



Introduction

- The Book in History
- Identity and Public Life
- The Sciences, Humanities, and the Question of Objectivity

The Nordic Postgraduate Conferences (NIHK) were established as a forum for students in various areas of the History of Ideas, in order to introduce their ongoing research projects and familiarise themselves with each others work. Since the mid 1990s doctoral students have gathered periodically every second year. The first conference was held in Lund (1997) and second in Umeå (1999). Now the conference for the first time took place in Finland with The Department of History at the University of Helsinki as the official host. Practical work was made by the Organising Committee which consisted of the Department's doctoral students.

The organisers of the Helsinki Conference wanted to provide their Nordic colleagues with a general survey of current research underway in Finland. At the same time the purpose was to create contacts between research students in their respective fields from different universities and promote co-operation between Nordic countries. The various theoretical and methodological problems are common to all researchers of the history of ideas. Besides, the similarities and differences between the Nordic countries can offer interesting comparisons concerning many research topics.

The Conference had three main topics, which introduced different approaches to the History of Ideas: *The Book in History*, *Identity and the Public Life* and *Sciences, Humanities and the Question of Objectivity*. These themes were discussed in separate workshops. In addition, specially invited senior scholars gave plenary lectures concerning these topics.

The Book in History



The History of Books could be described as the Social and Cultural History of Communication by means of the Written Word. Its purpose is to study the production, publishing and distribution of literature, with equal respect to the different stages of a book's passage, from the author to the reader and finally to its impact. The History of Books derives from two distinct traditions in historical research: on one hand from historical bibliography, where the attention is focused on the book as a physical object, on the other hand from the Annales-tradition, which emphasizes the relationship between literature and society.

One of the main results of this discipline has been the discovery of how readership and reader response relate to other occurrences in history - in other words that the production of a text, its circulation and interpretation by no means are actions separated from their historical context. The choice of the History of Books as a topic of the Conference aims at pointing out the strong connections between the History of Ideas and other areas of history, as well as the interdisciplinary character of the Conference. Thus the 'Book in History' is intended primarily as a possibility to analyse different means of communication: ways and forms of transmission of messages by written texts, as well as their reception.

Issues, among others, worth exploring are:

1. The printing offices and publishing houses. Which was the role of the printers and publishers in choosing products for the market? What was their impact on the forms and messages of the printed texts?
2. The bookshops. How did they function? Who chose the products offered to the readers? How diversified was the supply provided by the different book shops?
3. The unprinted word. What other ways did the literature reach the readers? How did censorship effect the writing and distribution of books? What is the relationship between the printed word and the handwritten?

4. The readers. For what reasons did readers choose certain readings? What kind of information did they receive about available reading? How were texts read? How were they interpreted?

Identity and Public Life

The relationship between identity and the public life in early modern Europe, is closely related to two institutions: the court and the town. The absolutist courts and the public institutions in large towns created new codes of politeness to complement the conventions of ancient medieval hierarchy.



The court and the town offered these spheres for the development of the individual public identity. This required new definitions for both the spoken language and the language expressed by body gestures. As exemplified in literature by de la Bryère's *Les Caractères*, the precious ambiance of the literary salons offered a setting for a discussion on character types and ideal conduct. On the other hand there were the coffee houses, which provided an opportunity for all participants to express opinions regardless to name and rank. The culture of politeness, with its various dimensions, was problematised in many different spheres. Beside the political and religious ones, the culture of politeness presented questions with reference to moral philosophy, literature, and the art of conversation.

There arose a problem concerning the relationship between traditional codes of courtesy (*courtoisie*) and new codes of civility (*civilité*). The latter required a reshaping of the individual public identity. What was the relationship between the public and the private, the "real" and the produced identity? And what was the relationship between gallant sociability and moral principles? And how were features such as taste and judgement to influence one's public appearance?

Theoretical questions within the theme are for example:

1. Discussions on the civilizing processes and the cultures of courtesy and politeness.
2. Analyses of conceptual history.

3. Debates on the historicity of the subject.

The practical approaches are for example:

1. The codes of body language: gestures, social choreography in general, sexuality.
2. The discourse: etiquette, art of conversation, rhetoric, moral and didactic literature, prose and poetry.
3. The public and semipublic space. Exteriors and interiors. The structures of urban planning. The organization of the architectural and social space within the court. The coffee houses and the salons as meeting places and social scenes in the town.
4. The fine arts: portrait painting, patronage, audience, the subjective art versus art as a craft.

The Sciences, Humanities, and the Question of Objectivity

During the past few decades, there has been a growing interest in the social study of the sciences and the humanities. It has been emphasized that all scientific studies are by their nature, just like any other human activities,



collective activities, the results determined by their historical and cultural contexts. In the background of this view, there is an epistemologico-ontological idea of reality being socially and culturally constituted.

Therefore all scientific research is inevitably bound to its context: social, personal, and intra scientific factors are merged together in a way which calls the traditional ideal of the objective scholar and the neutral, value-free science into question.

In the historically and sociologically minded study of sciences and humanities, emphasizing contextuality has led to an interest, for example, in the personal relations and group interests within the scientific community, as well as in the interdependent relationship between the objects of study, methods, and theoretical axioms, and the wider social, political, and economical factors. In the field of the historical studies, this has meant underlining the narrative quality of historiography. On one hand, research has concentrated on the study of different discursive and textual practises, on the other hand, it has emphasized that every source of the historical research is already in itself a narrative waiting for an interpretation; for example, the changing sums of a certain bank

account are stories telling about the barter of money and goods, relating to connections and relations.

The lectures and papers related to this theme may approach the subject from two different points of view:

1. Studies concerning certain disciplines or branches of science or humanities; for example:
 - different scientific efforts of justifying racial and sexual prejudices (eugenics, sexology, psychology, medicine etc.)
 - questions related to financial and institutional factors
 - the influence of political, social, religious etc. factors on the individual researchers / schools of thought
 - scientific quarrels and paradigmatic transitions
2. The self-understanding and self-criticism of the historians; for example
 - historiographical studies
 - the problems concerning historical knowledge and the epistemology of history
 - the narrative and interpretative nature of the historical research
 - the criteria of the scientific historical research
 - other theoretical assumptions concerning the historical research and its tasks

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