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## Public Arenas of the Humanities

### The Circulation of Knowledge in the Postwar Period

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# 7 Public Arenas of the Humanities

The Circulation of Knowledge in the Postwar Period

*Johan Östling, Anton Jansson and Ragni Svensson*

## Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how a new history of the postwar humanities could be written. Drawing on approaches from the history of knowledge, it outlines the conditions of the circulation of knowledge in the public sphere during the 1960s and 1970s. By introducing “public arena of knowledge” as an analytical concept, the authors highlight certain media platforms where circulation of knowledge occurred. As their empirical examples, they focus on paperback series and the Christian public sphere. All in all, the chapter underlines the importance of the humanities for a wider circulation of knowledge and thereby challenges a crisis narrative of the humanities of the postwar period that is prevalent in established historiography.

**Keywords:** humanities; postwar period; public sphere; history of knowledge; circulation of knowledge

## Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the history of the humanities has been vitalized through a series of important publications, projects, and conferences; the journal *History of Humanities* is perhaps the most obvious materialization of this enterprise. Thanks to all these endeavors, new vistas of inquiry have opened up. One novel approach has been inspired by frameworks developed within the history of science and emphasizes the practices and personae of past scholars. Another ambition has been to reinterpret the changing relationships between the humanities and the natural sciences throughout

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the centuries. A third source of inspiration has been global history where the traditional disciplines of the humanities have been related to and compared with non-Western fields of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

However, issues of the impact and influence of the humanities in society at large have not been at the center of attention so far and definitely deserves more attention in the new field of the history of humanities. In the current chapter, by contrast, these questions are analytically addressed. Drawing on approaches in the history of knowledge and other adjacent fields, it will, firstly, present a framework that enables analysis of the conditions of the circulation of knowledge during the postwar period. After this, we will give concrete examples of how the humanities circulated in public arenas of knowledge in the 1960s and 1970s. We have chosen two cases belonging to different parts of postwar society: on the one hand, paperback series as arenas of popular science; on the other hand, a few important arenas within the Christian public sphere. Finally, the general consequences of the proposed shift in perspective for the understanding of the history of the humanities will be discussed.

## Circulation and Arenas of Knowledge

There are a variety of definitions of circulation of knowledge. A common denominator is that scholars use it to dismiss traditional models of linear dispersion.<sup>2</sup> In this article, we will focus on a particular type of circulation – the public circulation of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Public circulation implies that knowledge is studied as a broad, societal phenomenon. This infers that the social reach and relevance of the knowledge under scrutiny are at the core of the analysis. Historical events and phenomena which only affect a few individuals or small groups of people cannot be the starting point for such a study. This means that original innovations and novel findings will be of subordinate importance, while public importance will take center stage. This is in line with a history of knowledge that is an integral part of a larger history of a society.<sup>4</sup>

1 See, for instance, "Going Global"; Krämer, "Shifting Demarcations"; Paul, *How to be a Historian*.

2 Östling, "The History of Knowledge."

3 The following sections draw on Östling, "Circulation, Arenas"; Östling, "En kunskapsarena."

4 This approach is related to an existing tradition in media history, cultural history, and the history of science to study audiences and publics; see, for instance, Ekström, *History of Participatory Media*.

One way of studying this kind of circulation is to introduce “public arena of knowledge” as an analytical concept. The term can be understood as a place – a physical, textual, or medial one – that at the same time provides opportunities and limits the circulation of knowledge. It serves as a site where a certain type of knowledge actors and a certain type of audience meet. To promote circulation of knowledge in society, the arena must usually have a measure of stability and durability, although the content of the knowledge that circulates in one and the same arena may vary over time.

As in all forms of circulation, knowledge does not move freely in an arena. A public arena of knowledge has its medial and rhetorical norms and limitations that contribute to reward and support certain types of knowledge while others are rejected or ignored. Anyone who wants to enter an arena must therefore adapt to various rules. Usually there are different types of gatekeepers who exclude that which does not meet the criteria of relevant knowledge, thereby guarding the boundaries of the arena and maintaining its reputation. Of course, this boundary work can mean a negative exclusivity, but it can also be productive in the sense that it consolidates the character of the arena and gives it a profile that distinguishes it from other competing platforms.

A distinction between an arena and an institution of knowledge can be difficult to sustain. In many cases, however, there is a difference in the degree of formalization or regulation, where an institution of knowledge tends to be part of the established educational system or the scientific community, that is, the general organization of knowledge in society. A teacher’s training college or a university, for example, are parts of a larger institutional system, where they constitute mutually dependent and cooperating parts within a relatively delimited unit. Nor is it possible to establish a definite border between the concepts of arena and infrastructure. The latter, however, is usually understood as a more basic structure that is instrumental for a society’s communication. A knowledge arena can rather be seen as an element in a larger infrastructure of knowledge.

In addition, an arena of knowledge can, at least for the modern period, be seen as an integral part of the public sphere. This is particularly true if we adopt an understanding of the public sphere as a historically changing phenomenon. Jostein Gripsrud and his Norwegian colleagues have in a fruitful way analysed the actual history of the public sphere in a specific country, inspired by Habermas’ classic *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962). Gripsrud proposes a broad definition of the public sphere based on what the inhabitants of Norway had in common – in other words, the available space of conversations and experiences that formed the political and

cultural public discourse.<sup>5</sup> However, beside the general public sphere, during a twentieth century dominated by nation-wide mass media, there were also more or less overlapping sub- or partial public spheres (*Teilöffentlichkeiten*), involving and affecting a lot of people, which we will come back to below.<sup>6</sup>

There are several general analytical advantages with the concept of arena. Firstly, it provides empirical concretization to the discussion about the circulation of knowledge; in short, the arena becomes the place where a certain kind of circulation took place. Secondly, it enables us to see the actors and audiences and how they promoted different kinds of knowledge and played different roles. A third advantage is that particular arenas can be analysed as components in a larger infrastructure or public sphere. Finally, the concept invites the historian to compare different arenas of knowledge, both diachronically and synchronically.

The concept of arena thus promises to be analytically useful, but it remains rather abstract. In order to demonstrate its potential, we will turn to Sweden, a country that during the postwar era is very much associated with social democracy, secularism, and rationalism. As we will show, however, in press, radio, television, and various forms of book publishing, people with an educational background in the humanities provided the public with content related to areas of knowledge such as history, literature, and philosophy.

In what follows, we will demonstrate the dynamics of the postwar circulation of the humanities in two steps. In the first part, we will focus on Aldus, a paperback series that was devoted to the popularization of science and scholarship. Paperback series could be seen as specific arenas of knowledge aimed at a large audience. In this context, the paperback series were closely related to other arenas of the time with a similar mission, for instance essay sections in major newspapers and popular education programs on television.<sup>7</sup> In the second part, we will move the discussion from the workings of one specific arena of the main public sphere and instead discuss how knowledge also moved in partial public spheres and in this way affected a large chunk of the population. Focusing on the Christian public sphere, we exemplify with an assortment of intermingled knowledge arenas and actors. We will elucidate the general structure of the Christian public sphere, including some of its central arenas of knowledge, but pay special attention to the role and function of the humanities.

5 Gripsrud, *Allmenningen*.

6 Fraser, "Rethinking."

7 Östling, "The Audience."

## Paperback Series as Public Arenas of Knowledge

The international “paperback revolution” may have started in the 1930s with the success of Penguin in Britain and Pocket Books in the United States, but the concept was established through the success of the so-called quality paperback, beginning in the middle of the 1950s and accelerating during the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> By that time, an abundance of paperbacks on academic or scientific subjects suddenly flooded the shelves and counters of bookstores in the West. The modern quality paperback was claimed to represent a new era of book publishing and dissemination. During the postwar period, similar projects were launched throughout Western book markets. The phenomenon had its biggest impact in English-speaking countries, but West Germany, Italy, France, and Scandinavia also had their counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

The cheap price as well as the accessibility of the paperback, which was on sale in newsstands and train stations as well as in traditional bookstores, were circumstances that made it an unprecedented intermediary of new and advanced knowledge.<sup>10</sup> As representatives of a brand new mass media landscape, the popular science paperback series of the postwar era served as public arenas for knowledge circulation. Although they were selected, packaged and disseminated by the major publishing houses, their content was communicated and renegotiated within a number of social institutions and environments.<sup>11</sup> In a Swedish context, Aldus, as the first and most prolific of the new quality paperback series of the 1950s and 1960s, serves as the most obvious example of such an arena. A study of the Aldus series thus contributes to a better understanding of what kinds of knowledge were perceived as socially relevant, as well as it informs us of the role of the humanities, in this specific historical context. Additionally, it helps us to shed light on how and between which actors this knowledge circulated, as well as how it was interpreted and reinterpreted into our own time.

In a Swedish context, the main representative of the popular science paperback was the editor and publisher Per Gedin. By introducing the first popular science paperback series Aldus in 1957, Gedin unleashed the Swedish version of the paperback revolution. The Aldus series was published under the supervision of Bonniers, Sweden’s largest publishing house, and contained

8 Milner, *Literature, Culture and Society*, p. 98.

9 Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*; Gedin, *Den nya boken*, p. 15; Hagner, “Ernesto Grassi”; Mandler, “Good Reading.”

10 Escarpit, *Book Revolution*, pp. 36–41.

11 Mandler, “Good Reading.”

humanities titles, as well as titles from social and natural sciences, with a wide range of subjects. By publishing current popular science in carefully designed and typographed paperbacks, printed in large quantities with rationalized production methods, Gedin and Aldus aimed to reach out with the latest research findings in a number of areas to as many people as possible. The aim was to make current research and popular science a modern consumer product.<sup>12</sup> In this endeavor, the humanities took a special position.

In his autobiography *Förläggarliv* (1999 [Publishing Life]), Per Gedin describes how he got the idea to launch a paperback series in 1956, while on a trip to the United States to study the American book market.<sup>13</sup> By that time, he was recently employed at Bonniers' publishing house as head of their book club Svalan. During his journey, Gedin caught sight of American paperback series, such as Anchor Books' Quality Paperbacks, founded in 1953. This trade paperback series presented modern classics with an academic content in comparatively small editions. These books were slightly more expensive than traditional paperbacks, but much cheaper than their hardcover counterparts.<sup>14</sup>

Now Gedin wanted to start a similar paperback series for the Swedish audience. His vision, as he presented it to the managers of Bonniers' publishing house, was to promote people's self-studies, by publishing works by prominent academics at prices cheap enough to attract impulse purchases. Gedin was a self-conscious young visionary, and he argued with considerable insistence, that the quality paperback book as a concept would be as successful on the Swedish market as in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Eventually his efforts paid off as he, in the fall of 1957, was given the opportunity to publish three paperback books with the trademark Aldus, a name inspired by the Venetian humanist and printer Aldus Manutius. The titles in question were *Svenskt arbete och liv* [On Work and Life in Sweden] by the economic historian Eli F. Heckscher, *Makt och rätt* [Power and Justice] by criminal justice professor Ivar Strahl, and Margaret Mead's anthropological classic *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* in Swedish translation.<sup>16</sup> Soon, sales began to pick up and Aldus' first nine titles were sold in almost 20,000 copies in a few years, which, seen from a Swedish perspective, was an unexpectedly high figure.<sup>17</sup>

12 Gedin, *Den nya boken*, pp. 10–14.

13 Gedin, *Förläggarliv*, p. 157.

14 Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, p. 208.

15 Gedin, *Den nya boken*, p. 13.

16 Gedin, "Georg Svensson."

17 Gedin, *Förläggarliv*, p. 160.



In a few years, Per Gedin advanced from editor of the Aldus series, to the managerial position at Aldus Publishing, a new publishing house established in 1961. In 1963 he took over the role as publisher, as well as part of the ownership of the long-established publishing house Wahlström & Widstrand, which had been partly owned by Bonniers. Gedin's assignment as both introducer and marketer of the Swedish quality paperback book, well qualifies for the role of knowledge actor, especially as a gatekeeper, providing the rules and boundaries that enabled certain knowledge to circulate.

Aldus books helped establishing the paperback as the most important Swedish book market trend of its time, even though it took until the mid-1960s until the paperback phenomenon had its complete break-through. Then, on the other hand, it was with the more noise and trepidation. In a few years, all the major Swedish publishing houses, as well as many of the smaller ones, established their own paperback series, inspired by the emerging success of Aldus. New paperbacks became front-page material in newspapers, and served as identity markers for a new and knowledge-hungry youth culture.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1957 and 1977, more than 500 Aldus titles were published in several topics, including both the humanities and the natural and social sciences. Although the number of titles varied widely between years, the humanities had an undeniably important position in the overall publication. Altogether, during the first ten years, humanities titles, including genres such as literature, history, art, religion, philosophy, history of science, and linguistics, comprised almost half of Aldus' publication list. Among the authors published in the series were both international celebrities and prolific Swedish authors. The two largest categories in the series were literary theory and history. However, as the number of titles varied year by year, the picture is not entirely clear. From having covered a total of three titles in 1957 (one of which in the humanities), the overall publication grew to seventeen books (eight of which were in the humanities) five years later, in 1962. In 1964, the humanities category was larger than all other categories together, amounting to eighteen out of thirty-four titles. In the following years, 1965 and 1966, thirty-eight Aldus books were published each year, but the number of titles in the humanities category differed; in 1965 they were ten and 1966 sixteen. In the late 1960s, the humanities had to stand back for a more social science-oriented publication for a few years. This development was of course in line with a general orientation toward social

18 Mercer, "Paperback Revolution."; Svensson, "Bo Cavefors"

science theories and issues during these years, clear both within academia and in a larger societal discourse (as indicated by several other contributions to this volume).

Thus, the proportion of humanities titles was at its lowest during the years 1968 to 1970, a period when the overall publication of Aldus books was the most extensive. The number of titles within the different subfields also varied from year to year. At the beginning literary theory, history and arts/music were roughly equal categories, which, given the size of the overall publication, meant that one or a few titles were published per category and year. Religion was represented by two titles in 1959, and one title each year during the period from 1961 to 1963, continuing to a similar extent until 1977. Philosophy was a relatively small category with one or two published titles each year in 1958, 1964, 1965, and 1969. The extent was approximately the same during the period 1970 to 1977.

The greatest variation in terms of the number of titles can be found in the history category. However, it should be borne in mind that books in other categories could have an historical perspective, without being categorized under history in the first place. Overall, history was the largest humanities category in Aldus, although both the number of titles and the percentage of titles varied widely. While only four history titles were published during Aldus's first five years, the number would increase noticeably by the mid-1960s. In 1964, as many as eight history titles were published in the series. In the 1970s, the history category would be significantly strengthened and during the years 1971 to 1974, it became by far the largest category of the humanities.<sup>19</sup>

Many Aldus titles could be placed in more than one subcategory. This is especially true of titles that concerned natural science issues from a historical perspective. Thus, the popular science titles published showed strong and lasting links between the natural sciences and the history of science. Titles on physics or astronomy were often presented from a humanities point of view, a framework which also influenced the design and selection of the books. While titles such as *The Creation of the Universe* by George Gamow (1958) and *Cybernetics* by G. Th. Guilbaud (1962) fit well into an established picture of the late 1950s and early 1960s, as a time period characterized by scientific and technological advancement, a humanistic world view characterized Aldus' publishing list. *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge (Atomfysik og menneskelig erkendelse)* by Niels Bohr (1959), *Radiation, Genes and Man* by Bruce Wallace (1961) and *Physics and Man (Fysiken och människan)* by

19 The statistical calculations were performed by the authors.

Tor Ragnar Gerholm (1962) were all popular scientific accounts of questions in contemporary physics, founded in reasoning from ancient natural and moral philosophy. Thus, they challenged a popularized view of the humanities and natural sciences as two different cultures, with no prospect of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> The rapprochement between different disciplines, in fact, permeates several of the introductory texts on the scientific writings published in Aldus during these years. In *Physics and Man*, such a view of science appeared as the book's own starting point. Gerholm's presentation of the history of physics took a pronounced stand against the media image of "the two cultures" as a formative of contemporary scientific society. The notion that there was a categorical division between the humanities and science was incorrect and constructed, Gerholm argued.<sup>21</sup>

The approximately 500 books included in the series were written or edited by 450 different people (co-authored and co-edited titles appeared, although they were not many). Most authorships were represented by a single book, even though there were authors who published several books in the series. Among the author names most frequently appearing on Aldus' list were Herbert Tingsten, publicist and political scientist (eight titles), Professor of biochemistry Gösta Ehrensverd (seven titles), Sigmund Freud (five titles), author Artur Lundkvist (four titles), psychiatrist and debater R. D. Laing (four titles), and literary scholars Gunnar Brandell and Olle Holmberg (five and four titles respectively).

It is no coincidence that all the name listed above are male. On the contrary, this list gives a fair idea of the gender distribution of the book series. The male dominance among Aldus' writers was almost total. During its twenty active years, a total of forty-two books written or edited by a woman was published in the series, that is less than one tenth of the total number. Nine of these forty-two books had a man as co-author or editor. Except for a few years in the late 1970s, female authorships were completely absent, regardless of subject area.

The humanities subjects were no exception from this rule. Between 1957 and 1977, only five humanities titles written by female authors were published in the series. The first being a biography on the Swedish writer and poet Karin Boye by Margit Abenius (1965), eight (!) years later followed

20 Hagner, "Ernesto Grassi," shows how Ernesto Grassi, editor of the rde (rowohlts deutsche enzyklopädie) series, successfully took on a similar task in a West German context. See also Eldelin, "De två kulturerna" for an analysis of the circulation of the "two cultures" trope in a Swedish context.

21 Gerholm, *Fysiken och människan*, p. 15.

by a church history study of St. Birgitta by Emilia Fogelklou (1973), Judith Holmes' historical account on the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin (1973), and a linguistic study on bilingual children's language learning: *Språkgränsen* (1973 [The Language Barrier]) by Magdalena Jaakkola. In 1975, *Invandrabarnen och språket* [Immigrant children and language] by Britt-Ingrid Stockfelt-Hoatson, another study of bilingual children, was published.

Renderings of the paperback revolution often begin with the story of British book publisher Allen Lane and his tremendous success with the Penguin series, launched in 1935. It is said that Lane got the idea at a train station in the British countryside. Annoyed that there was no sensible read to buy in the station kiosk, he stated that quality literature should be available everywhere, not to be more expensive than a packet of cigarettes. His idea would prove to be a brilliant move. Already the first titles became hugely popular, and after a couple of years, more than three million Penguin books had been sold. Although Penguin relied on distribution channels, materials, and formats strongly associated with so-called mass culture, the series invested heavily in reputable authorship, fictional classics, and current non-fiction.<sup>22</sup>

The most significant thing about Penguin was that the series made the paperback a consumer item. Penguin books had a uniform design with a clear graphic profile and a symbol that was easy to recognize.<sup>23</sup> The intention was to sell, which for Lane was nothing to be humbled by. Here he differed from another of the great pioneers of the paperback book: Ernesto Grassi, editor of West German popular science paperback series *rowohlts deutsche enzyklopädie* (founded in 1955). Grassi, used to emphasize that his series did not consist of "popular science for 1'90 Mark."<sup>24</sup> To him, the distinction between the endeavor of knowledge dissemination and the connotations of a word like "popularize," which can of course be understood as simplifying or distorting, was crucial.

Although the paperback is a mass market phenomenon, whose main selling point was always a cheap price and easily accessible distribution channels, there has been a need for boundary delineation between, on the one hand, "pulp fiction" and, on the other, "quality paperbacks."<sup>25</sup> The very concept of the quality paperback illustrates the recurring contradiction between so-called high culture and popular culture.

22 Baines, *Penguin by Design*, p. 12.

23 Baines, *Penguin by Design*, p. 13–15; Rylance, *Reading with a Mission*.

24 Döring, Lewandowski and Oels, *Non Fiktion*, pp. 39–40.

25 Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, p. xii.

Per Gedin's role as a knowledge actor and gatekeeper was more inspired by Allen Lane than by Ernesto Grassi. In a study conducted in 1967, on the paperback as a cultural and book market phenomenon, Gedin pointed out that the paperback was a child of postwar consumption culture. He viewed it as the book world's equivalent of "moon rockets, electric guitars and freezers" and talked about how the covers of paperback books should inspire impulse buying in the same way as "a color image of crispy, brown meatballs on the outside of the frozen meatball package" was supposed to.<sup>26</sup> Gedin's way of promoting his product testified to an unsentimental attitude, and simultaneously, it emphasized how the paperback made academic knowledge, humanities as well as the social and natural sciences, accessible to the vast majority.<sup>27</sup>

The late 1960s meant the emergence of a youth generation with great expectations for the future and society. A new audience largely composed of students and other young adults, called for a type of reading that had never before sold in such large editions.<sup>28</sup> Paperback publishing grew explosively and the publication of political theory and debate books became increasingly more common.<sup>29</sup> In Sweden, as throughout the Western world, the paperback would soon become associated with the emerging student movement and the left radicalization of the media debate.<sup>30</sup> In this context, Aldus would also play an important role, not least through its subdivision Aldus Aktuellt, in which eighty-two books were published on current social issues. Though it was rooted in a bourgeois educational tradition, it also helped to bring forth political theories of the New Left, for example Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1968). The Aldus series stood out well in the competition for the young left-leaning paperback audience, although Aldus, like other Swedish paperback book series, weakened considerably during the so-called publishers' crisis in the early 1970s.<sup>31</sup>

Because of the great impact of 1960s popular science paperbacks such as Aldus, these series not only reflected the spirit of the times, but often even managed to precede it. Paperback series have played a significant role as public knowledge arenas in book market history, the history of reading, and the cultural outlook of the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> The success of Aldus

26 Gedin, *Den nya boken*, p. 9.

27 Gedin, *Den nya boken*, p. 11. Cf. Mandler, "Good Reading."

28 Mercer, "Paperback Revolution."

29 *En bok om böcker*, pp. 335–339.

30 Östberg, 1968, p. 85; Svensson, "Bo Cavefors"; von Vegesack, *PAN 1967–1973*.

31 *En bok om böcker*, pp. 331, 335, 359.

32 Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, p. xii; Mandler, "Good Reading."

and other popular science paperback series testify to a belief in people's ability to acquire new knowledge and participate in informed debate. It also demonstrates the strong and lasting public presence of the humanities in a popular mass media format during the Swedish 1960s and 1970s. Directly and indirectly, the humanities acted as a general driving-force behind the development of the paperback series as public arenas of knowledge.

## Humanities in the Christian Public Sphere

As we have seen, humanistic knowledge was clearly visible in paperback series during the postwar era, as it was in cultural journals, the cultural pages of the newspapers, radio, and television, all important media arenas for the general public sphere. Beside the general public sphere, however, there were partial public spheres (*Teilöffentlichkeiten*), which were also important in providing arenas for humanistic knowledge. A study of partial or counter public spheres is thus also a way of focusing how knowledge circulated in society, as these partial public spheres, in Sweden often connected to the strong popular movements emerging from late nineteenth century, affected a large part of the population in one way or another. The social democratic labor movement, for example, has often been understood as comprising a partial public sphere (and sometimes a "counterpublic").<sup>33</sup> This sphere had its own newspapers, journals, book publishers, and not least provided popular adult education. In the adult education organization ABF, which provided voluntary leisure time studies, language studies played an immense role, and studies of history, art, and literature were also offered. Humanistic knowledge, such as philosophy and literary studies, also played a role in the counterpublic of the New Left emerging toward the end of the 1960s.<sup>34</sup>

Another very important partial public was the Christian sphere, which had its own actors, arenas, and audiences, partly overlapping with, but also independent from, the national public in general. The 1960s are often

33 At least it could be seen as a counterpublic early in its history. For a discussion, see for instance Karlsson, *Arbetarrörelsen*, ch. 1. The popular movements, typically represented by the temperance or teetotaling movement, the revivalist free churches, and the labor movement, are often highlighted as decisive for social change in twentieth-century Sweden. In 1900, a third of the Swedish population belonged to at least one of these movements. For more about the popular movements, including a discussion of "counter-hegemony," see Bengtsson, "The Swedish *Sonderweg*." Generally about counterpublics and a critique of Habermas' theory, see Fraser, "Rethinking."

34 Svensson, "Revoluting."

perceived as a period of “religious crisis” in the West.<sup>35</sup> Deep-seated Christian traditions were challenged and there was an experience of religious decline, which fuelled modernist theories of secularization.<sup>36</sup> However, many things point to the fact that the 1960s in one sense was actually a very strong period for the Christian public sphere in Sweden. Neither the state-connected Church of Sweden nor the free churches had started to experience the serious member loss they had later in the century, and the Catholic and Orthodox churches grew. Indeed, this was the peak period for Christian publishing houses, and there was a wide variety of Christian newspapers and journals.<sup>37</sup>

There was, however, some disintegration between church and state, as well as between Christianity and the general public conversation during the postwar era, which strengthened Christianity’s position as a partial sphere, where it earlier had been more integral to the general national public sphere. Christianity was increasingly perceived as something “other” in the course of the postwar decades, and this prompted Christians to discuss how to relate to, and take part in society, or in “the world,” which was a theological key concept during the 1960s.<sup>38</sup> And as we will see, in this endeavor, the humanities played a role.

In discussing this, we will focus on three arenas of knowledge within the Christian public sphere: two journals and one physical meeting place, and then specify them by looking at a few knowledge actors, who had a competence from the humanities, and were very active during the 1960s. What is presented here is by no means the entirety of the Christian public sphere, which was broad and lively, and included many different political and theological currents, but one important and influential part of it.

The Association for Christian Humanism [*Förbundet för kristen humanism*] had, from its foundation in the 1930s, as its aim to work for the realization of the highest human ideals, through traditional culture and humanist education.<sup>39</sup> While it also (increasingly) included political appeals which were anti-totalitarian, the cultivation of the human mind through defending and promoting *Bildung* was at its core. During the 1960s, their membership

35 McLeod, *The Religious Crisis*.

36 Jansson, “The City.”

37 Brohed, *Sveriges kyrkohistoria*: 8, p. 227; Steiner, “En (o)lönsam affär,” pp. 170–173.

38 For a discussion about the German case, see Hannig, *Die Religion der Öffentlichkeit*, p. 393.

39 The relation between humanism and the humanities is complex, and merits a discussion broader than what is possible to provide here. Humanism, while many-faceted (Christian or secular, for instance), is more of an ideology or “life stance,” stressing human dignity. In this, however, it often stresses traditional humanities education as an important part of realizing human ideals. For its history in Sweden, see Hansson, *Humanismens kris*.

grew, and there were active local chapters in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Uppsala, Sundsvall, and Linköping, who organized meetings, lectures, and debates.<sup>40</sup>

However, the central outlet of the association was its yearbook, *Årsbok för kristen humanism* [Yearbook of Christian Humanism], published from 1939. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the yearbook was at its peak. It had more than doubled in size between 1955 and 1965, and in the latter year it comprised of sixteen essays and reviews of more than 120 books. The largest segment was always the review section. Thus, the yearbook provided an important arena for discussions of new literature of different sorts (including Aldus paperbacks). Book reviews were often longer, essayistic, not seldom taking many books into account in one text. They were categorically ordered, and the category which dominated during the 1960s was religion.<sup>41</sup> However, this category was wide and included everything from more confessional literature, including shorter devotional books and heavier treatises on systematic theology, to books about church history, psychology, and world religions. History, literary studies, and philosophy/psychology were also prominent categories. One category, however, challenged religion in the number of reviews it included: literature, that is, texts which treated recently published poetry, prose, and drama. These ranged from shorter texts to longer essays, sometimes dealing with an entire authorship, and were often penned by writers with a degree in literary studies. Thus, they can be classified as not only shorter notifications of new literature, but rather analysis, in a more or less scholarly fashion.

So, the humanities: literary studies, history, philosophy, were a backbone of the Christian intellectual discourse in this context. The yearbook did not reach a mass audience, but as a public arena dedicated to intellectual discussions of new scholarly knowledge, it filled an important role. Not least since it included in its sphere of writers and readers many who held important positions within various Christian congregations, including bishops and leaders of free churches, editors of newspapers and journals, as well as scholars with positions at theological faculties.

The journal *Vår Lösen* [Our Watchword] had a somewhat larger readership. This was the leading Christian cultural journal for much of the twentieth century (it was discontinued in 2000), and had its peak in the late 1960s,

40 This characterization of the associations is based on their annual reports, printed in their yearbooks.

41 Only from 1964 were there actual headlines signalling the categories of "Religion," "History," etc, but the categorization is similar and quite clear also before this.



when it reached around 3,000 subscribers.<sup>42</sup> This was a broader publication than *Årsbok för kristen humanism*, somewhat less academic, and more oriented toward contemporary issues. It published texts on a wide array of topics related to society, culture, and church. Under the editorship (from 1961) of Anne-Marie Thunberg, it was an important arena for a political turn leftwards within Swedish Christianity.<sup>43</sup> There was, however, always room for other things than politics: existential issues, literature, art, and theater, as well as for discussions about churchly matters such as liturgy and theology.

Given its somewhat less academic and more political touch during the 1960s, classical humanities topics were somewhat less dominant than in *Årsbok för kristen humanism*. They still played a role however: literature was important, and many writers with academic degrees in literary studies published in the journal, not only reviews of new novels and poetry – which was common – but also broader portrayals of authors. Apart from this, philosophy was a topic which surfaced regularly. But not Swedish academic philosophy, which had become increasingly oriented toward the analytical tradition, but various continental philosophers dealing with existential questions in a broad sense, for example Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Martin Buber, and Simone Weil.

Both these textual arenas had connections to a specific place, namely Sigtuna outside of Stockholm, one of the oldest towns of Sweden. The reason was that this was the home of the Sigtuna Foundation [*Sigtunastiftelsen*], connected to the Church of Sweden. Founded as a combination of a folk high school and a guesthouse in 1917, it also was a place for different kinds of intellectual meetings and conferences, and thus functioned as a form of physical knowledge arena. This aspect was strengthened after a full-time director had been appointed in 1948, a position held by the writer and priest Olov Hartman until 1970. The guesthouse was frequented by the literary establishment of Sweden, who used it to work in a secluded milieu, or attended some of the conferences arranged by Hartman. During the 1960s, among conferences more aimed toward the church establishment, there were also what Hartman called “conferences about language and world views.” Here, academics, authors, and other intellectuals gathered, held lectures and debated issues such as literary criticism, the role of Christianity in modern society, or literature and political engagement. Such conferences often gathered participants from the intellectual elite of Sweden, Christian and non-Christian, and had echoes outside of Sigtuna, in that they were

42 Linderman and Lundmark, “*Vår lösén*,” pp. 342–343.

43 Sundeen, *68-kyrkan*.

referenced and discussed in journals and the cultural pages of the daily press.<sup>44</sup>

The journal *Vår Lösen* was based in Sigtuna and had strong ties to the foundation, as had The Association for Christian Humanism. Their yearbook was produced there for many years, as the librarian of the ambitious library of the foundation, Eric Lilliehöök, was the editor of the yearbook. Thus, we here see how an entanglement of different textual and physical arenas was important for circulating knowledge in this partial public sphere. These arenas, where the humanities played an important part, would however not have worked, were it not for the actors involved. We have already mentioned the director Hartman and the editors Thunberg and Lilliehöök, who were important gatekeepers in promoting and regulating the circulation of knowledge in Christian arenas, but we will now turn to a few more. Importantly, many of the most active persons involved in these arenas within the Christian public sphere, were people not only with a general interest in literature or philosophy, but who also had humanities degrees.

The Association for Christian Humanism had as its chair during the 1960s a historian, Georg Landberg, who held a PhD in history, but was mostly active outside of academia. Vice chair, until 1967, was a key person for all these circles and arenas: Manfred Björkquist. Björkquist was bishop of Stockholm between 1942 and 1954, being appointed without having a theology degree or background as a priest. He had studied philosophy and pedagogics, and been active as a teacher. He had however for a long time held a central position within the Church of Sweden as a layman. Apart from being involved in creating The Association for Christian Humanism, he was the visionary and founder of Sigtunastiftelsen, and *Vår Lösen*. Although Björkquist, a promoter of literature, philosophy, and classical education in Christian circles, was not as active in the 1960s, he was always present as an *éminence grise*.<sup>45</sup>

In textual arenas, writers were of course crucial. In *Årsbok för kristen humanism*, three of the four most active pens during the 1960s belonged to the above-mentioned Landberg, the philosopher Alf Ahlberg, and the romanist Gunnel Vallquist. Ahlberg, PhD in philosophy, was one of Sweden's most famous public intellectuals for much of the twentieth century, hailed as "the philosophy teacher of the Swedish people." For a long period, he was rector of the Folk High School Brunnsvik, connected to the labor movement.

44 About these conferences, see Hartman, *Fågelsträck*, pp. 265–276; Ohlsson, *Dialog och växt*, pp. 71–80.

45 On Björkquist, see Grönqvist, *Manfred Björkquist*.

He was an avid writer and translator during his time as rector, but even more so after his retirement in 1959, when he lived in the guest house at Sigtunastiftelsen for longer periods.<sup>46</sup> Philosophy, religion, and history of ideas were subjects he favored. Gunnel Vallquist was of a younger generation, and acted as a public intellectual who introduced literature and ideas from the European continent in Sweden. In the 1960s, she became known for her writings on the Second Vatican Council, published in both the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Vår Lösen* (and later in book form), and as a translator of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Vallquist, who converted to Catholicism as a student, later became one of the eighteen members of the Swedish Academy.

By far the most active writer for *Årsbok för kristen humanism*, however, was Erik Hjalmar Linder. Linder had a PhD in literary studies, and while he had written a central university textbook on modern Swedish literature, he had pursued a non-academic career within radio and the press. During the 1960s, he cemented his position as one of the leading literary critics in Sweden.<sup>47</sup> Linder had his roots in the Swedish Mission Covenant Church, one of the older free churches emerging from the revival movements of the nineteenth century, and spearheaded an increasing trend in these churches of taking part in public activities such as cultural debates. Linder was, as mentioned, by far the most prolific writer in *Årsbok för kristen humanism*, where many of the texts he published had earlier been printed in the newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten*. He also wrote for *Vår Lösen* and other Christian journals and newspapers. But while he was above all a highly productive writer and respected critic, he was also very active as an organizer and networker, for instance at Sigtunastiftelsen.<sup>48</sup>

Linder was a promoter of Christian perspectives in various public arenas, also in the general national public sphere. This was a conscious and collective strategy, not only for him, but in general for the networks covered here. For example, this can be seen in the correspondence between Linder and Kerstin Anér. Anér was yet another Christian intellectual with a doctoral degree in literary studies, who was both active in the Christian public sphere and broader political and cultural arenas (she later became a top politician for the liberal party). In letters from Anér to Linder, she discussed strategies of pushing Christian perspectives, including sharing articles, writing about each other's works, and collectively lifting Christian themes in the main

46 Krantz, *Alf Ahlberg*.

47 Forser, *Kritik av kritiken*.

48 Hartman, *Fågelsträck*, pp. 269–270.

cultural outlets.<sup>49</sup> Also, the authors in these networks often wrote positively about each other's work, in both Christian journals and the cultural pages of the main newspapers. In an era often perceived as very secular, these actors catered for Christian perspectives in the public sphere.

It was important that many of them had a background in the humanities. The non-dogmatic and ecumenical Christianity these actors represented mingled well with existential themes from literature, philosophy, and the history of ideas, thus turning this part of the Christian public sphere into an important node in the societal circulation of knowledge and themes from humanities research and education outside of academia. It contributed to the distribution and production of humanities knowledge in forms that reached large groups of people who were not part of the humanities within academia.

The humanities seems to have filled a role in what was one of the key discussions in Christianity of the decade. This concerned how it might relate and connect to secular society, and to "the world." For Christians trying to build bridges between the Christian sphere, and the secular public, competence in the humanities filled an important role, as this could be seen as an entry ticket into intellectual debates going on in the journals, cultural pages, and other arenas in the general Swedish public sphere. Furthermore, the Christian arenas were important for providing opportunity for educated humanists to discuss their expertise, and thus strengthened their role as humanistic knowledge actors, also when they acted in the larger public sphere.

## **Toward a New History of the Humanities**

The history of the public circulation of knowledge is not the same as the history of disciplines, researchers, or scholarly communities. By studying the public arenas where knowledge circulated, a different interpretation of the postwar humanities emerges. In this final section, we will highlight how the understanding of the humanities change when the public knowledge arenas are placed at the center.

Firstly, the most obvious effect of the shift in perspective is that the roles of the humanities in wider society or cultural life become clear. Instead of concentrating on traditional scholarly domains – academic journals,

49 Letters from Anér to Linder, September 26, 1966, and April 17, 1967. In the personal archive of Erik Hjalmar Linder.

conferences, universities – the attention is directed toward the public sphere, with its cultural journals, newspapers, and other public meeting places. As a result, the contact or interaction zones between the humanistic disciplines and, for example, journalism or the arts become evident. This widens the overall scope.

Secondly, the public framework means that other actors are drawn to the center. Professors can still be of interest, however not as researchers or academic leaders, but in their capacities as popularizers or public intellectuals. More important, however, is that the spectrum of agents of knowledge is broadened. Journalists, broadcasters, publishers, or bookstore owners emerge as important figures in the history of the humanities. Furthermore, this framework enables us to assess the importance of actors in circulation processes who for various reasons have remained invisible in traditional history writing. This is especially true for women and their role as knowledge actors. Here we have seen that authors such as Gunnel Vallquist and Erik Hjalmar Linder, who published extensively in public arenas, were important. But in a sense even more central were editors (Anne-Marie Thunberg), directors (Olov Hartman), and publishers (Per Gedin), who acted as gatekeepers and networkers to regulate and promote certain knowledge in certain arenas.

Thirdly, the emphasis on public arenas of knowledge can challenge an established interpretation of the historical development and position of the humanities. Our examples of arenas demonstrate that the humanities were comparatively strong during the 1960s, at least when it comes to their public presence. In histories of the sciences and universities, by contrast, this is a period in modern history when the social and natural sciences expanded more in relative terms compared to the humanistic disciplines. When the status of the humanities within the academic system is portrayed, it is not infrequent in the form of a narrative of “the crisis of the humanities.”<sup>50</sup> However, an analysis of public knowledge arenas paints a different picture of this historical reality. There are many examples, but as we have seen here, the humanities were a driver for a new form of book publishing, often hailed as revolutionary, and they were also decisive for a specific interpretation of how Christianity should relate to and integrate in modern society.

Fourthly, with the concept of arena we can discern an epoch’s larger infrastructure and organization of knowledge, utilizing the concept of infrastructure in a way that has been developed in media history, history of technology, and history of science. John Durham Peters has emphasized that there are both hard and soft forms of infrastructure: railways as well

50 Östh Gustafsson, “The Discursive Marginalization.”

as websites could be seen as infrastructure. According to him, they are characterized by an inherent inertia which helps to promote certain forms of path dependency. For infrastructures to work, it requires someone to manage and maintain them. If this is the case, they can become normalized and taken for granted. It would be worthwhile to explore how the humanistic arenas of knowledge were linked to each other and if they formed an overarching infrastructure. One way might be to look at how the dynamics of publishing worked in the postwar period. For instance, it was not uncommon that a knowledge actor wrote a series of essays in the press that were later expanded and turned into a paperback, as for instance was the case with many of Erik Hjalmar Linder's books. This book was, in turn, reviewed and discussed in newspaper or journal articles. To capture this kind of communications circuit – to use Robert Darnton's concept – would be a way to shed light on the infrastructure of public knowledge in the postwar period.<sup>51</sup>

In sum, our focus on public knowledge arenas opens up new aspects of the history of the humanities, hopefully contributing to a richer and more multifaceted history that captures the significance that the humanities have had in society, culture, and the public sphere as a whole.

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51 Darnton, "What is the History"; Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*.

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