after several years. Other things are just there – *in the light or in the wave*. It fills up all the time, but then it washes away in the ends. A certain share of this wave of endlessness remains.

It would be wonderful to read more and read different... But also: *why* does one read? Why should one *burn* a lot of time on reading? What is it that you can get from it or take with you? Is it that once in the book circle you meet people and talk about it? What you get from reading becomes more important the more time you spend on it. It does not *have* to be a question of reading many books; it can be experiences that last long, that exert more influence. There is a conflict between the forces of just being pulled along, washed along, and some kind of resistance. The colours illustrate that there can be *both – and*. There has to be a little black colour also; it is kind of a little spiny. Not just being joyous, but also:

sadness. And finding a way out of it, or kind of a comfort. A good reading experience does not need to have anything to do with joy.

## Rounding Up

“*It started with a wave...*” the book circles’ story began. Like many other myths of creation, their reading wells up with water. Even the history of writing springs up between two flooding rivers, Euphrates and Tigris. In the image of reading, two crashing waves fold together and create two circuits that join in abundance. A pair of eyes appears as if to give a new perspective.

This chapter set out to put readers’ use of value of books and reading in a consumption practice perspective and explore its specific art and logics. Using complementary methods helps to map the manifold and diverse array of artifacts, doings and sayings that together form the practice of book reading.

To round up, what on earth is such fun about reading?

It is probably the journey! That is to say, getting to be *somewhere else*. Getting to *see* something else and... experience something else. You get to end up in another *place*. You simply get a *richer* life. You get to experience more things... That is what I think is most appealing. You get another everyday life. Now it is *partytime* – I’m going to the bookshelf! [Laughs] I think it is important. It does give perspective to our existence. (Woman b. 1969)

Like many other respondents, this woman emphasizes above all that with reading, one gains yet another everyday life. In my reinterpretation of reading, “another” in this context should be understood as both different and additional: the life of reading as an extra life both inside everyday practice and outside of the ordinary life. She brings up travelling, moving, and the richness of reading, the bookshelf as resource, the complements of everyday life and the importance of additional perspective on human existence. With reading, existence is harboured, bounded, and encompassed. Once acquired, it is no longer possible to take away without damaging the sense of life itself:

Without books, life would not be life. (Woman, Haninge, b. 1955, KU 18506)

## XV. Summing up and drawing conclusions

*Reading makes immigrants of us all. It takes us away from home,*

*but, most important, it finds homes for us everywhere.*

Hazel Rochman

*The world exists to be put into a book.*

*Stéphane Mallarmé*

### Introduction

At the beginning of this book, I stated that the overall research objective was to explore whether and to what extent the art and logic of book reading as consumption practice belong with traditional understandings of economy and culture, consumption and value. My thesis was that we need to envision another, plausible mode of economy – a veritable *book economy* – belonging with this general area. The thesis raised theoretical and meta-theoretical concerns and needed empirical grounding, which in turn called for further methodological experimentation.

These studies led me to the point where the book circles painted their rich and colourful image. For long I nurtured the notion that I would analyze it as an object, to approach it as a miner would a gold mine, but I could not. If the function of science is, as Huxley says, to reduce manifold meanings to something unambiguous, then turning the image into an object of scientific research would be to work against the image, rather than with it. It could not be objectively analyzed or explicated, just simply exhibited. Then I tried to enter a dialogic relationship with the image, so that I would become its co-creator in a process of joint construction of meaning. But that too proved difficult. For it did not open to immediate conversation, only to interpretation.

If theory is endless, unbounded and interdisciplinary with literary theorist Culler (1997), then scholarly interpretation is, according to Susan Spiggle (1994: 500), “playful, creative, intuitive, subjective, particularistic, transformative, imaginative and representative”. Also, being familiar with literary devices, analysis and

discussion is helpful in developing skills of interpretation. Importantly, interpretive insights commonly arise from serendipity. (Ibid.) With the abductive approach to science, surprising and even anomalous empirical facts call for theorizing anew, drawing upon a different set of assumptions, in order to make deeper sense of the empirical work at hand.

The book circles' image was to me a dramatic turning point – what the dramatists in ancient Greece call a *peripeteia* [Swedish *peripeti*], that decisive moment in which the condition was turned around and forever changed. In my case, it was the most fortunate moment. The whole event was to save me from further atomism and essentialism, and prompted me to turn my whole perspective around, and discover the intrinsic logic or underlying pattern of reading that belongs with endlessness. Underlying Bennet's prescriptive reading list and Eliot's five-foot shelf of knowledge, there is overflowing abundance and infinity. And if reading has become a visual poem, as de Certeau (1988/1984) says, then I believe this image is it; bright as light and dynamic as a wave.

### Theoretical Concerns

Importantly, the book circles' image of reading put the genealogy of literacy into a new light. A genealogy does not seek to explain what this world is; it suggests how this became a world in the first place. (Cf. Nehamas 1985) It renders an account that is put up for interpretation and reinterpretation. Hopefully, already a genealogical reading offers new ways of looking at what we already knew (cf. Beronius 1994). Complemented with the image, the genealogy renders a new understanding of the overall economy of reading and the book.

The additive logic of orality was not abandoned as described by Ong (1993/1982), but following the historical evidence of the emergence of writing and literacy, I suggest that it was rather transported into the specific economy of books and reading. The genealogical exploration in chapter VII was concerned with two major themes: the invention of writing, reading and the book, and literacy in particular; and its genealogical relation to the development of socio-economic organization including consumption. These themes form my main argument that both areas belong intimately together, both revolving around the area of economic surplus.

We have learnt that at a specific period in time and place, the 9<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C.E in-between the overflowing rivers of Euphrat and Tigris, mankind invented writing as a solution to the problem of surplus between nomadic pastoral life and agricultural settlers' life. Writing emerged as the repository for the surplus of nature's produce, and with time, for the abundance of words. The book in turn has become the inventory for the repository of writing. Literacy understood in a wide sense is not only sprung from economic practices, but has developed and revolves epiphenomenally around a primordial economy, and

more specifically, an economy of surplus and excess. In turn, after its invention, writing has become the creative inventory for thinking about economy.

Economic practice existed of course in society, but economic thought developed specifically within literature. Through the invention of literacy, our topics of reading and writing and the book were connected to economy and to issues of juridical, political and moral importance from the very beginning. Besides the Greek term at heart of ontology, *ousia*, denoting substance, entity, thing, property, etc., we also found the concept of *periousia*, meaning balance and surplus (cf. Singer 1958). And surplus seems to have been important all along: surplus (read foreign) lands for the development of the economy (esp. *oikos*); economic surplus for the invention of philosophy in ancient Greece; surplus population that formed the bases for a pre-industrial labour market (16th c.) and widespread readership (18th c. Northern Europe). Following an increasing politization, culturalization and economization of society over time, the valuation gradually shifted from the value of appropriation and apportioning of surplus, towards economic value (value-in-exchange) and the value of consumption.

The relationship between literacy and consumption is interesting but complex with regard to socio-historical aspects. First, we observed that the surplus produce was indeed first spared from immediate consumption, and instead gathered together, monitored, slotted and stored. We find here an important clue as to why part of the economy of reading partly resists being described or categorized in terms of consumption. Of course, reading is a consumption activity, but that activity could best be described as an organized practice of consummation. It makes it possible to summon up, organize and take part of that surplus which was not consumed in the first place. Moreover, script is not consumed or used up in reading. The same words can be read or consumed many times, and by many.

Drawing a parallel to Wilk's (2004: 17) view on listening to music, it does not disappear and many can listen to the same music at the same time, reading too would seem less like consumption because the book will still be there for somebody else to read, whereas with food, two people cannot both possess and eat the same cake. Just like listening to music, reading should not constitute gluttony, "since your brain does not fill up and get fat" (Wilk 2004: 21).

Considering the metaphor of consuming as eating (cf. Wilk 2004; Östberg 2004), we find an interesting twist in our case. The Egyptians had the same hieroglyph for eating and drinking, speaking, thinking, and feeling, shown by a man sitting down and holding his hand to his mouth. (Ritner in Daniels and Bright 1996: 77) Actually, reading was for long primarily connected with the mouth, rather than with eating or ingesting. Consider that words spoken or read aloud are not swallowed. In the Sumerian mythology, words are kept within the mouth and could be spilled out on tablets again, i.e. written down and distributed rather than consumed. This was also the case in ancient Greece, as Svenbro's (1993/1978) investigation into the conglomerate around *nemein* (to



distribute) pertaining to reading (ibid.), law (ibid.; Derrida 2001) and economy (Singer 1958). Reading as distribution was held as an instrumental, submissive activity, a slave's chore, or at best, a production of a vocal copy of an absent text. Also, reading was either an inclusive activity, involving the reader, or an additive activity, adding reading to some other phenomena. Here too we find that reading could point to an alternative understanding of consumption, formulated as consummation.

We observed that it was mainly in a Christian context that reading readily began to appear as a form of ruminating, eating, even devouring. Illuminated manuscripts displayed the book's divine wealth of knowledge with a plenitude of fruits and edibles. When reading had fallen silent, the words were no longer just tasted upon, as in oral reading, but also ingested. This type of reading may not yet have been 'hedonic' in Campbell's (1987) sense of the word, but it was certainly embodied with deep devotion and affect.

Reading may still be solitary, but should no longer be considered unitary or singular. Reading soon encompasses a composite multiplicity of readings and its value appears different in various contexts. In literature, value is settled subjectively and increases by the heightened contrast of manifold complexity and simplicity of content and form. In the sciences, value is settled collectively, through the objectivity of many eyes in a culture of research, and it increases by the uniformity and clarity of the conveyed message.

The *distributive* logic allows for communal sharing of texts and books. Already in ancient Greece and Rome, there were public readings of written works, and there were reading circles organized in people's homes, where books were gathered together. These communal reading practices cannot simply be explained by the relative scarcity of books. Indeed, they flourished with the increase of copies – cf. Latin *copia*, 'abundance', which is central in this context.

The complementary principle to the distributive logic is the *encompassing* logic, by which writing and reading harbour a multitude of meanings, and that could help support the development of empathy in readers. At the same time, the encompassing logic provides reading practice with a sense of boundaries, whether perceived from the inside when riding on the tram, or from the outside by the partner in the marital bed. This logic also helps us understand how less accustomed readers may experience certain confinement in book reading, comparable to the 'pen' or 'fold' that audio book listeners mentioned when they felt strongly tied to a specific vocal interpretation. Given the complementarity perspective suggested by Plotnitsky (1994), these boundaries are not fully encompassing but will always be connected to the outside world in some way.

The concept of consummation was suggested to rid consumption of the destructive connotations and nurture instead those pertaining to consummation as completion or perfection (Holbrook 1987, Normann 2001, and Vargo &

Lusch 2008).<sup>205</sup> Previously it has not been entirely clear how consummation can be distinguished from consumption in practice (Kernan 1987). I suggest specifically that consummation could differ from consumption by taking *additive* and *geometric* logics of value and practice into account. By reading page by page, whether in print or on screen, we are in fact consummating the book. Putting together the bits and pieces of writing, we are not consuming value as in using up, destroying or burning (cf. Wilk 2004), but rather summing up and generating new value in our reading. Here *accounting* is not only a type of consumer practice (cf. Holt 1995) but an important logic that runs deep in the practice of stock-taking, and book circles' discussions about title selection and reading experiences. Extending beyond my empirical material, one could expect literary blogging *et cetera* to be related to a logic of accounting in a wide sense.

It seems that reading as consummation thrives on adding acts of reading together. Moreover, becoming an accustomed reader brings the ability to read a great variety of texts in great variety of ways. To become more than just functionally literate is to develop ways of reading that are complementary to one another. This entails reading all sorts of texts. Those skills are vital if one is to be able to tap into the abundance of writing that surrounds us.

In this general context, the *erosive* logic of book reading is manifest in forgetting, for example. The erosion of time, place, people and memory plays an active and integral role for the overall drive in the consumption cycle of books, throughout acquisition, reading, possession and disposal (cf. Arnould & Thompson 2005). Here the *depository* logic helps to organize book reading practice through continuous storing and slotting of books in different ways in the bookshelf and elsewhere.

History shows we cannot take the value of literacy and reading as a necessary given, and not merely as a matter of contingency. It has been interpreted and reinterpreted differently throughout the years in a process of revaluation. As our genealogy suggests, reading, writing, and the book is a means for gathering together value, whatever mode, content or form it may take, creating boundaries around it and then distributing and circulating it. We also found in ancient Greece a specific value concept, *timiotera*, related to speaking, reading, and writing. This value posits that whatever is added must surpass in quality the already

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<sup>205</sup> The word consummation is derived from Latin *consummare*, to sum up (> *com-*, together + *summa*, a sum, complete, perfect; Webster's: 163). With Holbrook, consummation is attained by means of products. Recall from Chapter VI that that "product" [L. *prōduct-um*, *OED*] denotes "a thing produced or brought forth", and this captures our common economic understanding of the word. But it can also be defined mathematically as a "quantity obtained by multiplying two or more quantities together" (Ibid.). In a wider mathematical sense, a product is "obtained by certain defined processes of combination of two or more entities, the processes not necessarily being commutative and the entities combined not necessarily being of the same kind". (*OED*) This mathematical understanding of product is the key to understanding the fit between consummation and the book.

existent. It is at once both connected to what is already existent and engaged in a power play with it. In other words, it is complementary. Through the book, this form of value could probably be extended to comprise material aspects too.

The book is both a material object and a centre for a diverse range of practices. The book itself is not easily defined, encompassed and contained. As entity, the definitions often range from cultural product to experienced good or publishing product. Depending on the scholarly outlook, these product definitions often draw upon a market optimistic or market pessimistic view, in comparison to other forms of products. Either way, the market is bottom-line, which is much too totalizing an approach to be appropriate in the case of books. Second, the product definition of books does not take into account the mathematical meaning of product – a multiplying form of generation – that conveys a certain logic of the book and has rendered the printed book as the first mass product known to mankind in the first place. In other words, the ways of its being are related to the ways of its doing.

The word ‘book’ is both noun and verb, and to book means roughly to record, to engage, or to charge. The book is bounded both as object and discourse; it is also creating and maintaining boundaries (linguistic, national, legal, economic, technological, social, etc.). It borders on both economy and culture, but cannot be reduced to neither of them. Instead, it manages to encompass both as a matter of complementarity. Indeed, the book accumulates what is rich and manifold, and manages to distribute it, traversing and challenging boundaries in terms of time, space and people. The book is not only a package or storage for content, but is also highly generative in turn. Even if the book has been the model product in modernity, the very excess of books upsets traditional economic models based upon scarcity.

What singles out reading among other forms of consumption practices is the specific mode by which reading operates as a form of “booking”, not only in terms of time, space, and the sense of self and others, but also in terms of a simultaneous inner and outer existence which belongs intimately with this practice. In order to understand the art and logic of reading practices, we also need to continuously engage with the book, and follow its movements, as it is repeatedly multiplied and continuously extended into new forms.

Miller (2000) holds that “other-than-economic” value and “outside-of-economic” value are equivalent, or at least comparable to each other. Even if reading and the book can be described in part as other-than-economic, I argue that it is more appropriate to approach them as outside-of-economic phenomena: different from but epiphenomenally connected to economy. If economy centres on surplus produce in face of scarcity, then perhaps writing and reading would best be described as some sort of *surplus-to-surplus* produce. In other words, it cannot be entirely covered or contained by the economic concepts of value-in-use (utility), value-in-exchange (value), and value-in money (price), etc.

Moreover, rather than store value, which only applies to certain products, it is more a question of general value-in-store. The main difference lies in the distributive logic of reading, writing and the book. It is an epiphenomenal value that simultaneously draws on, takes hold of, and distributes surplus and excess. In this way, it is not a question of being surplus-to-value, non-founded and non-grounded (cf. Bay 1998). Instead, it is a matter of surplus-to-surplus value-in-store, with a distributive logic at heart. It permeates the entire sphere of the book economy and becomes what I term *bookeconomic value*.

Regarding this value as outside-of-economic does not mean that it builds on perfect commensurability or that we apply an antithetical view of the relationship. No relationships and objects are ever fully contained, or completed (cf. Plotnitsky 1994); hence, it is clear that the value of the book will not be fully consummated in our use. For every added reading, the book will be summed up in new and different ways. Moreover, books are non-exhaustible, so there is no limit to consummation of books. Even so, the eventual breakdowns of book consummation and its logics remain of vital interest (cf. Holbrook 1987). It is not always successful; any productive creation also includes false starts and routes, erasures, revisions, and wasted attempts (cf. Attridge 2004: 25). Here the logic of erosion in reading is an example of a creative breakdown, and from a complementarity principle perspective, it is actually an integrative part of book consummation within the present-day abounding book boom.

## Methodological Concerns

The practice perspective raises concerns regarding scholarly methodology for empirical studies, calling for a challenge to statistical data regarding consumption (De Certeau 1988/1984; Chartier 1992; Warde 2005). I have suggested a variation of projective or elicitation techniques by which participating respondents generate a visual material along with complementary sayings through collective, experimental sessions. The method at hand gives access to practices in ways that otherwise remain outside the scholar's reach. In sum, I have bulleted some examples of how visual sessions can contribute directly to the research into practices:

- ☞ Contextualizing practices: putting the doings, general embodiment and specific body gestures into an everyday life context, and also portraying the extent to which time, place, space, and levels of interaction play a role in practice
- ☞ Exhibiting visible, material aspects, i.e. those artifacts, etc. that bear upon practices and that do not emerge in face-to-face interviews or sayings
- ☞ Uncovering invisible aspects: the underlying pattern and internal dynamics – the art and logic of practice – along with the relations, experiences, qualities and value of individual and social practices

Important motives for using visual sessions as a method in practice research are both ethical and economical: first of all, the opportunities for participant respondents to engage actively and directly in data collection, and with simple means. This filtered through the inner images of the scholar's mind, which also allows more transparency in the representation and interpretation of the data.

Experimenting, in Nietzsche's view, attempts to create something – something that “*does not yet exist: a set of forces capable of acting upon and modifying that which exists*”. (Klossowski 1997/1969: 127) In this way, once the participant respondent has created an existing material, one cannot rule out the possibility that the experimental sessions could also bring about further modification and change of existing practices. As for research, experimentation coupled with an abductive approach to science, driving at finding plausible and pursue-worthy conceptualisations of underlying patterns, could bring forth new ways of acting upon, and modifying, existing theories.

### Meta-theoretical Concerns

With the business of books, many have suggested there is a concern of both economy *and* culture and they both need to be addressed. The relationship between culture and economy cannot be grasped or conceived of from either side, however. It is an encounter of two ways of practice and thinking and they cannot be entirely separated from each other, and they cannot be reduced or subjected to the other. Neither is bottom-line. The book is what passes between practices commonly known as economic and cultural, so that what counts as the book – or “bookness” – is as much the result of these twin concerns as it is what creates the division in the first place. And yet, what it draws from is not scarcity and lack, but from surplus-to-surplus resources. Thus, I suggest that the book possibly operates in accordance with a logic of its own, a logic that is connected to ways people think and make do in everyday life.

Throughout my research process, I have been increasingly convinced that the economy–culture discussion serves to hide another, plausible mode of economy, one that draws less on administration of order, social exchange and allocation of scarce resources but on gathering together, and dispensing with, abundance and excess. Writing, reading, and the book operate together by sealing and taking hold of the household (*oikos*) paradigm of economy, and at the same time, surpass it. They are highly distributive, not only of the household, but also of themselves. Therefore we would do better to conceptualize them as connected to economy, yet constituting a mode of economy in their own right. In short, unlike economics that teaches the allocation of scarce resources to meet infinite needs, there appears to be a related mode that operates in a different manner. Some would prefer to call it a literary “culture”, due to its select cultivation of collective resources and aspects. I prefer, however, to speak of it as a

plausible mode of economy – a complementary, yet epiphenomenal economy that I conceptualise as *bookonomy*.

*Bookonomy* denotes an underlying pattern of complementary logics that gather together and distribute surplus and excess, historically not least, but also as driver into industrial mass production and into these times of ‘post-scarcity’ (Cf. Slater 2000). Most important, our understanding of this economy will be breaking new ground as it departs from a condition of post-scarcity even from its very beginning. In this way, *bookonomy* may be the conceptual tool with which we can contrast a simplistic consumerist morality that either dictates that consumers must consume more, or consume less, depending on where the anxieties in society lay.

Just as art has organizing powers (Cf. Guillet de Monthoux, 2000), so does the book. It is an organizing principle for the practice of reading. Not only does it *pose, dispose, dispense, and repose* (to speak with Derrida, 2001), it also necessarily draws from abundance, restricts it, and withholds it momentarily by setting up boundaries. Adding to this picture, this mode of economy also entails a fair share of *supposing*, that is, the element of risk (both monetary and literary), and *exposing*, which is the public element inherent in the economy of books. Notably, with a complementary perspective upon Bookonomy, nothing can be entirely contained; one economy will almost certainly spill over into the other, despite all the (moral) efforts to keep them distinct.

Bookonomy provides us with an opportunity to invent or construct new problems and new problem-positions concerning reading and the book and society at large.

## Suggestions for Future Research

Aligned with Max Weber (1918), the scientist does not write for eternity, but write so that the work will be obsolete as research moves on – and the sooner, the better. Given the additive logic of reading practice, I invite the reader to add or invent an interpretation of this chapter that goes beyond and is better than mine. After all, readers are not mere repositories or depots; they are active passers-by in the stream of life.

## Identity Project of Reading

In the tradition of CCT, one important strand concerns the consumer identity project. Here it would be interesting to further pursue the more post-human strands of research within theories of practice to explore what happens with the identity of reader in contemporary society. Recall how the word ‘book’ is both noun and verb, and so is ‘read’. For instance, “the read” is also a ruminant’s

organ [*bladmage*]. Similarly, a “reader” is not only a human being but also “a book with selected passages for the instruction in reading” (Webster’s: 618) that many of us are acquainted with. Reader may also denote a “machinic” element, the very ware that enables us to read electronic books. In that case, the machinic reader is primary and the human reader is secondary. Our conceptualisations of the identity of the “the reader” may already have become obsolete to bear upon human reading, or may have to change in order to retain actuality. Whichever will carry interesting paths for future research.

### Symbolic Aspects of Consumption Practice

The CCT tradition also involves a general awareness of symbolic aspects and elements of consumer culture. The experimental visualising sessions could be fruitful in this area. An interesting strand of future research would consider these representations in view of practice theory: how symbolic consumption is constituted in practice; and conversely, to what extent consumer practice gives rise to symbolic constructs and representations. Is it possible to discuss this without referring to human dispositions or distinguished positions due to one’s capital in a field (cf. Bourdieu)? What I have in mind is rather to specify the symbolics of commitment or engagement in a practice (cf. Warde 2005).

### Literature as Empirical Data

Many scholars who advocate a rapprochement between literature and science often start from a very abstract notion of text. Texts are no less *about* the world than they exist *in* the world. Hence, if we are to believe what a text says, we had better pay attention to how it is made. (Cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1987) In my view, this means that we should also take into account the manner and mode of how texts have come to existence in the first place. This entails an awareness of the context of translation, production, circulation and consumption of books and writings.

When scholars within the fields of marketing, consumption and organization studies propose that we should take the literary texts into account as part of research, they rarely mean that we should devote any attention to either context or paratext. However, we cannot neglect the book as a material object and as a centre for a variety of practices. In other words, there is a need for new approaches to science and literature, based upon a principle of complementarity. I suggest therefore, that using fictive literature as empirical data will pay special attention to those matters that are dealt with in their many different aspects, or shades of value. In this way, the rapprochement between the social sciences and literature is not a simple illustration of the value of literature, set apart, but it will also contribute to the overall theoretical discussion around the value of reading, writing, and the book.

## Bookonomy Part II

By extension, and expanding the outlook a bit, there is a need to consider readers' use of value in relation to the trade and commerce of books. It remains to be explored what understandings the concept of bookonomy may bring to this area. Following Miller (2000), we must not assume that commerce rules out all creation of value; on the contrary it could even help in creating new value. As argued by Johan Svedjedal (2009), publishers are co-creators of literary value. The publishing company provides literary prestige and renders an interpretative frame for the published works. Publishers' value-chain has been discussed by John B. Thompson (2005), but is essentially a mere application of classical marketing rather than an exploration of the specific underlying patterns within this area. Roger Escarpit's study has been criticized for being dated and for not being appropriate for Nordic countries. This criticism has led Hans Hertel (1997) to explore literature under conditions of increasing media symbiosis. Bourdieu's (1992) now-classical study of French publishing in the literary field has drawn attention to the special conditions for rivalry and competition regarding symbolic capital.

Though Bourdieu has inspired several studies in different contexts (cf. Gedin 2004; Mättää 2006; Sapiro 2003a; 2003b); Thompson 2006; 2010), they rarely succeed in explaining the relative homogeneity among actors. Studies within organizational theory have explored the joint culture and commerce of book publishing (Coser, Kadushin & Powell 1982, Powell 1985, Weber 2000), and the institutional logics of the publishing industry, going from editorial to market logic (Thornton 2001; 2002; 2004), and they contribute an understanding of how publishers not only compete with each other, but also that they react to changes in the environment in similar ways. However the logics and strategy of the book industry in terms of theories of practice remain to be explored and related to those of reading. In this context, there is a need to explore meta-theoretically whether and to what extent the economic assumptions of finitude and scarcity are appropriate for the area at hand.

## Distributive Logic in Legal terms

The research in books and reading will continue to be interdisciplinary, and different fields could take various interests in new conceptualizations of the area. Given the intimate connection between the distributive logic and the legal domain in ancient Greece and Rome, captured in the Greek verb/noun pair *nemein/Nomos* and Latin *legere/Lex*, the concept of bookonomy also includes legal aspects that pertain to the area of reading, writing and the book, although they have not been explored in this study. Copyright is one specific area where legal rights are in fact effectively "booked" in terms of time span and space. It regulates the distributive logic and practice in face of the near abundant regeneration of books and texts.



## Epilogue

Nearly a decade has passed since the reduction of the VAT level on books and magazines in Sweden, following the Publishers' Association's slow and steady lobbying. Since 2006, a new Government has been formed by the Alliance for Sweden, and the Liberal Party has demanded that the conditions for quality literature are to be strengthened and examined in a government report. In October 2010, the Government announced that initiatives will be carried out in the years 2012-2014 at an annual cost of SEK 3 million. The purpose is to secure the book's position on the book market, for example, by supporting translations of quality literature from other languages. Another prioritized issue is establishing sanctuaries [*fristäder*] for persecuted writers living under political threat. (cf. Hellekant, 2010)

After a roundtable talk in November 2011 with a group of industry representatives, librarians, politicians, journalists, etc. (a group in which I took part as a scholar), the Government's made public the directives for an examination of the standing of literature [*Litteraturens ställning*] in society. It centers mainly on the development of reading habits in view of changing technology. The examination will analyse 1) the standing of literature in school; 2) initiatives for promoting reading; 3) the conditions for authors; 4) the book market; 5) the market for magazines; and 6) the international exchange in the literary area.<sup>206</sup> The investigation shall result in recommendations for public initiatives. Their overall aim is that reading shall increase, and lead to a "rich supply of quality literature" (Dir. 2011: 24: 3). The date for the final presentation is set to September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

Interestingly, reader's use of value is no longer pitted against the industry. In this way, with Miller's (2000) outlook on value, there is hope for generation of new value. This actualizes the need for an integral public view on reading, industry and society at large. Barker & Escarpit (1973: 152) suggested *The Charter of the Book* with 10 articles directed at the well-being of the entire book world for the benefit of general society:

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<sup>206</sup> A brief version of the Directives are available from  
<<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/14080/a/164540>

- Article I: Everyone has the right to read.
- Article II: Books are essential to education.
- Article III: Society has a special obligation to establish the conditions in which authors can exercise their creative role.
- Article IV: A sound publishing industry is essential to national development.
- Article V: Book manufacturing facilities are necessary to the development of publishing.
- Article VI: Booksellers provide a fundamental service as a link between publishers and the reading public.
- Article VII: Libraries are national resources for the transfer of information and knowledge, for the enjoyment of wisdom and beauty.
- Article VIII: Documentation serves books by preserving and making available essential background material. (Especially for science, technology and other specialty areas.)
- Article IX: The free flow of books between countries is an essential supplement to national supplies and promotes international understanding.
- Article X: Books serve international understanding and peaceful co-operation.

The uneven distribution of books and of reading across the world is a problem for any society at large. Most would agree that the democratic political economy is dependent on literacy and reading. We need a deeper understanding of the intricate relations between the book and practice of reading, and macro-level relation of the book industry and its consumers. This awareness does not rule out critical perspectives on the breakdowns in this area; rather, it calls for insights into the inner dynamics and logics of the book market and industry in practice. One such important issue is the difference in power between various actors in the sector. There is little mention, however, of the problematic market structures, relations or practices that may obstruct the production and distribution of such literature. (Cf. Dir. 2011. 24. 10) This understanding is paramount for any deeper investigation into the book industry.

The main question for the Liberal Party is how one increases the interest in reading. One such area is how to integrate literary fiction in school education.<sup>207</sup> Though I sympathize with the attempt to designate value to reading, I want to issue a word of warning. Let us not fall for the lure to make reading into a order or duty, when it is in fact one of the basic human rights. We need a shift away from top-down readership morality, filled with consumerist duties, to an ethics for reading that will grant us our *rights* in practice.

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<sup>207</sup> Letter of invitation to the roundtable discussion, issued in October 2011.

The French author Daniel Pennac (1995/1992, my transl.) has formulated ten rights of readers summarized below:

☞ The right *not* to read. Reading should not become subjected to moral coercion. “The freedom of writing cannot be connected with the duty to read”. (Ibid. 163)

☞ The right to skip pages. Especially children should be granted this right, Pennac holds, because then they can gain access to almost all the riches that are deemed to be out of reach for them. If they cannot choose for themselves, others will, by providing special editions of children’s books.

☞ The right not to finish a book. All reasons for not finishing a book are legitimate, but one: the feeling of defeat. If the book remains a stranger even after serious attempts at reading, do not throw it away, put it aside. Who knows, one day the urge to read it will return. Or maybe it never will? Time will show.

☞ The right to re-read. It is perfectly all right to indulge in the joys of repetition. Every time we re-read, the durable will be rich in new experiences. It will be more, and more again.

☞ The right to read whatever. According to Pennac, there are indeed “good” and “bad” novels, and to the latter category he will count “industrial literature” – that type of applied fiction that could be made into a product to suit certain categories of readers in accordance with marketing research. Anyhow, a reader is free to choose for oneself.

☞ The right to *bovaryism*, which is a textually transmitted disease.

☞ The right to read anywhere.

☞ The right to read here and there in a book. As Pennac says, when one does not have the time or the money to spend one week in Venice, why on earth should one deny oneself to visit it for five minutes?

☞ The right to read aloud. Silent reading may belong to the dominant discourse, but if one is reading aloud with sympathy towards the author, the text and the listeners will break the doors open.

☞ The right to remain silent. The secrets of literature cannot always be explicated. “Man builds houses because he is alive, but writes because he knows he is mortal. He lives together with others because he is a flock animal, but reads because he knows he is alone.” (Pennac 1995/1992: 189)

These rights are generally aligned with De Certeau’s view of reading practice as a *tactic*, but adds to this picture by granting the readers certain powers. It remains to be seen how cultural policies could strategically support bottom-up joyful reading tactics.



Perhaps someone wonders whether my ten-year-old son ever took to that Edith Nesbit book that I went to fetch in the basement?

Well, the book was found some weeks later flat on its stomach on page 124 of 264. My son had moved on to other books. Even a young boy will detect the trace of readership morality in a parent and put up the proper resistance.

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## List of Artworks

1. Front cover: Jan Lavies, *Golden Fiction (Laurens)*
2. Edmund Burki, *You Should Read This...*, p. 19
3. Fanny Brennan, *Beach Party*, p. 39
4. Fanny Brennan, *Chateau*, p. 169
5. Jost Amman, 1588, p.
6. Fanny Brennan, *Book Circle*, p. 229
7. Fanny Brennan, *Cascade*, p. 335
8. Fanny Brennan, *Nadine's bookcase*, p. 389

# Appendices

## Value-added Tax on Books

The European Commission has assigned books a special place among those “necessities” that can be exempted from a higher tax rate. (Kist 2002/1992: 200) In 1992 The European Parliament ruled that the book market could be exempt from the value-added tax legislation. (92/77/EEG/19th October 1992) The Bookonomy project does not delve more deeply into the technical, theoretical or empirical nature of taxation beyond an introductory note regarding context and background. In etymology, the word ‘tax’ is derived from the Latin verb *taxare*, which means ‘to appraise’ (Webster’s: 760). The original meaning is “to determine the value of; assess” (Ibid.) The value-added tax has a foundational connection to valuation.

Taxes can play quite an important part of the state’s shaping of consumption in ways desired by the state. The basic idea of value-added tax was developed in Germany and the US shortly after the World War I. The idea is very simple: with value added tax, an indirect, transaction-based tax applied at the point of sale, prices of goods are increased so that consumers can purchase less of it. “Taxes provide governments with control over resources for their use, and decrease the quantity of goods that can be purchased by the private economy.” (Lindholm 1970: 117) From this perspective, a 6 per cent cultural VAT on books means that the state accepts that 6 per cent less books are bought than if there were no tax on books at all. Indeed, by 1992 the Dutch Minister for Culture and many of his counterparts across the EC were publicly in favour of a zero rate for books. However, in the final analysis, it was left up to the governments to introduce it. (Kist 2002/1992: 200)

It may be interesting to note that the introduction of the VAT in Europe was often thought of as a replacement for the corporate income tax. (Cf. Lindholm 1970) In other words, although a transaction-based tax may put an emphasis on consumption and operate on consumers’ demand, it is not a question of bringing in a consumer-perspective. Instead, at the time of introduction into the EEC it was primarily seen as a alternative means to communicate with the business environment: to ensure economic stability, inducing economic growth and investment, bringing tax neutrality and tax harmonization in an interna-

tional perspective. Another positive expectancy of the VAT is that tax evasion is decreased whereby the general acceptance of it is improved. (Cf. Lindholm 1970)

At the brink of the new millennium, Sweden along with Denmark had the highest tax on books in Europe. (Timm 1999: 12) Books in Sweden were taxed in accordance with other common goods and services; that is more than four times the tax on cultural events such as theatre and cinema tickets, and media products such as newspapers, a situation which according to pro-decrease organizations led to a penal fine on the printed word followed by a distorted competition on the markets for entertainment and education. For instance, the person who experienced Ingmar Bergman's films on screen paid 6% in tax, whereas the one who buys the text paid 25% in tax (cf. Timm 1999: 12). In an international perspective, Sweden along with Denmark had the highest tax on books in Europe, although the European Parliament in 1992 ruled that the book market could be exempt from the value-added tax legislation. (Timm 1999: 12) (Cf. 92/77/EEG/19th October 1992)

In Denmark, three arguments were raised against reducing the VAT: 1) the large financial setback to the state; 2) administrative difficulties of different VAT rates had previously hindered the introduction in the area of foods; and 3) not all books are deemed to be of public interest. (Hjort-Andersen 1996: 104)

Finland introduced a lower VAT rate for books in 1994, going from 22% to 12%, which led to a 10% increase in book sales. (Timm 1999: 14) Four years later, when Finland had joined the EU, the VAT rate was reduced even further, to 8%, but it is important to note that the main motive was not to secure increased reading, but rather to adjust the level to other goods. (Timm 1999: 14; Hagman 2000: 18) Two levels of VAT rates disappeared (12% and 6%) whereby books were given the new, lowest tax rate. The investigator of the Swedish Cultural Council, Johan Hagman (2000: 18) writes that books in Finland did indeed become cheaper after the reduction, although it is not clear how much, and it is also difficult to prove that the increase in book sales depend on the general VAT decrease, since there was an overall increase in consumption in Finland at that time. Hagman notes that most actors in Finland are positive about the tax reduction, but he states clearly that the reactions would not necessarily be the same in Sweden. First of all, he holds that the Finnish income from VAT was about 1/4 of that of Swedish VAT on books (given his method of calculation, which was promptly subjected to criticism in a report by The Swedish Publishers' Association). Secondly, the decrease in Finland was conducted stepwise over a period of time, whereas the Swedish case would bring a larger drop at once.

The Swedish VAT rate on books was reduced as from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2002, following an extensive campaign led by the Publishers' Association. The anti-VAT

campaign was launched in 1998 at their spring meeting when it was decided that it should become a top priority for the following years.<sup>208</sup> In their annual report for 2001, the publishers listed their most important arguments for a VAT reduction on books:

☞ Books will get a lower consumer price that will lead to increased sales and increased availability – even for those who are not accustomed to reading books [*läsavana*].

☞ The unfairness of different tax rates for the printed word. There was a 6% VAT rate for newspapers, but not for books.

☞ The VAT rate for many cultural expressions is 6%, but books were not included in this “cultural VAT”.

☞ The VAT rate on books in other EU countries range between 0 to 10% and all other countries distinguish books by a lower rate.

☞ In the increasing trade from international Internet based actors, the higher VAT rate restricts the competitiveness of Swedish retailing actors.

☞ The importance of safeguarding the Swedish language. A reduction of the VAT rate would be an important shield for the position of the Swedish language.

☞ A reduction of the VAT rate is an important question of education and culture [*bildning*]. All people who study after the age of 20 pay for their course books by themselves and thereby they pay full VAT.

☞ A reduction of the VAT rate is an important issue for democracy. Everyone should afford to improve [*förkovra*] oneself, take part of the public debate, understand and make oneself understood.

In August 2001, the Publishers’ office continued the political lobbying and directed their efforts mainly at The Green Party and The Leftist Party that were supporting parties to the Social democratic government. The purpose was to keep up the engagement for the VAT reduction so that it would be part of the budget deal for the year 2002 that was expected within a couple of weeks. The 24<sup>th</sup> of August, the Green Party announced that a decrease in the VAT on books was the most important demand besides what was called the “green tax shift” [*gröna skatteväxlingen*]. (*SvF Annual Report 2001*: 15)

In the evening of September 1<sup>st</sup> the negotiations for the budget proposition for 2002 were ready. The Social democrats and the supporting parties, The Greens and The Left Party, had agreed to reduce the VAT rate on books and magazines per January 1<sup>st</sup> 2002. The proposition was then handed over to the parliament on September 18<sup>th</sup>. Three months later, December 12<sup>th</sup>, the parliament

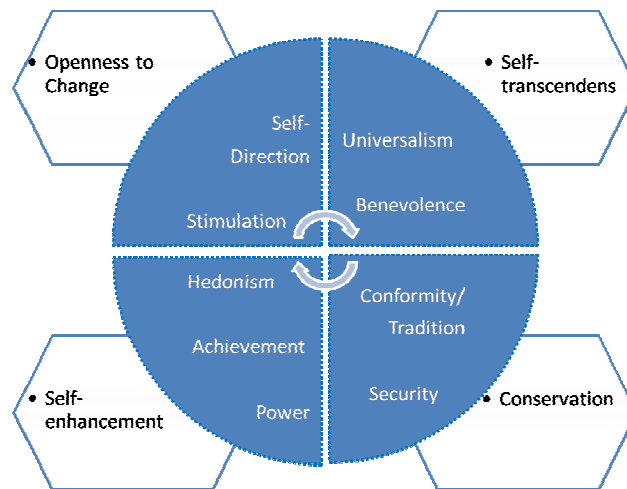
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<sup>208</sup> A description of the whole campaign can be found in their annual report from 2001.

accepted the proposition directly, without any reservations. According to the Ministry for Finance, the decrease would bring a set-back worth 1 Billion SEK (roughly \$760.000.000/105.800.000 Euro). (*SvF Annual Report 2001*: 15f) In January 10th 2002, the Government decided to summon a Commission (eventually the BPC) with the task to follow and scrutinize the price development on books and magazines as from January 1st, when the new tax was effectuated. (SOU 2005: 12)

## Schwartz's Theory of Values

Below is the psychological model that much research of values is based upon.



*Figure 3 Schwartz's model of the relation among types of values that will influence motivation (Figure based on Hitlin & Piliavin 2004)*

## Interview Guide

Below is a list of the questions that were posed in the individual semi-structural interviews for the 2005 report to the BPC.

When and how did you become literate? *När, var, hur blev du läskunnig?*

How was reading in your family when you were little? Were there books in your home? *Hur var det med läsandet i din familj när Du var liten? Fanns det böcker i Ditt hem?*

Can you remember when you became a reader - that is, started to read on your own accord? *Kan du minnas när du blev en läsare, dvs. började läsa på egen hand?*

In which way/ways do you get information about the books you read? *På vilket/vilka sätt får Du information om böckerna Du läser?*

Do you speak about books with someone? Has somebody had any particular influence on your reading? Have you yourself had any influence on somebody else's reading? *Talar Du om böcker med någon/några personer i Din omgivning? Har någon person haft särskilt stort inflytande på Ditt läsande? Har Du själv haft inverkan på någon annans läsande?*

What is your state of your reading today in comparison with around three to five years ago? Do you read as much/more/less? *Hur ser Ditt läsande ut idag i jämförelse med hur det var för ungefär tre-fem år sedan? Läser Du lika mycket/mer/mindre?*

The same regarding your book purchases, are they different from three to five years ago? Do you buy as many, more or less, now than before? *Likaså Dina bokinköp, skiljer de sig från för tre-fem år sedan? Köper Du lika många, fler eller färre nu än förut?*

Do you give books as presents? *Ger Du bort böcker i present?*

Do you receive books as presents? *Får Du böcker i present?*

Compared with three to five years ago, are there as many/more/less books as presents in circulation in your life? *Jämfört med tre-fem år tillbaka i tiden, är det lika många/fler/färre presentböcker i omlopp i Ditt liv?*

Has the VAT decrease had any influence on your purchasing and your reading of books? Why/Why not? *Har momsänkningen haft någon inverkan på Dina inköp och Ditt läsande? Varför/Varför inte?*

Why do you think that some people do not read books? *Varför tror Du att en del människor inte läser böcker?*



It is often said that women read more (fiction) than men – why, do you think?  
Kvinnor sägs ofta läsa mer (skönlitteratur) än män, varför tror Du att det är så?

Does one become a better person through reading books? *Bli man en bättre  
människa av att läsa böcker?*



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