

The Cultural Transfer of a Concept: C. P. Snow’s “Two Cultures” and the Swedish Debate

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In the Cambridge Rede Lecture of 1959, C. P. Snow expressed his thoughts on “The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution”. His idea of “the two cultures”, described as a gap between scientists and “literary intellectuals”, attracted much attention in Swedish debate from the early 1960s onwards. In this essay, I present the concept of “the two cultures” as deeply grounded in Snow’s personal experiences and in a British social, political and cultural climate. Furthermore, I discuss the Swedish interpretations and transfigurations of Snow’s concept and, above all, how they differ from Snow’s views. “The two cultures” is here regarded as a concept which was discussed in relation to certain other concepts in a Swedish interpretative framework. In Sweden, “the two cultures” was related to concepts like *Bildung*, humanism, the humanities, and science. The Swedish debate on “the two cultures” often drew from historical perspectives on these concepts, and was affected by earlier influences from German intellectual traditions. These differences between Sweden and Britain, regarding cultural influences, languages and conceptions, contributed to a broader and partly different understanding of “the two cultures” in Swedish debate.

The Cultural Transfer of a Concept: C. P. Snow's "Two Cultures" and the Swedish Debate¹

In May 1959, the British writer, debater and former scientist C. P. Snow gave the Rede Lecture in Cambridge on the subject "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution". Later the same year, his lecture was published as a pamphlet which was widely discussed in the early 1960s.² In *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, Snow argued that there was a split in Britain, but also in the whole of the Western world, between different "cultures", and especially between two particularly distinct groups: scientists and "literary intellectuals". These two groups had widely different interests, experiences and ways of expressing themselves. Their attitudes towards one another were prejudiced and scornful, and they differed in political opinions and approaches to the technically and scientifically grounded development of society. In particular, Snow considered the literary intellectuals, with their traditional and reactionary attitudes to progress, to stand in the way of a technical and scientific modernization of Britain. The "literary" and "traditional" culture, he argued, had a strong influence on the British corridors of power: on politicians and decision makers with an educational background in literary and classical studies. This influence of attitudes also prevented access to the necessary means for British scientists and engineers to take an active part in spreading modernization to developing countries.³ In many ways, as I will discuss further below, this contemporary analysis was a product of Snow's upbringing and of his own private experiences as an outsider – as someone standing in between and perhaps also outside of scientists and literary intellectuals.

The Two Cultures was translated into Swedish in 1961 and soon attracted much attention in Sweden.⁴ In the ongoing debate regarding the Swedish educational reforms of the early 1960s, Snow's concept came to serve as a rhetorical point of departure in debates concerning *Bildung* and the relationship between general knowledge and specialization in education. Some decades later, most evidently in the 1990s, "the two cultures" experienced a renaissance in the Swedish debate, now mainly functioning as a starting point and background for different ways of describing the epistemological and historical divide between the sciences and the humanities.⁵ The concept has also appeared in discussions regarding the place of science and technology in culture and cultural debate.⁶ Over the years, the Swedish layers of

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- 1 This essay is based on results from my dissertation, see Emma Eldelin, "*De två kulturerna*" flyttar hemifrån: C. P. Snows begrepp i svensk idédebatt 1959–2005 ["The Two Cultures" Leaves Home: C. P. Snow's Concept in Public Debate in Sweden 1959–2005] (diss. Linköping; Stockholm, 2006), with a summary in English.
 - 2 C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, 1959). I will use the abbreviation *The Two Cultures* (in italics) when referring to Snow's written document, while "the two cultures" denotes the concept in itself, regardless of the written source or debater using it.
 - 3 This outline of Snow's discussion is based on my own interpretation of *The Two Cultures*, but particularly fruitful perspectives on Snow and "the two cultures" can also be found in John R. de la Mothe, *C. P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity* (Austin, 1992) and in Daniel Cordle, *Postmodern Postures: Literature, Science and The Two Cultures Debate* (Aldershot, 2000).
 - 4 C. P. Snow, *De två kulturerna*, transl. by Claes-Adam & Lillemor Wachtmeister (Uppsala/Malmö, 1961).
 - 5 The Swedish debate on "the two cultures" has been expressed in different types of publications, ranging from cultural debates and series of articles from major Swedish newspapers and periodicals, private and personal pamphlets and essays, to political and more collective committee reports and government bills on educational reforms. Many different groups of people have made contributions to this discussion: scientists, engineers, medical doctors, social scientists, classical scholars, writers and journalists as well as educational politicians.
 - 6 Since this part of the Swedish debate on "the two cultures" has been more occasional than the parts regarding *Bildung* and the sciences/humanities-conflict, and also because it bears more similarities with Snow's perspective, I have here chosen to focus on the two latter tracks (*Bildung*, sciences/humanities). For

interpretation have caused Snow's original thoughts to be distant and forgotten. Still, many Swedish debaters have continued to regard the concept of "the two cultures" useful to make certain statements, or they have tended to use it as a guiding metaphor for certain kinds of discussions or comparisons between the 1960s and the present.

When the concept of "the two cultures" became a part of a Swedish debate on certain issues, it was affected by a cultural climate somewhat different from the British one. It is clearly something of a paradox that such a personal, highly British pamphlet could ever become so important in the Swedish debate. What really happened in this transition? How did Swedish debaters interpret Snow's concept? In what ways do Swedish interpretations of "the two cultures" differ from Snow's? To what extent have differences in conceptual traditions and cultural contexts affected the Swedish understanding? And what about the originator himself – how can we understand Snow and his view of "the two cultures"? What were the motives and inspirations for his idea?

In this essay, I aim to discuss these questions, beginning with presenting C. P. Snow along with several clues to why he wrote about "the two cultures". Then, I outline the Swedish debate by introducing some of its central concepts and questions. Along with it, I stress how Swedish debaters adapted Snow's concept and made it a part of a Swedish frame of reference. The story of "the two cultures" in Swedish debate also provides us with an illustration of what happens when concepts travel between cultural and social contexts and reach far beyond the originator's intentions. But first, however, a few words on the analytical points of departure.

"The Two Cultures" and Conceptual History

In my analysis of the Swedish debate on "the two cultures" and in my focusing on the *conceptual* relations and differences, I have found some useful basic assumptions in the methodological perspective known as Conceptual History (*Begriffsgeschichte*) developed by, among others, the German historian Reinhart Koselleck.⁷ As discussed in Koselleck, a concept is always ambiguous.⁸ It is the subject of a "semantic struggle" for the correct definition, carried out through linguistic representations by different individual debaters or groups. Concepts are always defined by its relations to other concepts. Koselleck terms this relation between concepts as a "semantic field". In Conceptual History, concepts are viewed as important tools to grasp and describe reality, personal identities or group formations. The connections between language and social change are frequently stressed: the meaning of concepts change over time and in relation to social, political and institutional change. Different languages and cultural traditions also affect the changing meaning of concepts.

I regard "the two cultures" as a concept which, in Sweden, was understood and interpreted in relation to certain other recurring concepts.⁹ This means that even though the description of "the two cultures" had its origin in a specific British context, it left home to live its own life of interpretations in another language and in a Swedish cultural context that somewhat differed from the British one. The Swedish interpretations of "the two cultures" often drew on perspectives and conceptions originating from the intellectual traditions and

the Swedish debate on "the two cultures" in relation to the concept of *culture*, see Eldelin, "De två kulturerna" flyttar hemifrån, chap. 4.

7 Several of Koselleck's works in Conceptual History are available in English, e.g. Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, transl. by Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford, 2002) and *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. by Keith Tribe (New York, 2004).

8 The founding principles of Conceptual History are expressed e.g. in Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History", in Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

9 Naturally, the same perspective could be used to study the debate in Britain as well as other countries.

debates of Germany in the 19th century. The Swedish concepts most clearly connected to “the two cultures”, like *bildning* (from German *Bildung*), *humanist* (from Italian *umanista* and Latin *humanus*) and *vetenskap* (from German *Wissenschaft*), were often more intensely discussed than “the two cultures”, which foremost served as a rhetorical point of departure.

There are some important differences between the concepts most often in focus of Conceptual History and those brought up in this essay. Particularly, this goes for the concept of “the two cultures”, which is more specific and of less far-reaching importance than those in centre of attention in Conceptual History.¹⁰ The relation between “the two cultures” and e.g. Swedish *bildning* is also not an antithetical one, while the “semantic field” of Conceptual History consists of antithetical, opposite and asymmetric relationships between concepts and “counterconcepts”.¹¹ In addition to referring to a “semantic field”, I have therefore chosen to speak of a “conceptual frame of reference” referring to the complex and various relations between “the two cultures” and other central concepts in Swedish debate.

C. P. Snow and “The Two Cultures” in Context

What can then be said of C. P. Snow himself, of possible importance for his reasoning in *The Two Cultures*?

Charles Percy Snow (1905–1980) was born in Leicester in a lower middle-class family.¹² After successful studies in physics and chemistry in Leicester and a Master’s degree, a scholarship made it possible for him to study physical chemistry in Cambridge, where he got his Ph.D. in 1930. From that year he was also a Fellow at Christ’s College and was later made tutor and editor of a popular science journal. In the early thirties, he made his debut as a novelist as well. In *The Two Cultures*, he considered the authorship his “vocation”, while he was a scientist merely “by training”.¹³ And it seems that novel writing was a primary interest for Snow, even before his training to become a scientist. Although he did not succeed as a scientist, he never ceased to discuss the roles of science in society. This discussion is continuously brought up in his novels and he is also considered to be one of the first writers of “academic novels”.¹⁴ One of his main inspirational sources was college life and scientific culture in Cambridge during the interwar period, when the colleges, according to Snow, were “stiff with Nobel prize winners”.¹⁵ Snow also carried out administrative business over the years, e.g. as technical director at the Ministry of Labour and as recruiter of scientific personnel during World War II. He was involved in the recruitments for the atomic bomb project in New Mexico.¹⁶ After the war he continued as director of scientific personnel for the English Electric Company and was also civil service commissioner. In 1964, he was appointed junior minister of technology in the Labour government of Harold Wilson (until 1966). Between these assignments he wrote novels and book reviews as well as polemical articles and lectures. For

10 Conceptual History focuses on social and political concepts. Studied concepts might be e.g. the state, revolution or democracy.

11 See e.g. Reinhart Koselleck, “The Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetrical Counterconcepts”, in Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

12 For more biographical details of Snow’s life, see e.g. de la Mothe, *C. P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity*, 13; David Shusterman, *C. P. Snow* (Boston, 1975), 13–14; Philip Snow, *Stranger and Brother: A Portrait of C. P. Snow*, new ed. (1982; London, 1983), 11–48. Biographical data provided here are mainly based on these sources.

13 Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 1: “By training, I was a scientist: by vocation I was a writer.”

14 Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (Philadelphia, 2005), 14–26. Showalter considers the academic novel to be a “small but now recognizable subgenre of contemporary fiction” (p. 2), developing in the fifties. Its main concerns are life, behaviour and tribal rites of the academic world. Cf. Showalter, 1–13.

15 John Halperin, *C. P. Snow, an Oral Biography: Together with a Conversation with Lady Snow* (New York, 1983), 21.

16 Philip Snow, *Stranger and Brother*, 91.

posterity, he is most well known as a polemic and debater, especially for minting the concept of “the two cultures”, which he did in an article in *New Statesman* in 1956, later developed into the Cambridge Rede Lecture and the published version of it.¹⁷

As stated above, Snow’s description of “the two cultures” was clearly grounded in his personal experiences of standing in between the scientists and the literary intellectuals as an academic in Cambridge in the 1930s, but there are other aspects to be considered as well. If we are to understand the reasons and inspirational sources for his discussion, we need to see “the two cultures” in a broader cultural, historical and contemporary context. Snow’s expression had connections to a 19th century debate on the roles of literature and science in culture, as well as to the political situation in Britain after World War II.

The Distinction Between Literature and Science

Firstly, “the two cultures” can be viewed as an expression of a classic and traditional British distinction between literature and science, a distinction which has no exact Swedish counterpart. In the late 19th century, classical scholar Matthew Arnold and anatomist and zoologist T. H. Huxley (also an ardent advocate of Darwin) had a famous argument on this matter. In their discussion concerning the roles of science in culture and society, Huxley claimed that knowledge of science was of great importance for the cultured personality. Arnold, however, asserted that literature was superior and occupied a place apart in culture. As a mediator, author John Burroughs wrote “Science and Literature” (1889), acting as peace broker by describing the distinctions and differences between these fields. The arguing in “Science and Literature” is based on a strict division of intellectual labour between these two groups.

In the debate of Arnold and Huxley, the fields at stake were science and literature, not science and *art*. As Daniel Cordle has pointed out in *Postmodern Postures: Literature, Science and the Two Cultures Debate* (2000), there is an imbalance between the terms. Science is an umbrella term for a range of disciplines and sub disciplines, while literature is but one part of the arts, even though it has, according to Cordle, often been considered a champion of the arts, the preferred and paradigmatic humanities subject.¹⁸ Literature and science have then been constructed as conceptual opposites. Snow’s idea of “the two cultures” can be viewed in line with this dualistic structure, and his argumentation was in many ways similar to that of T. H. Huxley.

Another sign of this literature–science dichotomy was a debate that broke out in 1962, when renowned literary critic and Cambridge scholar F. R. Leavis attacked Snow and his ideas in *Two Cultures?: The Significance of C. P. Snow*. Leavis claimed that Snow had given the wrong picture of the literary intellectuals, but above all, he rejected and ridiculed Snow as an author. He wrote that “as a novelist he [Snow] doesn’t exist [...]. He can’t be said to know what a novel is”. He suggested that Snow’s – in his view – monotonous and undistinguished novels could just as well have been written by an electronic brain.¹⁹ The following debate sometimes degenerated to a question of taking sides – Leavis’s or Snow’s.²⁰ Eventually, author Aldous Huxley acted as mediator with his essay *Literature and Science* (1963), describing the distinctive features of the two traditions. With Aldous Huxley’s contribution, the pattern from the 1880s had repeated itself: Snow, like T. H. Huxley, had pointed to the problem with the weak position of science in society and culture, and Leavis, like Arnold, had defended the cultural status of literature. As the grandchild of T. H. Huxley and as distant rela-

17 C. P. Snow, “The Two Cultures”, *New Statesman*, 6 Oct. 1956.

18 Cordle, *Postmodern Postures*, 13–20.

19 F. R. Leavis, *Two Cultures?: The Significance of C. P. Snow* (London, 1962). Quotation from p. 13.

20 For an overview of the British debate on Snow, Leavis and “the two cultures”, see *Cultures in Conflict: Perspectives on the Snow–Leavis Controversy*, ed. David K. Cornelius & Edwin St. Vincent (Chicago, 1964).

tive of Matthew Arnold as well, Aldous Huxley then tried to reconcile literature and science by pointing out the differences and by suggesting job splitting and general goodwill.²¹ In all of these examples, the distinction was made between science and literature, *not* science and art. As we shall see later, this particular dichotomy has not been at the core of the Swedish debate on “the two cultures”, where debaters have rather tended to view the split between the sciences and the humanities in general.

The Blindness and Insights of an Outsider in Interwar Britain

A second contributory factor of importance for Snow’s formulation of the concept of “the two cultures”, is, as I have already touched upon, Snow’s personal experiences of trying to combine his interest in the scientific development with his affection for literature during his years in Cambridge. “The two cultures” can be viewed as an isolated description of the different attitudes of conservative or reactionary modernist writers and more radical and socially optimistic scientists during the interwar period. John R. de la Mothe has suggested that “the two cultures” was an expression of the insights as well as the blindness of an outsider. Snow’s background in the middle-class pointed to a class-distinction between him and most of his colleagues. He was a second-rate scientist among brilliance and Nobel Prize winners, but also a writer among scientists. As a writer with a scientific ethos, however, he was not a part of Cambridge literary circles, where F. R. Leavis and the New Critics set the tone.²²

The description of the two groups that made up Snow’s “two cultures” had much in common with Cambridge college life of the 1930s. Most of the scientists mentioned in *The Two Cultures* were active in Cambridge during Snow’s formative years as scientist and author – e.g. mathematician G. H. Hardy and physicists Ernest Rutherford and J. D. Bernal.²³ As Snow put it, the scientific culture really was a culture (perhaps, as we would view it today, a sub-culture), sharing a scientific ethos that consisted of political radicalism, optimism, a strong belief in the future for mankind and a desire to transform the British society.²⁴

Snow’s description of the scientific culture was heavily dependent on what we now refer to as the “scientific left”, a leftist movement among scientists with Marxist oriented J. D. Bernal as something of a central character. As Gary Werskey illustrates in *The Visible College* (1978), at this particular time, the fusion between radicalism and technocracy was possible in scientific culture. Some of the leftist scientists were also engaged in public discussions on social problems.²⁵ In *The Social Function of Science* (1939), Bernal argued that science should serve society and be set free from capitalism. Science must be planned by the government and scientists take part more actively in improving society.²⁶ Bernal seems to have been an ideal scientist for Snow, even though he did not share Bernal’s collectivistic model, and rather discussed the importance of science for the individual than for society at large.²⁷ On the whole, Snow’s view of science seems to have been deeply affected by his years in Cambridge, and by his feeling of being a part of what he considered to be a golden age of science.

Snow’s description of the literary intellectuals or the literary culture was a bit more vaguely expressed. But most of his examples referred to the modernist writers and cultural

21 Aldous Huxley, *Literature and Science* (London, 1963). For a closer account of the literature–science conflict in historical perspective, see Cordle, *Postmodern Postures*, 11–44.

22 de la Mothe, *C. P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity*, 52, 140. Cf. Philip Snow, *Stranger and Brother*, 8, 24.

23 Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 4, 10. Cf. Gary Werskey, *The Visible College* (London, 1978), 24.

24 Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 5–10. As Snow expressed it, scientists had “the future in their bones” (ibid., 10).

25 Werskey, *The Visible College*, passim. Cf. Vidar Enebak, *Mellom de to kulturere: oppkomsten av vitenskapsstudier og etableringen av Edinburgshskolen 1966–76* [In Between Two Cultures: The Creation of Science Studies and the Establishing of the Edinburgh School 1966–1976] (diss. Oslo, 2005), 286–289.

26 de la Mothe, *C. P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity*, 40. Cf. Enebak, *Mellom de to kulturere*, 48–49.

27 de la Mothe, *C. P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity*, 140–141.

critics who were the central characters in British culture in those days. He claimed T. S. Eliot to be the very archetype of a literary intellectual, and he also mentioned Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, William Butler Yeats, D. H. Lawrence and George Orwell as representatives of this literary culture.²⁸ Snow's outline especially stressed the political tension between scientists and literary intellectuals. While scientists, according to Snow, were often leftists, literary intellectuals were described as politically conservative, even reactionary. Snow connected the modernist writers to an earlier generation of literary "luddites" and sceptics of the industrial movement, e.g. Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.²⁹

Martin Wiener has discussed the paradoxical case of Britain: In the nation where industrialism made its first breakthrough, there was also an air of strong scepticism towards technical progress and materialism, especially among the bourgeoisie. Wiener claims that Snow was one of the first to criticise the attitude of this intellectual elite.³⁰ As Charles Ferrall states in his study on modernist writers and reactionary politics, part of this elite, e.g. writers like Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence and Lewis, shared a sceptic attitude to liberalism, industrialism and progress. Some of them were even drawn towards fascist ideology. In their ambivalent attitude to modernity, they invoked a pre-modern idyllic existence and claimed *l'art pour l'art* by ways of creating a separate sphere for art, independent of the development of society.³¹ Even though Snow shared the social background of many of these writers, neither did he agree with their view of literature nor of politics.³²

We now have an additional way to interpret Snow's dualistic picture of "the two cultures". Besides being an expression of a traditional dichotomy of literature and science, "the two cultures" can be seen as a description of Snow's personal experiences of standing in between or perhaps outside of two particular groups, sharing most of the ideals of scientific culture but, at the same time, wanting to play a part in literary culture by changing its aesthetic values and attitudes to society. But Snow's conception *also* reflects post-war Britain and the current state of politics, education and culture.

Post-War Britain and the State of Education and Power Politics

Summing up his lifelong impressions in the late 1950s, Snow made "the two cultures" a contribution to the debate on educational politics and power politics. He was disappointed in post-war Britain and its conservative government, which did not initiate a necessary modernization of the school system by strengthening the roles of science and technology in society. The new government did not share the view of science of the scientific left, so influential during the war. Both Snow and J. D. Bernal lost their central positions as scientific advisors and recruiters for the government after the war.³³ Bernal's communist views and his inspiration from Soviet planning models were also met with more suspicion, and the scientific left was continuously attacked in the media, e.g. by writers Arthur Koestler, E. M. Forster and George Orwell.³⁴ During the fifties, Snow thus saw his visions for science and technology evaporate. The view of science and technology in society was also compromised by the con-

28 Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 4, 7, 23–24, 49.

29 *Ibid.*, 21–24.

30 Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981), 158–162.

31 Charles Ferrall, *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (Cambridge, 2001), 2–3, 6, 13–14.

32 de la Mothe views Snow's political opinions as part of a broad liberal tradition, see de la Mothe, *C. P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity*, 75, 149–152. For similar remarks see also Halperin, *C. P. Snow, an Oral Biography*, 40, 62, 66–67; John Hultberg, *A Tale of Two Cultures: The Image of Science of C. P. Snow* (diss. Göteborg, 1990), 162; Jerome Thale, *C. P. Snow* (Edinburgh, 1964), 14.

33 Enebakk, *Mellom de to kulturer*, 51–52; Werskey, *The Visible College*, 278–279.

34 Werskey, *The Visible College*, 281–290. Werskey even refers to these attacks as a "cultural cold war" against the scientific left, p. 281.

nections to military industry. Several British scientists moved to the United States and those remaining had problems finishing major research projects.³⁵

The Two Cultures can then also be seen as an elegy over Britain no longer playing an important part in the global struggle for power. In the last section of the pamphlet, Snow discussed the importance of science and technology taking an active part in society, partly influenced by Bernal's opinion that science should be socially organized and funded.³⁶ Snow stressed the importance of rethinking the British educational system, especially the tradition of early specialization. He claimed that education in the Soviet Union, as well as in the USA, had adjusted to a modern society in ways that had made Britain fall behind.

In his argumentation, Snow connected British educational traditions with the problem of the division between rich and poor nations. He considered it of crucial importance that the Western world helped out in the transforming of the poor countries. British scientists and engineers should take part in spreading industrialisation and carrying out a new scientific revolution. But this enterprise must not end in paternalism – scientists and engineers had to be trained in human terms as well.³⁷ As Snow concluded in *The Two Cultures*, Britain and the whole Western world needed to “look at education with fresh eyes”.³⁸ In so doing, he made a statement of immediate interest for British educational and research politics. Some years later, in 1964, new Labour leader Harold Wilson won the election with a policy that strongly emphasized the social functions of science and technology, similar to the view of the scientific left. Snow was offered, and took on, the post as junior minister of technology in the new Labour Government of Harold Wilson for some time. In the mid sixties, new types of “science studies units” were also founded, aiming at reinterpreting science history and making scientists and engineers aware of their roles in society.³⁹ Part of the discussion on science and society from the 1930s had finally made a difference in British educational and research politics.

This outline of the complex background of the concept of “the two cultures” is necessary in order to grasp the differences between Snow's motives and the Swedish debate, where Snow's specific circumstances were seldom considered. Snow's *The Two Cultures* is a deeply personal but also a very British pamphlet, and in a way, it is peculiar that Swedish debaters made this a statement of such importance. Partly, the popularity of Snow's concept can be explained by what happened in the very process of transferring and reinterpreting Snow's thoughts. Swedish debaters made “the two cultures” a part of a particular Swedish conceptual frame of reference. Debaters with interests, experiences and backgrounds differing from Snow's took part in a process of “cultural transferring”⁴⁰ of the concept, and the debate was affected by a new cultural context. “The two cultures” became a catch-phrase of the 1960s, but is still quite common in certain kinds of discussions in Sweden. What happened then, more precisely, when “the two cultures” left home to live a life of its own in the Swedish debate?

35 Enebakk, *Mellom de to kulturer*, 53.

36 Ibid., 45.

37 Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 38–48.

38 Ibid., 48.

39 Werskey, *The Visible College*, 320; Enebakk, *Mellom de to kulturer*, 54–59.

40 According to French scholar in Nordic history of literature and ideas, Sylvain Briens, the here alluded term, “cultural transfer” (which he translates into Swedish as “kulturell rekontextualisering”), can be used to describe the transfer-process of a cultural phenomenon from one culture to another, causing changes in meaning and content due to the new cultural context. The originator of this term is French historian Michel Espagne, who in discussing “transfert culturel” is claiming that all cultural contacts are affected by the difficulties of translating cultural codes. See Sylvain Briens, “Vilken stad är ditt Paris?” [Which City is your Paris?], *Svenska Dagbladet*, 19 May 2007; Michel Espagne & Michael Werner *Transferts: les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand: XVIIIe et XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1988). The results of the Swedish interpretative process of “the two cultures” expressed in this essay confirm Espagne's perspective.

The Swedish Translation

As mentioned above, *The Two Cultures* was translated into Swedish in 1961 by Claes-Adam and Lillemor Wachtmeister. They were connected with a radical Swedish student society called Verdandi, founded in the 1880s and for a long time associated with adult education and popular science publications. The translated version of *The Two Cultures*, *De två kulturerna*, was the first title in a new series of critical and polemical statements published by Verdandi. When comparing the original text with the Swedish translation, it is obvious that there are differences in intellectual and conceptual traditions which have played a crucial part in the transforming of Snow's concept to fit a Swedish frame of reference. Apart from the translation itself, the concept was frequently made use of in certain Swedish debates and contexts, and in connection with certain other concepts, most frequently terms like *Bildung*, humanism, the humanities and science.

What is important to notice is that the Swedish comprehension of several of these concepts differs from the English ones, mainly because their modern meanings were established during the 19th century and under the influence of German culture in Sweden. A first illustration is how Snow's phrase "literary intellectuals" was translated into Swedish. In *De två kulturerna*, literary intellectuals were throughout referred to as *humanister* (humanists).⁴¹ In Sweden, it seemed, there was no literary culture so dominant that it could stand alone in this category. This "humanistic" conception of the literary intellectuals differed a great deal from Snow's. That is actually the most striking difference between the original and the Swedish translation: Snow did not use concepts like humanism, humanists or the humanities when naming one of the groups in "the two cultures" nor elsewhere in *The Two Cultures*. But these concepts played a significant part in the Swedish understanding of "the two cultures".

Further, the Swedish conceptions of humanism and humanist might not completely correspond with the Anglo-American view of the same concepts. Humanism is certainly a concept of various meanings in both languages, but there might be cultural differences in the range of meaning. Another difference might be what connotation of a concept is most heavily stressed in a certain culture. Naturally, the conceptual range of meaning also changes over time.

Judging from the debate following *The Two Cultures* in Sweden, *humanister* could aim at classical scholars as well as writers, journalists or debaters with cultural interests in general. The range of meaning of the Swedish conception of *humanism* has for a long time been extensive, and it has clearly been under the influence of German intellectual, educational and philosophical debate of the 19th century. In Swedish, *humanism* can be described as an attitude to life and a process of formation and self-fulfilment, connected to the German concept of *Bildung*. This aristocratic interpretation is strongly influenced by the renaissance liberal arts movement and, before that, by Greek philosophers like Cicero in his ideal of nobility. The more ethical and humanitarian dimension of the concept, central in the Anglo-American humanist tradition, is also present in the Swedish understanding, especially after World War II. *Humanism*, in this sense, is then the affirmation of the dignity and worth of all people and the discussion of universal human qualities. In the Swedish language, *humanister* has frequently and for a long time *also* been used to describe humanities scholars, not only referring to scholars of the classical literature and languages but also to liberal arts scholars in a broad sense.⁴²

41 See e.g. Snow, *De två kulturerna*, 7. Snow's "scientists" was translated as *naturvetenskapsmännen* (natural scientists), which is more in agreement with the British conception than "literary intellectuals" as compared to *humanister*. But, as we shall see below, the Swedish and the British concepts of science have different ranges of meaning.

42 There are several thorough discussions on the Swedish conception of *humanism* published in later years, but I have found no one written in or translated into English. This lack might express the difficulties we have in trying to explain the grounds for differences in conceptual traditions of different countries, especially while

When Swedish debaters of “the two cultures” referred to *humanister* or *humanism* or to a humanistic culture as one of the parties in Snow’s dichotomy, the different meanings of the concept were often blurred. *Humanism* might, as in the 19th century and especially after World War I, again be used as a spiritual and moral offset against materialism and technical development.⁴³ Just as often though, *humanister* denoted humanities scholars and an epistemological division between the sciences and the humanities. This description of “the two cultures” as two *academic* groups has been very common in Sweden, but we have not, like Snow, stressed the literary culture as the counterpart to science. John Hultberg has pointed out that Snow himself did not really consider “the two cultures” a question of epistemology.⁴⁴ *The Two Cultures* is not a scientific investigation, written out of theory; it is a pamphlet, very essayistic, full of anecdotes and personal accounts of two different groups or types of people, almost with different temperaments and attitudes to life. These were the two groups that were most crucial for Snow’s own life: writers and scientists. But Swedish debate on “the two cultures” reflected from the very start a broader interpretation of Snow’s concept, more in line with German conceptions and traditions. The translation of “literary intellectuals” into *humanister* is but one illustration of the shift of meaning taking place when “the two cultures” left its origin. To enter deeply into the Swedish debate on this concept is the aim of the rest of the essay.

The Swedish Debate and the Conceptual Frame of Reference

Snow’s pamphlet gained a lot of attention in Sweden during the early 1960s. Along with the translation, a conceptual frame of reference started to form around “the two cultures”, at that time most strongly emphasizing “the two cultures” as referring to the question of *Bildung* and as displaying the relationship between humanistic general education and scientific specialization. *Bildung* is a traditionally German concept and has no exact British counterpart⁴⁵ – and Snow did not refer to it in *The Two Cultures*. But as the chief paragon for Sweden in the 19th century was Germany, the concept of *Bildung* was imported to Swedish debate as *bildning*.⁴⁶ In the Swedish understanding of *bildning* there was also an intimate connection between *bildning*, the humanities and humanism as concepts with similar roots in Greek antiquity (the same can be said of the German tradition).⁴⁷ Thus, the Swedish conception of

using another language than our own. For a discussion of *humanism* in Swedish, see e.g. Anders Piltz, “Human, humaniora, humanism: kan man utbildas till människa?” [Humane, the Humanities, Humanism: can one Educate oneself to be Human?], *Språk i världen: broar och barriärer*, ed. Jerker Blomqvist & Ulf Teleman (Lund, 1993) or Jonas Hansson, *Humanismens kris: bildningsideal och kulturkritik i Sverige 1848–1933* [The Crisis of Humanism: Bildung and Cultural Critique in Sweden 1848–1933] (diss. Lund; Eslöv, 1999), with an English summary. Bo Lindberg has written on the tension between humanism and science in Swedish philology, but, significantly for the cultural influences on these concepts from German traditions, his summary of the book is in German, see Bo Lindberg, *Humanism och vetenskap: den klassiska filologien i Sverige från 1800-talets början till andra världskriget* [Humanism and Science: Classical Philology in Sweden from early 19th Century to the Second World War] (Stockholm, 1987).

43 Cf. Hansson, *Humanismens kris*, 212.

44 Hultberg, *A Tale of Two Cultures*, 10–11, 192–196.

45 Cf. Koselleck, “On the Anthropological and Semantic Structure of *Bildung*”, in Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 173, 175.

46 Swedish historian of ideas, Sven-Eric Liedman, has written an essay on the influences of German intellectual traditions in Sweden regarding the concept of *Bildung* in the university and on lower levels of the educational system, see Sven-Eric Liedman, “In Search of Isis: General Education in Germany and Sweden”, *The European and American University since 1800: Historical and Sociological Essays*, ed. Sheldon Rothblatt & Björn Wittrock (Cambridge, 1993).

47 Liedman states that even though *Bildung* was not originally a concept associated with a certain stock of knowledge or cultural heritage, gradually, the discussion on *Bildung* merely concerned humanistic subjects and served as part of a defensive strategy of protecting the humanities when they lost ground to science, technology and eventually to the social sciences. See *ibid.*, 100.

“the two cultures” was affected by a partially different conceptual frame of reference than the British one, as the former was influenced by historical intellectual traditions from Germany. But the Swedish view of “the two cultures” was also influenced by the ongoing debate on the Swedish welfare state and the process of democratization. Several Swedish debaters claimed that there was a crucial difference between the state of science and technology in Sweden and Britain. In the idea of the welfare state, science and technology were seen as important factors in the modernization of social life. The process of democratization was also an important part of educational politics and gradually made a discussion on *bildning* more difficult to maintain. In the early 1960s, however, it was still possible to put the concept of *bildning* on the agenda.

Bildning

One of the most important reasons for the Swedish understanding of “the two cultures” as a question of *bildning* is the state of the social democratic educational politics at this particular time. In the early 1960s, educational reforms were being planned and were gradually carried out on all levels of the Swedish educational system. The suggested reforms were frequently discussed and evaluated in public debate. As it were, Snow’s pamphlet was interpreted as a statement, relevant for this particular educational context.⁴⁸

One of the central questions brought up in this debate concerned what should be the main objectives for the new “gymnasium” (upper secondary school), common for all pupils. Specialization was a necessary goal on this level of education, but many Swedish politicians and debaters also stressed the role of *bildning*. If *bildning* was to be one of the functions of education in the “gymnasium”, was it not necessary to redefine the concept to fit a modern society and the political process of democratization? Should not knowledge of science and technology and the scientific world picture also be considered as cultivating, as a part of the *bildning*? These questions served as a starting-point for a debate in one of Sweden’s central papers, *Dagens Nyheter*, in 1962.⁴⁹ The paper had invited some of the central Swedish academics and writers of the time to reflect on the new gymnasium and the role of *bildning* in it. The debaters continuously made references to Snow and *The Two Cultures*. In the discussion, debaters such as histologist and writer Lars Gyllensten and philosopher Ingemar Hedenius claimed that the classical concept of *bildning*, with its aristocratic and bourgeois connotations, was out-of-date or needed to be redefined.⁵⁰ Some debaters with a background in science and mathematics pointed out that the concept had a strong humanistic bias, but claimed that science and technology should also be considered as cultivating. Humanists or the humanities could not have the sole right to concepts like intellectual, *bildning* or culture, as mathematician Sonja Lyttkens stated.⁵¹ Lyttkens here hinted at Snow’s discussion of the British literary intellectuals, “who incidentally while no one was looking took to referring to themselves as ‘intellectuals’ as though there were no others”, as Snow had put it.⁵² In this

48 According to Liedman, the discussion on *bildning* lost ground in Sweden during the first decades of the 20th century and especially after World War II. From being a central task of the university in the 19th century, *bildning*, or rather *allmänbildning* (general education) gradually became the chief goal of comprehensive school while studies in the gymnasium and in university became predominantly vocational. *Ibid.*, 101–102.

49 The headline of the debate was “Bildningsideal i rymdåldern”, which reads something like “*Bildung* for the space age”.

50 Lars Gyllensten, “Bildning och nytta” [*Bildung* and Utility], *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 Feb. 1962; Ingemar Hedenius, “Människointresse och bildning” [Interest in Humanity and *Bildung*], *Dagens Nyheter*, 4 Mar. 1962.

51 Sonja Lyttkens, “Humanisternas bildningsmonopol” [The Humanists’ Monopoly of *Bildung*], *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 Jan. 1962.

52 Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 3–4.

debate, several of those involved rejected Snow's analysis as valid for Swedish society and culture.⁵³ At the same time though, they felt obliged to mention his concept and started to recontextualize⁵⁴ it to better fit the Swedish debate.

As one solution of the problematic division between specialization and general education, some debaters in *Dagens Nyheter* and elsewhere in the debate of the time asserted that history of ideas could be a new school subject in the gymnasium. It was suggested that history of ideas had an integrative power which could reconcile classical and scientific studies.⁵⁵ This proposal had actually been discussed in Swedish educational politics for some time, and in the new gymnasium of 1966, history of ideas was initiated as a new perspective to be considered in already existing subjects of the curriculum, together with an obligatory course on science for pupils of arts and humanities. In reality, however, these visions were difficult to attain, due to a lack of necessary knowledge among many of the teachers and insufficient resources in general.⁵⁶ The ambition to reconcile "the two cultures" exceeded reality.

When Snow's concept was connected to *bildning* in the Swedish debate, the relationship between the general and broad process of self-formation of the individual and the narrower process of specialization was continuously brought up. In this interpretative process, "the two cultures" was understood in line with older historical traditions and conceptions. At least since the 19th century, there had been recurrent challenges between different notions of *bildning* in Sweden. On the one hand, there were the scholarly followers of the classic-humanistic and idealist conception, while for example scientists and engineers often embraced an idea of *bildning* that emphasized more civil, practical and scientific aspects and their significance in education and society. This divide was for a long time embodied in the secondary grammar school with its split between pupils of science and pupils of arts.⁵⁷ This classical and historical conflict, with roots in the clashing of Enlightenment and Romanticism and its different views of *bildning*, affected the Swedish conceptual frame of reference developed around "the two cultures". Snow's concept simply seemed to offer a new and congenial metaphor to describe a historical disunion. "The two cultures" had a triggering effect, but Swedish debaters tended to repeat the historical arguments, quite regardless of the personal and complex background for this conception. As a result, the concept was given a considerably more universal application in the Swedish debate on *bildning* than in the original work.

During the late sixties, a utilitarian view of knowledge grew to dominate the debate on education, causing ideas of *bildning* – a self-cultivation for its own sake – to seem out of

53 E.g. Ingemar Düring, "Humanister och naturvetare" [Humanists and Scientists], *Dagens Nyheter*, 7 Jan. 1962; Torsten Gårdlund, "Den tredje kulturen" [The Third Culture], *Dagens Nyheter*, 12 Jan. 1962; Ragnar Granit, "Bildning och specialisering" [*Bildung* and Specialization], *Dagens Nyheter*, 6 Feb. 1962.

54 By "recontextualize" I intend the "moving of something from one context into another", see Per Linell, *Approaching Dialogue: Talk, Interaction and Contexts in Dialogical Perspectives* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1998), 141, note 24.

55 Debaters in "Bildningsideal i rymdåldern" suggesting history of ideas as a school subject were Ingemar Düring and Lars Gårding (the latter in "Program för gymnasiet" [A Curriculum for the Gymnasium], *Dagens Nyheter*, 16 Jan. 1962). *Dagens Nyheter* also published an editorial on the subject, summing up the debate on *Bildning* in the gymnasium, see "Bildningsideal i rymdåldern", *Dagens Nyheter*, 18 Mar. 1962. Another debater who stressed the history of ideas as contributing to a process of formation in the individual was literary historian Erik Hjalmar Linder in *Bildning i tjugonde seklet* [*Bildung* in the Twentieth Century] (Stockholm, 1962).

56 Britt Wilson Lohse has discussed the problems of *Bildung* put into practice in the new gymnasium in "Gymnasieskolans roll i bildningsdebatten – en tillbakablick på sjuttioalet" [The Role of the Gymnasium in the Debate on *Bildung* in the Seventies], *Högskolans bildningsprogram – finns det?: om bildning och humaniora som allmän medborgarkunskap eller yrkesmässig kvalifikation: en seminariedokumentation*, ed. Kenneth Abrahamsson (Stockholm, 1985).

57 Cf. Liedman, "In Search of Isis", 90–106. One Swedish debater who stressed that the natural sciences should be an aspect of *Bildning* was scientist and bishop Carl Adolph Agardh, see *ibid.*, 94.

date.⁵⁸ The discussion on *bildning* subsided while a slightly different discourse started to grow strong in the Swedish debate: radicalization.⁵⁹ The concept of *bildning*, with its bourgeois connotations, did not fit with the left-wing tendencies of the time, but neither did “the two cultures”, or so it seemed. Even though Snow had brought up the problematic imbalance between rich and poor countries, this part of his lecture did not get much attention in Sweden at any time. Probably, Snow’s technocratic attitudes and his strong confidence in science and technology as the chief solutions to political matters of world importance were essentially different from the societal view of the political left.⁶⁰ The focus for Swedish public debate shifted in the late sixties and early seventies and was gradually more influenced by the political situation abroad. *Bildning* was not on top of the agenda when Swedish debaters attended to the conflict in Vietnam, issues of equality, pollution and a general leftist critique of excessive rationalism, technomania and scientism.

Vetenskap

As time went on and as specialization and complexity grew stronger at the universities and in society at large, there was a certain shift of focus in the Swedish debate on “the two cultures”. *Bildning* as a reconciling process was no longer the main objective for this debate. Instead, “the two cultures” was gradually understood as a description of an academic and epistemological, as well as methodological, split between the sciences and the humanities. This interpretation of “the two cultures” grew stronger and was perhaps even the dominating one in the 1990s and after the turn of the millennium. At the same time, this was a shift in the main emphasis of the conceptual frame of reference of “the two cultures”, rather than a complete transformation. *Bildning*, and even more so, *allmänbildning* (general education, aiming at the broad orientation in different branches of knowledge), have lingered in the periphery of Swedish debate on “the two cultures”.

To start with, one needs to understand the proportions of this view of “the two cultures” as a description of an academic conflict. Similar to the Swedish debate on *bildning*, the Swedish discussion on the division between the sciences and the humanities had mainly been inspired by German intellectual and scholarly traditions. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the range of meaning of the Swedish concept *vetenskap*, influenced by German *Wissenschaft* rather than Anglo-American *science*.

In the German, quite inclusive conception of *Wissenschaft*, *Naturwissenschaften* (the natural sciences) as well as *Geisteswissenschaften* (the arts or humanities) have, at least since the 19th century, been understood as scientific enterprises. This view was emphasized, e.g. by German historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, who in the 1880s and in a culture dominated by the natural sciences wanted to establish a theoretical and methodological foundation for the “human” sciences, for *Geisteswissenschaften*. In so doing, he claimed that the *Geisteswissenschaften* were just as scientific as *Naturwissenschaften*, but they differed theoretically and methodologically. Dilthey distinguished the natural world studied by *Naturwissenschaften* from the inner experiences as the object of study for *Geisteswissenschaften*. *Naturwissenschaften* sought to explain (*erklären*) natural phenomena in terms of cause and effect and deriving from the laws of nature, while *Geisteswissenschaften* concentrated upon under-

58 Ibid., 101.

59 Radical tendencies are present in some statements in “Bildningsideal i rymdåldern” as well, but is more clearly expressed e.g. in the writer and debater Bengt Nerman’s *Demokratins kultursyn* [A Democratic View of Culture] (Stockholm, 1962), and from 1965, leftists set the tone of the Swedish debate. See e.g. Anders Frenander, *Debattens vågor: om politiskt-ideologiska frågor i efterkrigstidens svenska kulturdebatt* [The Waves of the Debate: On Political-Ideological Topics in Post-War Cultural Debate in Sweden] (diss. Göteborg, 1999), with an English summary, chap. 5–6.

60 Cf. Enebakk, *De to kulturer*, 41.

standing (*verstehen*) and interpreting the individual as a unique phenomenon with hermeneutic methods.⁶¹ In the English language by this time, a contrary development resulted in a narrowing of the science concept, which could earlier refer to e.g. theology, philosophy or law, but now only denoted the natural and exact sciences.⁶²

The Swedish view of *vetenskap* is illustrated by the translation of *The Two Cultures*. When Snow's "scientists" was translated into Swedish, it was pointed out that these were the scientists of the *natural sciences* (*naturvetenskaperna*), who did not have the sole right to the concept of science.⁶³ The Swedish translation of "literary intellectuals" as *humanister* (humanists) at least partially referred to scholars of the humanities at the university. The translation in *De två kulturerna* was in line with the Swedish, and German-influenced interpretation of *vetenskap*, a concept that comprised all the disciplines of the university, not only the natural sciences.

This broader notion of *vetenskap* that describes the humanities as equally scientific as the sciences has been very common in Sweden, and was often the basis for the Swedish debates on "the two cultures". Further, the most eager debaters on this subject often had a background as researchers in the humanities (*humaniora*) or the social sciences (*samhällsvetenskaperna*).⁶⁴ If there was a division that concerned these debaters, it was then a split in science itself, between the natural sciences and the humanities. Snow's concept was here associated with a discussion concerning differences in epistemology, various methodological approaches and with the distinctive characters of different disciplines and the relationships between them.⁶⁵

The dualistic description of the sciences versus the humanities sometimes became more extensive. Not only would some debaters place technology and medicine along with science on the same side, but in course of time, the social sciences were also taken as standing on the same side as the humanities. This characterizes one of the most recent Swedish discussions on "the two cultures". In 2005, Swedish journal *Axess* published an issue focusing "the two cultures" splitting the academic life and causing clashes and conflicts. Terms such as the "human" sciences (*humanvetenskaperna*) and the "cultural" sciences (*kulturvetenskaperna*) were frequently used by the debaters – sociologist Mats Benner, historian Arne Jarrick and historian of economics and agriculture Janken Myrdal – as the counterpart to the natural sciences.⁶⁶

61 For a version of the epistemological description of the relationship between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, see e.g. Georg Henrik von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (London, 1971).

62 Sven-Eric Liedman has discussed the plausible structural causes for the differences between the range of meaning of German *Wissenschaft* and Anglo-American science. He claims that differences in the roles of institutions and the university system in the two countries have affected the differences in conceptions. While German *Wissenschaft* points to any body of knowledge with a place in the university system, science is a class concept and an ideal type; something is scientific if it corresponds to a certain scientific standard, regardless of its place inside or outside the system. See Sven-Eric Liedman, "Institutions and Ideas: Mandarins and Non-Mandarins in the German Academic Intelligentsia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1985:1 (vol 28), 130–135.

63 Snow, *De två kulturerna*, 7.

64 This is characteristic e.g. of a debate in the Swedish newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* in 1990, with the headline "De två kulturerna" [The Two Cultures]. Historian of ideas Svante Nordin reread Snow's pamphlet and encouraged several scholars from literature, history, philosophy and sociology to do the same. Some writers with a background in medicine (Lars Gyllensten and P. C. Jersild) as well as a neurologist and a science journalist also took part in the discussion.

65 Of course, "the two cultures" interpreted as an epistemological dichotomy has never been able to capture the complexity of the university and its broad range of subjects and faculties. Subjects and scholarly traditions like theology, economics or law have very seldom been a part of "the two cultures" description in Swedish debate.

66 See Mats Benner, "Naturvetenskapen intar humanvetenskapens domän", *Axess* 2005:2; Arne Jarrick, "Även kulturvarer förblir naturvarer" and Janken Myrdal, "Den ensammes monografi och forskargängets

The tendency to include the social sciences in “the two cultures” split probably has to do with the expansion of these disciplines during the post-war period. This inclusion served almost as a reinforcement of the divide within science itself. Back in the early 1960s, C. P. Snow had often been criticized for not having paid attention to the social sciences, and he later thought that they would perhaps become a “third culture”, reconciling the other two (discussed in Snow’s follow-up *The Two Cultures: And a Second Look* (1964)).⁶⁷ Such a perspective received some attention in the debate of the 1960s, for instance by analytical philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright, who at the time apprehended the influence of mathematics and quantitative methods on behavioural science as a step towards a unification in science.⁶⁸ Later on however, it became more common to describe the social sciences and the humanities as being on the same side in the conflict.

Not every Swedish debater agreed with this broad conception of science, in line with the German discussion of *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, explanation and understanding. Some debaters, who attached themselves to a scientific, rational and perhaps also positivist attitude, doubted or denied that the humanities could really be viewed as “scientific”, especially when, in the 1980s and 1990s, the postmodern philosophy affected the perspectives and founding principles of the humanities. Postmodernism was sometimes conceived as the major threat for the scientific (scholarly) quality of the humanities. The writer and former doctor P. C. Jersild brought up such a perspective on several occasions, as did the doctor, biologist and cancer researcher Georg Klein, but debaters with a background in the humanities could express such a concern for the future of the humanities as well.⁶⁹

In this process, when Snow’s concept was connected mainly with *vetenskap* and the conflict between the natural sciences and the “human” sciences, by and by “the two cultures” came to function mainly as a retrospective tool for discussing historical change in the relationship between disciplines. When Snow’s outline of “the two cultures” was taken as point of departure, debaters would notice that since his time around 1960, the balance of power between the humanities and the sciences had changed radically.⁷⁰ As one example, sociologist Mats Benner (in *Axess* 2005), reflected on shifts of authority and of objects of study in the research society with Snow’s description as comparison and background. He noticed that science, technology and medicine were now expanding as the humanities were on the defensive. There had also been a shift in what scientific discipline held the leading position. It was no longer physicists who set the agenda but geneticists. With research on the human genome, the

pek” in the same issue. These essays are translated into English and available at http://www.axess.se/english/2005/02/theme_benner.php (for Mats Benner’s essay “Humanising Biology”); http://www.axess.se/english/2005/02/theme_jarrick.php (for Arne Jarrick’s “Cultural Beings vs Natural Beings”) and http://www.axess.se/english/2005/02/theme_myrdal.php (for Janken Myrdal’s “Interdisciplinary Crafts”) (June 25, 2007). In the translation, the humanities is the dominating term used to describe the “human” or “cultural” sciences.

67 C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures: And a Second Look* (Cambridge, 1964), 69–71.

68 Georg Henrik von Wright, “Enhet och splittring i vetenskapen” [Unity and Division in Science], *Horisont* 1962:5/6.

69 See e.g. P. C. Jersild, “Det hotade förnuftet” [The Threat to Reason], *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 12 Aug. 1990 and *Humpty-Dumpty’s fall: livsåskådningsbok* [The Fall of Humpty-Dumpty: a Book on Philosophy of Life] (Stockholm, 1990); Georg Klein, *Korpens blick: essäer om vetenskap och moral* [The Raven’s Eye: Essays on Science and Morality] (Stockholm, 1998). For a historian with a similar critique of the “postmodern turn” in the humanities, see Thorsten Nybom, “Kulturvetenskapens karaktär och nytta” [The Character and Utility of the Cultural Sciences], *Tvärsnitt* 1993:3.

70 See e.g. Svante Nordin, “...och aldrig mötas de två” [...And Never the Twain Shall Meet], *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 5 Aug. 1990.

classical conflict between heredity and environment could once again be brought up and serve as a challenge to how humanity was defined in more “humanistic” terms.⁷¹

On some occasions, the well-known American conflict, often referred to as the “Science Wars”, was viewed as a new formation of “the two cultures” as well, even though it had not really affected Swedish research to any great extent. This conflict between scientists (chiefly physicists) and sociologists of science was interpreted as an expression of how researchers from both sides started to take on new territories of knowledge. In the last decades, e.g. socio-biologists, geneticists and neuroscientists had challenged the “humanistic” and “anthropocentric” view of man, while a social constructivist perspective had dominated the humanities. In the growing research field of Science and Technology Studies, sociologists of science had studied the natural sciences and its supposed objective truths as culturally and socially constructed. These challenges from both “sides” created new and aggressive positioning, which were often understood as new illustrations of the “two cultures” conflict.⁷²

What is significant for this part of the Swedish conceptual frame of reference for “the two cultures” is that Snow’s original concept was chiefly connected to a discussion for specialists and university elites, and did not so much concern more general conditions, such as the role of the educational system for encouraging the process of development and reflexivity in the individual.⁷³ There had been a shift of emphasis in how “the two cultures” was conceptualised in Sweden: the debate was no longer on *bildning* in the educational system or in culture, but on an epistemological conflict between disciplines at the university. Questions at stake often dealt with authority in a scientific community or according to which criteria an enterprise would be seen as scientific. In a way, these debaters also expressed an experience of crisis for science in society in general, as the discussions sometimes included an analysis of the somewhat strained and complex relations between science, society and politics.

As for C. P. Snow himself, he did not approve of the academic turn that the debate on “the two cultures” had taken.⁷⁴ In a prologue to his collection *Public Affairs* (1971), he expressed dissatisfaction with “the two cultures” having been formulated as chiefly an epistemological conception. He seemed to criticise the scholars, self-sufficiently stuck in their ivory towers, incapable of engaging in urgent societal matters, like fighting poverty. But he also admitted that he should have kept the debate on social matters apart from the educational issues.⁷⁵ As Vidar Enebak has pointed out, Snow would probably also have been more positive to sociology of science than the physicists of the “science wars”, as it was a discipline partly springing from the “science studies units” developing in Britain in the 1960s as a bridge between “the two cultures”.⁷⁶

71 Benner, “Naturvetenskapen intar humanvetenskapens domän”, *Axess* 2005:2. Cf. also Jarrick in the same issue of *Axess*. In a debate or “correspondence” between biologists and writers/journalists in the Swedish evening paper *Expressen* in summer 1997, a similar conflict between “nature” and “culture”, genetics and humanism, heredity and environment was enacted. See Eldelin, “*De två kulturerna*” flyttar hemifrån, 237–247.

72 For further reflections and afterthoughts on what was at stake in the “science wars”, see e.g. *After the Science Wars*, ed. Keith M. Ashman & Philip Barringer (London, 2001); *The Science Wars: Debating Scientific Knowledge and Technology*, ed. Keith Parsons (Amherst, NY, 2003).

73 Cf. Liedman, “In Search of Isis”, 90–106, who stresses that the unique character of Swedish intellectual tradition in comparison to other countries has been its greater interest in popular education, adult education and *bildning* of the common people.

74 The “academic turn” of the “two cultures” debate clearly also dominated British discussion, see e.g. *Cultures in Conflict*, ed. Cornelius & St. Vincent.

75 C. P. Snow, “Prologue”, in *Public Affairs* (London, 1971). Cf. also “The Case of Leavis and the Serious Case” and “The State of Siege” in the same volume.

76 Vidar Enebak, “Science Wars og *De to kulturer*” [Science Wars and *The Two Cultures*], *Kunnskapsmakt*, ed. Siri Meyer & Sissel Myklebust, (Oslo, 2002), 88–94. Enebak points out that it is peculiar that the

Concluding Remarks

It is now suitable to make some concluding remarks and to recapture the perspectives presented in this essay. The most fundamental conclusion to be drawn from this study of the relationship between the original conception of “the two cultures” and the various Swedish interpretations, is that “the two cultures” went through a process of what can be described as a “cultural transfer”. Snow’s concept was interpreted in a cultural and intellectual context differing from the context of the original in some crucial respects. The new context gave rise to new shades of meaning. A Swedish conceptual frame of reference developed around Snow’s concept, slightly different from his understanding. “The two cultures” became “de två kulturerna” and was, in this interpretative process, connected with certain other Swedish concepts, like *bildning*, *humanism*, *humaniora*, *vetenskap* and *naturvetenskap*. These concepts had a common origin in the intellectual traditions of Germany in the 19th century. When debaters interpreted “the two cultures” as a question of *bildning*, the historical perspectives on this concept were once again brought up. “The two cultures” was seen as a new and fresh metaphor for something already familiar. Using Snow’s concept, Swedish debaters could claim that a historical conflict was still an issue of vital importance. Even though the Swedish debate on educational matters was gradually more influenced by American educational politics from the 1950s onwards,⁷⁷ the shift of meaning of the central concepts for this debate was sometimes slower than changes in society and political influences.⁷⁸ A national, Swedish semantics of “the two cultures” was established, of course reminiscent of the original concept, but differing in range and shades of meaning.

“The two cultures” was indeed a concept of personal meaning for Snow, and when giving his lecture in 1959 he could not possibly have imagined to what extent his idea would be discussed in the following decades. For example, he seems to have been quite disturbed that his concern for the issue of the rich and the poor did not get much attention. But the new conceptual frame of reference of “the two cultures” might be seen as an example of what happens to almost every concept or idea: once it leaves its birthplace or origin, it sets out on an unforeseeable journey, in a complex world of interpretations in new and different frameworks and situations. There is not much the originator can do about this process.

To sum up, Snow’s examples came from the two cultures he was most familiar with, but in the Swedish debate, the categories were often described as broader and partly different. Snow’s special circumstances, experiences and the particular British context could sometimes be connected to the concept of “the two cultures” in Sweden, but on the whole, these aspects did not matter much. Instead, his concept became a catchword; an empty category which could be filled with contents according to the specific interests or purposes of the debaters. Therefore, “the two cultures” came to serve as an instrument in many different ways. It might orient a debater in contemporary history by relating to past and similar conditions, serving as a reflection of historical change and reoccurring patterns. The concept could be a tool for identifying relations between different scientific disciplines or their varying aims and methods. It might sometimes also function as a very British description, so that the cultural climate of Sweden was held up as a model of better understanding and less serious gaps between different groups. It could form a rhetorical point of departure for descriptions of group identity

“science wars” are described as yet another manifestation of “the two cultures”, as sociology of knowledge was not an established branch of knowledge when Snow wrote his pamphlet.

77 Cf. Liedman, “In Search of Isis”, 101.

78 As a part of *Begriffsgeschichte*, Koselleck claims that the relation between the range of meaning of concepts and historical and social change are often out of step. The transforming of language and concepts is slower than changes in society. Concepts can therefore often contain and accumulate meaning from different time periods – older meanings linger along with the newer. This circumstance is referred to as the “contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous”. See Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 79, 90.

and individuality as well as for investigations or critique of the “other” side of the “two cultures” split.

Snow’s personal conception clearly attracted much attention in the public debate in Sweden. But for what reasons? Perhaps this question has partly been answered already: “The two cultures” was a simplification, and as such it would serve as a useful tool for thought. It was a very effective formulation, but also open and ambiguous enough to attract debaters from very different backgrounds. The concept could therefore be connected to several and various projects and interests. One of the conditions of such a varied and active conceptual frame of reference was, then, that the origin of the concept was ignored or forgotten.

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