
**DIVERGING AND SOMETIMES PERHAPS ALSO
CONVERGING THOUGHTS BEFORE A CONFERENCE
ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

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One day I met Bertil Lind and asked if it was possible for me to listen to the lectures in this conference on Intercultural Communication. "Of course", was the immediate and generous answer.

Some days later he phoned me and confirmed his promise. "But", he said, "you have to introduce the conference with a speech". I wondered why. "Oh, you see, the man I really wanted to do it has got ill and cannot come, so it has to be you". Another day later he phoned me again and said: "Of course it has to be in English". -"O dear me, I haven't spoken English on such an occasion for 25 years". -"Well, take it or leave it", he said. So - here I am.

When C P Snow in the late fifties published his essay *The Two Cultures* it was received with an immense attention in Sweden as it was in the whole western world. And even if we here in Sweden have had professorships in History of ideas and learning for almost seventy years we have had a marked border between those two cultures, between technology, science and economics on the one hand and the humanities and the arts on the other.

When I look back some decades or more on cultural life in Sweden I can remember just a few individuals who have trespassed the border. Of course: we had August Strindberg. But as a natural scientist he was just an interested charlatan without basic training.

And we had Harry Martinson, an author who had a rather profound knowledge in science and was one of the first to warn us not to pollute lakes and rivers with garbage and defecation. He also took an interest in astronomy and in new technical research in space flight and that gave us his great and tragic vision of our future in *Aniara*. But even Harry Martinson, the Nobel Prize winner, was more of an amateur than a natural scientist himself. I had a friend who was acquainted with him and he once told me about a meeting with Martinson. The author was describing with paper and pencil a scientific theory to his guests when his son objected to the sketches or to the conclusions. Harry Martinson replied: "Please, don't forget, I am a poet".

What else do we have in Sweden? Well, I remember Tord Hall, a mathematician who also wrote about science in a popular sense and even published poetry that got a lot of attention. And two of our most wellknown astronomers, the late Peter Nilsson and Bengt Gustavsson, had and has literary and humanistic interests outside the observatories, the latter e.g. as the new director of Sigtuna-Stiftelsen.

A few days ago I read in a newspaper that Lise Drougge, with a Ph D in chemistry, and profession as a teacher, now 80 years old, has written some twenty theater plays, a dozen detective stories, novels and biographies. She is also a painter and has just sent her latest book to her publisher.

And what about Piet Hein the constructor of the superellipse and the superegg, also the brilliant author of thousands of *Gruks*, and besides: a physicist and philosopher. Well, I know he was not Swedish, but pretty close to. He was a student at Stockholms Högskola in the 40ies.

At the University College of Jönköping, Department of Economics, a teacher - his name is Alsheimer, not with a z but with an s (and how glad I am to remember his name!) - has drawn a lot of attention to his work with developing the lists of literature. He has introduced as a compulsory, but not credit-giving subject, fiction, classic as well as modern. And it was not a short course: some thousand pages per year. I wish I had read all that stuff of advanced literature on his lists.

But I have not. As a matter of fact I find it difficult to have an extensive reading in both science and humanistics or arts at the same time. So I had to take one direction first and then turn to the other. I started as a natural scientist, I took mathematics, physics and chemistry and taught these subjects for some fifteen years. Then I turned to teach psychology, philosophy and theory of science.

Let me return to C P Snow. I heard him some twenty years ago in London when he for a big audience introduced the famous Russian poet Jevgeni Jevtusjenko. And I can't imagine anyone - among Swedish scientists - who could possibly have done that with the same authority.

These days I have been reading a book about the Swedish school system and the education of teachers. And I was amazed when I read about a school leader and supervisor who frankly declares that we have to produce a lot more of natural scientists and that - I quote him - "It's quite OK with language", and now it comes, "but social science is really just completely unnecessary". I quite agree with the author of the book when she expresses her indignation that a man with views like that can remain as a tutor. "He not only looks down upon one other group of subjects but also upon all our cultural heritage", she exclaims.

I think we have a strong need for border trespassing and communication between the two cultures which Snow wrote about. The last ten or perhaps fifteen years we have seen a lot of research projects with such a tendency, and - however without statistical verification - I think it is accumulating. But often these projects are coproductions involving one researcher or a team from one part of the scientific field and one from another part. And that is, maybe, a prerequisite.

And let me now finally return to C P Snow. When he wrote a supplement to his first speech on the two cultures he thought it was too early to talk about an existing third culture though he had a firm conviction that it was on its way. And he regretted that he had challenged the humanists' competence in science by asking what they knew about "the second law of thermodynamics". What he really wanted was a third culture, existing between the two, a culture that made it possible for the first two to be on speaking terms with each other. Because, as Snow says, it is dangerous to have two cultures which cannot or don't want to communicate.

The natural scientists can give bad advice to those people who have to decide and these in turn can't know if the advice is good or bad. On the other hand: the scientists may have knowledge about possibilities which only they know.

Diverging and sometimes perhaps also converging thoughts...

This makes the political process far more complicated than ever before and also more complicated than we can really tolerate. It doesn't matter if the problems apply to avoiding future disasters or to fulfilling a definable common hope.

And I guess that this, "avoiding future disasters and fulfilling a common hope" is a good summing up formula for a conference like this one.