9 Thinking the Human System

The Application of Humanities and Social Science Reasoning to Societal Problems

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Abstract
Between 1967 and 1972, Swedish futures studies emerged as a distinct political and intellectual endeavor. In this development, the humanities and social sciences played a special role, especially through the idea that human knowledge and knowledge about a "human system" could be brought to bear on societal problems and used to forge a new approach to the future. We focus here on two scholars, historian Birgitta Odén and geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, proposing that they were important figures in developing a new engagement with problems of social and human time in Swedish social science and humanities research.

Keywords: Sweden, Cold War, humanities and social science, system, values

Introduction

Between 1967 and 1972, Swedish futures studies emerged as a distinct political and intellectual endeavor. In this development, the humanities and social sciences played a special role, especially through the idea that human knowledge and knowledge about a "human system" could be brought to bear on societal problems and used to forge a new approach to the future. Integral to this development were two Swedish scholars, historian Birgitta Odén and geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, who took active part in shaping the field of future studies. In this chapter, we will

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highlight their intellectual trajectories and their particular contribution to the field: an emphasis on the role of values in and for human development.

The construction of Swedish futures studies, drawing on specific conceptualizations of Odén and Hägerstrand, appears as a specific engagement with temporality in a context where humanities and social science research in many other places were caught up in different projects of temporal colonizations. The Swedish, and perhaps Nordic, approach to a social and human system with open temporalities can be situated in a global debate around systems theories, thoroughly inspired by the Cold War. Recently, an important literature in the history of social science has highlighted the influence of the Cold War on forms of knowledge, also outside of the particular American Cold War science nexus.[1] Knowledge production in the humanities and social sciences contributes to the shaping of temporality and the construction of forms of engagement with social time.[2] The Swedish case is of importance here. The mobilization of humanities and social science reiterated notions of a Scandinavian *Sonderweg*, particularly in the Swedish context in which the last years of the 1960s were marked by the development of more active state research policy and an increased awareness of research as the solution of a new set of problems.

These challenges were conceptualized as having to do with long term and transversal challenges to growth societies, and by ambitions to develop new cross-disciplinary perspectives around problem areas such as technology and human value change, peace and conflict studies, and environmental research. The construction of these problem areas drew on new conceptualizations within the general politics of knowledge regarding the role of the humanities and social science, as well as on new dimensions between cross-sectoral research, basic and applied knowledge, planning and policy relevance.

While these developments were international, indeed global, the Swedish trajectory – and the key role played by the humanities and the social sciences – was different. Hence, we here seek to demonstrate how a preoccupation with human values and the human system, made Swedish futures studies into a different intellectual endeavor that paved the way for a novel understanding of change, time, and human agency.

1 Solovey and Cravens, *Cold War Social Science*.

2 Camic, Gross and Lamont, *Social Knowledge*.

Futures Studies, Transversal Research, and the Cold War Situation

The reorganization of humanities and social science research in Sweden in the early 1960s reiterated specific institutional trajectories even if it mirrored transnational and international developments. As argued for instance by Fridjonsdottir, Swedish political culture was marked since the interwar period by a highly modernist and reformist approach to social science, a structure by which social democrat politicians "set the problem" and an army of social scientists proceeded to solve it. This problem-solving complex fell back on the organization of social science since the late eighteenth century, a period in which mainly sociology was closer linked to problems of state organization and national resource husbandry than before (even if this was a later development in Sweden than elsewhere).[3]

The "problem solving" orientation, in turn, reflected institutional convergences with for instance Germany, which was a model in the construction of Swedish social science from the mid–twentieth century on. Social science in many places was of course directly influenced by problems of statehood and modernity. In the immediate post war and early Cold War period, as scholars have recently argued, research gained a yet stronger role in Swedish society as a tool for building the welfare state. In the 1960s this included a stronger approach to the technical and natural sciences, an interest in new forms of application as opposed to basic science, and also, a reflection on which kinds of science could strengthen a societal culture perceived as unique and distinct. As Lundin, Stenlås and Gribbe show, a parallel of sorts emerged to what has frequently in the US been labeled the military industrial complex, where science, including social science and humanistic forms of knowledge, was mobilized for the purposes of national unity during war.[4]

In Sweden, there was no direct Cold War front, but ideas of neutrality strengthened ideas of self-provision and sustenance in an overarching notion of crisis preparedness and national effort. By the 1960s, a new set of state-industrial initiatives thus included new forms of socio-technical science such as systems theory, ecological economics, and futures studies, which could be motivated both as defense strategic interests and

3 Fridjondottir, *Vetenskap och politik*; Wagner and Wittrock, *Discourses on Society*; Wisselgren, *Samhällets kartläggare*.

4 Lundin, Stenlås and Gribbe, *Science for Warfare and Welfare*. See also Isaac, "The Human Sciences."

as having a new potential for policy and planning. These developments were in many ways direct parallels to the building of policy sciences in the US, the UK, and Germany (in response to the harnessing of science and technology in the Soviet system), and it is also clear that there were important transnational connections between Sweden and a much larger science policy debate.[5] Swedish historians have mainly emphasized the way that the science policy debate enacted key national myths and Cold War constructs, for instance when Lundin, Stenlås and Gribbe cite the nuclear physicist and member of the Swedish Atomic Committee, Torsten Gustafson, 1955, in a chapter on the technologies of tomorrow: "Sweden must build its own capacity, otherwise, we would lose our freedom of action."[6] But it matters that this specific notion of freedom of action was directly linked to reflections on the drawing in of human and social research into the projects of Marxism and liberalism elsewhere, and to a critical stance on such epistemologies.

The key architect of social science reasoning in Sweden in the Cold War era, Gunnar Myrdal, husband of Alva Myrdal who became the political architect of Swedish futures studies, set out this formulation of a specific systems independence in *The Objectivity of Social Research* in 1969, where he argued that there could be no strict value neutrality in social science. A social model like Sweden's, with a planned but essentially liberal economy, a vital democracy, and an in-between position between the blocs, had to find its own epistemological orientation. This became a core principle of Myrdalian thought in the 1970s and it had a huge influence on Swedish social science. Myrdal's criticism of objectivity was directly tainted by the Cold War situation, but his understanding of social science as active intervention fell back on the Myrdal's 1930s conceptions.[7]

The development of the policy sciences in Sweden was, similar to US and large parts of Europe, strengthened by the active organization of new fields in engineering and technology during the Cold War. Not least the role of the Royal Academy of Engineering, IVA, is important here. IVA was created in 1919 by Swedish business and engineering interests. In the 1960s, IVA, on behalf of a set of Swedish multinationals, began to take a strong interest in mainly technological systems analysis and defense applications.[8] What is

5 Andersson, "Choosing Futures"; Andersson, *The Future of the World*; Holmberg, "Historikerna blickar framåt."

6 Grandin, "Naturlig neutralitet"; Stenlås and Lundin, "Technology, State Initiative," p. 3.

7 Myrdal, *Objektivitetsproblemet*.

8 Lundin, Stenlås and Gribbe, *Science for Warfare and Welfare*.

key to this chapter, however, is that the new constellation that developed from the early 60s also contained active reactions against militarization and commercialization of research, and against the very idea of thinking the "system" as an essentially technological product.

This was a two-edged development: on the one hand, strong public figures such as Odén and Hägerstrand, and not least Myrdal, argued for a new value-informed and non-deterministic approach to systems thinking, on the other, they strongly advocated the public utility of the humanities and social sciences and sought to draw these further into state led research policy in a new way. Also, the humanities and social sciences were thus given a key role for neutrality, welfare, and a kind of forward-looking rationality that involved both deep forms of instrumentality and problem solving, and an essentially epistemological reflection on the human situation of the Cold War.[9]

The Swedish geopolitical situation between the blocs here translated into a specific idea of autonomy, freedom, and welfare. Over time this reconfiguration had a profoundly transformative role on the research landscape: in the ensuing decade, some of these initiatives gave rise to new transversal science policy attempts such as *Miljövårdsberedningen* [Board of Environmental Protection], based on a much different approach to the science policy complex than had been the case before. In the early 1970s, *Centrum för tvärvetenskap* [Center for Interdisciplinarity] was also established in Gothenburg by Latinist Emin Tengström. This paved the way for the integrative discipline of human ecology. A couple of years later, Linköping University was set up and structured around thematic interdisciplinary problem areas (rather than disciplines), and both future studies and system analysis were key to the so called Tema T-structure on societal relationships of technology (Hägerstrand, and the physicist Lars Ingelstam who was also part of the original futures studies group in 1967–1972 were both architects of this initiative).

In 1977, the research councils for the humanities and social sciences were brought together in HSFR (*Humanistisk-samhällsvetenskapliga forskningsrådet*), with the explicit purpose of bringing the HSS area closer to societal use and achieve cross sectoral collaboration.[10] The construction of this new landscape of research political platforms in HSS was both a reaction to the concentration of research efforts in industry, and a public strengthening of efforts to apply HSS reasoning to the complexities of the welfare state. It

9 Cf. Östh Gustafsson, *Folkhemmets styvbarn*.

10 SOU [Governmental Commission Report] 1975:26.

reflected, in a still entirely pervasive way, the idea that research capacities could be harnessed for problem solving in advanced industrial societies, and that new phenomena of value reactions to growth and technology necessitated new conceptualizations of human-social-technological interaction.[11] An emerging focus on the advanced technological society thus reiterated the importance of the humanities as central to "*samhällsproblemen*" [societal problems] – to thinking a set of relations between societal and technological temporalities, between progress and emergent notions of systems crisis, and between human values and other forms of technological or economic change.

An important starting point for this was the creation, in 1962, directly influenced by such attempts in other European nations and by advice activities in the OECD, of the Board of Research [*Forskningsberedningen*], a new organ for discussing the organization of science, disciplinary contributions to national policy, and possibly overlapping themes between the disciplines. Hampus Östh Gustafsson shows a growing concern during the 1960s in particular with the humanities, which were seen as outside of statist efforts of planning and reform policy. These were now given a new role. The Board of Research was first an initiative focused on the technical and natural sciences, but grew to incorporate the social sciences and the humanities, charged with widening the human horizons of civilization in a highly technological society.[12] It laid the foundation for new notions of relevance and it also identified a set of transversal [*sektorsövergripande*] fields that broke with a previous organization of research and introduced themes of environmental knowledge and ecology, but also importantly, peace and conflict research and so-called futures studies. The Board of Research was in charge of following debates in the OECD's new Science Policy unit – where from the mid-1960s on there was a strong emphasis on "policy science" as a new and wider concept of planning for general welfare, and as a way of escaping problems of the growth society.[13] Both of the latter were key arenas of transnational collaboration from 1967 on, and the emphasis on planning tools came along with a broadening of policy objectives such as welfare. The setting up of a group for futures studies in the Board of Research in 1967 (and as a parliamentary committee in 1969) was an attempt to examine this transnational debate and its relevance

11 Ribbing, *Människan i tekniksamhället*.

12 Östh Gustafsson, *Folkhemmets styvbarn*, p. 259.

13 Andersson, "The Future of the Western World," pp. 126–144; Schmelzer, *The Hegemony of Growth*.

for the Swedish HSS landscape, and future studies came to play a key role within the Board.[14]

Other fields discussed in the Research Board was psychology, education and adolescence (through Torsten Husén, professor of psychology and warfare),[15] and economics, with new developments such as indicators for quality of life. In 1969, the working group on futures studies was entrusted to Alva Myrdal, who had just returned from Geneva where she had presided the Social Science Council since 1955 (and thus overseen attempts to harness the potential of the humanities and the social sciences for cooperation and coexistence within UNESCO).[16] Connelly situates Alva Myrdal in the reformist eugenicist field, due to her activism in family planning between the 1930s and the 1950s. It needs to be pointed out however that Myrdal changed her views on eugenic control after the publication of *The Limits to Growth* report in 1972, which was widely read as a neo-Malthusian document, and which made Myrdal rethink the role of future research as an intervention in values, and not in demographics.[17]

Future research was a new field, which was not only transversal in terms of its attempt to open up inquiries pertaining to the long-term development of human, natural, economic, technical, and military systems for investigation, but also quintessentially hybrid in terms of its lack of disciplinary domiciliation. Future research developed, in different geographic contexts during the Cold War, into a form of planning, drawing on the active harnessing of computerized tools of decision science, forecasts or cybernetics, a managerial and corporate science, a defense and military strategic question, or, with some notable examples, into a philosophical or phenomenological questioning of the human condition in advanced industrial societies.[18] The Board of Research monitored developments within this field in parallel to how it followed the OECD science policy secretariat (which created the Club of Rome in 1968) and also prepared for the coming UN conference on the Environment in 1972.[19]

Future research had first been suggested in Sweden in a proposal that came from IVA in 1967. The proposal referred mainly to the need to monitor

14 Wisselgren, "From Utopian One-worldism," pp. 148–182.

15 See Husén, *Adolescensen*.

16 Andersson, "Choosing Futures"; Wisselgren, "Decentering Cold War Social Science"; Wisselgren, "From Utopian."

17 Andersson, "Choosing Futures"; Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, pp. 145, 151.

18 Andersson, *The Future of the World*; Seefried, *Zukünfte*; Solovey and Cravens, *Cold War Social Science*.

19 Engfeldt, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg*; Paglia, "The Swedish Initiative."

developments in military and defense systems and strengthen research policy for military purposes and new applications [*tillämpad forskning*]. In the Board of Research, it was rather perceived that future research offered tools for a new kind of systems analysis that could be applied largely to problems of planning in an advanced industrial society with new ecological, social, and value related problems, and that future research could also be used to experiment the relationship between technology, participation, and societal structures in new ways. Many of these ideas came from the social democrat, pacifist, and mathematician Lars Ingelstam, who as member of the Research Board joined the working group for futures studies from 1971.[20] Ingelstam was central in the import of systems analysis to Sweden, and in rethinking it into a specific and distinct approach which drew actively on the interplay between technology, social structure, and human values in an essentially open approach to coming developments.[21]

This brought discussions directly into both social science and humanities thinking. We stress this human approach to the system, because while the history of futures studies and futurology has been given substantial attention in the last years, the focus has been on the deterministic forms of system analysis and the mainly American approach to "Cold War science."[22] A collateral damage of this research has been to neglect the alternative epistemologies and temporalities that also grew out of the Cold War situation from localities outside of the direct super power confrontation, for instance in the non-aligned movement or, importantly, in the Nordic countries where the Cold War situation gave rise to a "Third way" idea of neutrality and specificity. As suggested by Westad and others, the Cold War situation was not just armed conflict but really a metaphor for a human condition which included an increasing pace of technology and production and a struggle over sense making and belonging in high growth societies.[23] The Cold War was a framework for epistemological disputes that were quintessentially about world temporalities. The Swedish attempt to use systems analysis in order to develop an independent epistemological positioning on Cold War science is therefore interesting, and while there were attempts with future research in both Denmark and Norway, they do not seem to have had the same role.[24]

20 Jenny Andersson, interview with Lars Ingelstam, April 24, 2014.

21 Ingelstam, *Planeringens grundproblem*; Ingelstam, *System att tänka*; Ingelstam, *Teknikpolitik*.

22 See Andersson *The Future of the World*; Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems*.

23 Westad, *The Cold War*.

24 Stråth, "Poverty, Neutrality," pp. 375–401.

Swedish historians for a long time considered that the Cold War had little bearing on the circulation and impact of the Scandinavian humanities and social sciences due to the position of neutrality. It can be more correctly argued that the position of autonomy, or freedom of choice, in the Cold War situation directly influenced both the organization of research and the epistemology of the humanities and social sciences in ways that were then not just related to domestic welfarist needs but also to global considerations. As the example of Swedish future studies (which took an -s in an emphasis on plural time scales, *framtidsstudier*) and the arguments of the key intellectuals in the group shows, a stance of autonomy spurred a reflection on HSS-epistemology as a critical reflection on temporality and the human system. This, in turn, would have effects in terms of emphasizing and also over-emphasizing notions of Nordic singularity in the ensuing decades, but deserves to be revisited as an original path for scientific thinking and as an unexplored example of how the Cold War inspired a plurality of epistemological positions.[25]

Planning and forecasting were very much part of a struggle over influence and reflected both liberal and Marxist attempts to rationalize and manage social time. In both blocs, science and research were directly pulled into this logic, and mobilized as part of an effort to create predictability and control. As studies emerged of this complicated struggle of positions, it is important to note that there were other ways of engaging with the future and that some of those were designed directly to attempt to find human exits to the Cold War situation. As the initiative for Swedish futures studies was taken in the Board of Research, a key component was the ambition to construct a particular epistemological version of futures studies, built on a social approach to time, and on a hermeneutic dialogue between technology, societal relations, and value change. The approach to the future that this spawned was distinct from forms of prediction for instance in military applications – it led to an emphasis on the necessity to think through the human position in advanced industrial society, in relationship with nature (increasingly thought as the "human environment," as the UN conference was later entitled), and in a system of world relations where national and global futures were intrinsically related.[26]

The latter work of the so-called Secretariat for Futures Studies would reflect these dimensions and produce studies on work, stress, and welfare within the so-called Swedish model, as well as the role of this in an evolving

25 Marklund, *Bridging Politics*.
26 Huldt, *Sweden in World Society*.

system of international relations (the latter in one of the first projects of the Swedish secretariat for futures studies, through the work of Sven Tägil). The specificity of the Swedish futures studies debate was that it drew directly on the humanities and social sciences in an attempted new interdisciplinarity that would address this human situation, and as such the Swedish approach to futures studies stands out in a global field of approaches to a future system.[27]

Understanding Human Value Change: Birgitta Odén and the Future of Historicity

Stenlås and Lundin suggest that the organization of a new research policy in the 1960s led to a new kind of intellectual in the Swedish welfare state nexus that they chose to refer to as a "Reform technocrat." Their main examples here are engineers and planners deeply in tune with the applied turn of military industrial research. Our examples in this chapter, historian Birgitta Odén and geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, are arguably different: certainly reformist, but outspokenly non- or even anti-technocrat. Rather, their positioning in relation to social democrat policy and planning was one of sympathetic criticism and meta-diagnosis. Both incarnated a position, according to which the role of the scientist was also that of intervening on value questions in open debate with policy and publics. Both were quintessentially concerned with the public use of humanities and social science.

Birgitta Odén (1921–2016) was professor of history at Lund University and the only humanities scholar in the futures studies group led by Alva Myrdal. Odén's role in the groups' work was to examine the role values played in, and for, societal change. This theme was the focal point of her individual research report *Planering, värdestruktur och demokratisk participation* [Planning, Value Structure, and Democratic Participation], published as a supplement to the governmental report *Att välja framtid* [To Choose Future].[28] Odén had replaced Erik Lönnroth in the Board of Research in 1969 – and positioned herself against a source close, historicist perspective.[29]

Odén's report for the futures studies group was written with an explicit interdisciplinary agenda. She argued that there was a need for scholarly "partisans" that integrated, synthesized, and challenged, established

27 Andersson, "Choosing Futures," pp. 277–295.

28 Odén, *Planering, värdestruktur*; SOU [Governmental Commission Report] 1972:59.

29 Jenny Andersson, interview with Birgitta Odén, June 8, 2004.

disciplinary bodies of knowledge. The great promise of future studies was, in her view, that it might have the capacity to bridge the divide between the two cultures and foster a genuine dialogue among natural and social scientists. This was necessary, she argued, if society was to tackle the major challenges ahead. She also saw intellectual resemblances between history and future studies. Both were temporal projects, in need of integrating various bodies of knowledge on time.

A central common point here between history and future to Odén was the question of values – which had been addressed in the 1950s and 1960s by *l'histoire des mentalites* of the Annales school, in ways that emphasized value change as structural, systemic, and linked to epochal changes in the history of capitalism. Odén's argument in her inlay to the futures studies group was that values were a structural component of history, but not predetermined. Rather, values were part of an active human engagement with time, and humanistic research about value change could both tell something important about the future, and act as a factor of change on that future in ways that to Odén were socially useful.

A historical approach to values would be a needed alternative to the value study revolution in the behavioral sciences – which to Odén were nomothetic and problematic. Systemic historical analysis might find, not predictability in value change, but connections between technological and demographic change, and value change, in order to better understand what in the late 1960s seemed like a "value revolution" in the words of a much disliked book, Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (which to Odén and most futurists appeared as an intolerable popularization of future rupture).[30] However, this perspective was also critical of historicism, or the idea that historians could help future research by outlining systemic causalities as based in the past. Odén was a great critic of Toynbee and suggested rather that the key element in historical value research for the 1960s and 1970s was to understand the different temporalities involved in value change. Why were certain values, such as child care, slow to change, while others, for instance the adherence to democracy, might be stable only in appearance?[31]

In her later essay "Stabila och föränderliga värden," [Stable and Changeable Values] Odén outlined this approach to values as a problem between historical and future time as a "social temporality" – an understanding of desires, fears, passive and active options for coming time. Social temporality changed understandings of facticity, and to Odén, historiographical scholarship was

30 Toffler, *Future Shock*.

31 Protocol, futures studies working group, May 18, 1971, Alva Myrdal archives (AMA).

limited by its obsession with source criticism and its rejection of all forms of prediction.[32]

Interdisciplinary scholarship had a personal resonance for Odén. She came from an academic family of natural scientists. Her father had been professor of chemistry in Stockholm and both her siblings were pursuing scientific careers. Notably, her younger brother Svante Odén (1924–1986) was a renowned Swedish scientist and the one who discovered, and raised the alarm, on the environmental hazard of acid rain.[33] This took place in the fall of 1967 which was a pivotal turning point in Swedish environmental history. During this historical moment a number of well-respected Swedish scientists sought to awaken the public and the politicians to the perilous situation at hand. The scientists' simultaneous, though not coordinated, activities were very successful. In particular, the chemist and social democrat Hans Palmstierna's book *Plundring, svält, förgiftning* [Looting, Starvation, Poisoning] became an influential bestseller. Furthermore, the intensified environmental debate in Sweden had global consequences. In December 1967, the Swedish delegation to the United Nations proposed an environmental conference to be held in the early 1970s. This became the first step toward the landmark UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972.[34]

However, the natural scientists who entered the public fray in the fall of 1967 were not the only Swedish group grappling with these issues. The Swedish Defence Research Institute was also well underway in various pursuits. In the spring of 1967, the head Martin Fehrm (1910–2001) and his colleagues began framing the looming environmental crisis as a national security issue. Moreover, Fehrm had grown convinced that environmental problems were not strictly scientific or technical issues – they were at heart societal and political challenges. Hence, in May 1967 he arranged a meeting, to which Birgitta Odén – as well as her brother Svante – was invited. Among the other participants were the political scientist Pär-Erik Back (1920–1988) and the economist Assar Lindbeck (1930–2020). Fehrm wished for them to provide him with knowledge of how society dealt with environmental hazards. He wanted to use this knowledge in models of systematic future planning which the military had developed for other ends. However, the three professors reported that no such knowledge base existed, as scholars in their respective fields had not previously taken an interest in environmental issues. They declared that basic research was

32 Odén, "Stabila och föränderliga värden," p. 160.
33 Lundgren, *Acid Rain*.
34 Larsson Heidenblad, "Mapping a New History."

needed and Fehrm agreed. Birgitta Odén was assigned to make plans for how the group could move forward.[35]

Hence, as the environmental debate took off in Swedish society scholars in the humanities and social sciences were working behind the scenes in order to make original contributions. Odén crafted detailed plans for a future-oriented interdisciplinary research program, including at certain stages natural scientists. Her ambition was to provide Swedish politicians with a strong and practical knowledge base which could improve their ability for long-term decision making. In parallel to developing the interdisciplinary research program she encouraged history students in Lund to conduct various pilot studies. At heart of her research program were so-called "trend studies" of how values and political attitudes toward natural resources and the common good had developed over the long term.

In the spring of 1968, the group crafted the application *Miljö, naturresurser och samhälle* [Environment, Natural Resources and Society]. Birgitta Odén had high hopes and ambitions. She wanted historical research to make a real political difference. In two influential journal articles from 1968, she proposed that the discipline of history should strive to become more of an applied social science. In this she was inspired by the surge in ambitious theoretical models and quantitative analysis.[36] However, the grand plans of the interdisciplinary group never materialized. In 1969, the funding body decided to support only the economists. Subsequently, the group fell apart and Odén – visibly discouraged – gave up on environmental history. Yet, there are obvious links between this early attempt and the later development of Swedish futures studies.

Birgitta Odén's conviction that historians should strive to produce societally "useful knowledge" kept growing stronger. In the fall of 1971, she publicly voiced her view on the relationship between academia and society in the so-called "forskardebatten" [the researcher's debate]. This was sparked by a controversial public speech of the aforementioned Hans Palmstierna at a trade union conference in Stockholm. Palmstierna had made an investigation of health hazards for industrial workers and realized that many Swedish scientists had double loyalties. In addition to their university jobs, they were also consultants for various large businesses. He feared that the scientists were first and foremost loyal to capitalist interests and thereby reluctant to look into health hazards of workers. The accusation sparked a heated

35 Larsson Heidenblad, "Miljöhumaniora på 1960-talet?"
36 Odén, "Clio mellan stolarna"; Odén, "Historiens plats."

debate where Palmstierna's position was fiercely criticized by scientists, politicians, business, and university leaders.[37]

Birgitta Odén sought to foster a moderating position. She described Palmstierna's speech as a "demagogical simplification" and "impermissible generalization." However, she also lamented that the discussion had deteriorated into a debate of the private morals of individual scientists. In her experience, scientists were neither more nor less moral than other people. Hence, the more important issue raised by Palmstierna was how the Swedish research landscape should be structured. Which different legitimate interests should scientists serve and how?

On a principal level, she was not opposed to collaborations between scientists and the private industrial sector. In fact, a small nation as Sweden could not dispense with this competence. Moreover, she believed that scientists were also stimulated by commissioned research and could find new impulses and application. However, she saw a risk that consulting scientists unilaterally were used to develop new product lines. This was obviously of great value for Sweden but not – in Odén's view – the only thing scientists should devote their energy to. Equally important was for scientists to study the unwanted side-effects of modern industrial society, such as environmental problems. From this broader point of view commissioned research was an indirect threat. "Society's resources for using top-expertise for strategic problem-oriented research are comparably small," she argued. What Birgitta Odén envisioned was a different kind of commissioned research. One who did not seek to increase profits but rather sought to create a better world for everyone. The client should be the "anonymous fellow man" rather than businesses or trade unions.[38]

Torsten Hägerstand and the Human Approach to Time

Odén's scientific views and her understanding that both the humanities and the social sciences had a specific responsibility for thinking through the challenges of modern society and the relationship between human beings and time resemble those of Torsten Hägerstrand, professor of cultural geography at Lund University and also a member of Alva Myrdal's group. Torsten Hägerstrand was an international star by the late 1960s due to

37 Larsson Heidenblad, *The Environmental Turn*.

38 Odén, "Samhället måste bygga." "Samhällets resurser för att utnyttja toppexpertisen för problemorienterad forskning förefaller vid jämförelse med näringslivets mycket små"

his work on time, but did not have the same notoriety in Sweden. Here he was mainly positioned as a philosopher of planning, and as such he was mainly influential during the late 1960s and early 1970s when not only the methods but also the overarching goals and objectives of planning (indeed its relationship to future, or futures) were being discussed.[39] There is very little academic work on Hägerstrand, which is striking in relation to the importance of his highly original work. It is tempting to see him in the context of other critical philosophers of modernity and transcendence, such as Lewis Mumford, Ivan Illich, and Eric Fromm (the latter was very influential on Swedish social democrat circles in the 1960s and 1970s).

Hägerstrand's so-called time geography had at its heart the idea that man himself was "the elementary particle" of the future, the smallest denominator of change. Change therefore had to be understood as limited by the scope or "reach" [*räckvidd*] of man – and this was physical, social, and psychological. This perspective on time led Hägerstrand to, in his report for the group, mount a substantial critique of linear and growth-oriented planning as detached from the limits of the "elementary particle" and as therefore always reaching beyond the scope of the human subject and transforming the relationship of democratic planning into a potentially subjectivizing and de-democratizing structure. Scope [*räckvidd*] was a central epistemological term in Hägerstrand's thought, referring to the physical and cognitive limits of human beings. Another term was the notion of life cycle, which in Hägerstrand's thinking extended not only to all living beings but also to objects. When Jenny Andersson interviewed him in 2004, Hägerstrand raised a coffee cup, dangled it and let it drop. "All animate and inanimate things have a temporal existence. This cup has a life cycle. It includes production, use and waste. Things live on in composite particles and substance, long after we have finished using them. In our social systems, we manage time without acknowledging these temporalities."[40]

In a memo for the futures studies group, Hägerstrand experimented with the notion of aggregate time as an alternative to GDP growth. Aggregate time was the totality of human time within the social system. To Hägerstrand this would be a more adequate gauge of social development – because exceeding the limits of aggregate time had human costs.[41] Through Hägerstrand, and Lars Ingelstam, who wrote a specific memo on planning for the futures

39 See Hägerstrand, *Om tidens vidd*; Nordström, *Trängsel i välfärdsstaten*; Thrift, "Torsten Hägerstrand"; Wikman, *Kulturgeografin tar plats*.

40 Jenny Andersson, interview with Torsten Hägerstrand, June 9, 2004. Taped recording.

41 Hägerstrand, memo December 29, 1971, AMA; Hägerstrand, *Om en konsistent*.

study group, these notions became understood as forming the basis for a new approach to long term planning in contrast to the ongoing economic and social planning. Long term thus stood for a life cycle and human generation approach, which would turn time into a more human construct, and force planning and policy structures of growth society to adapt to human reach.

It needs to be emphasized that the 1960s was a period of both Swedish and international debate on the activity of planning – a debate that focused on the limitations of linear planning and the failure through the post war era to plan for negative consequences and feedback effects. Planners thus entered into new transnational activities and associations during the decade. The most important of these was without a doubt the Club of Rome – of which Hägerstrand was not part, but which was studied and followed within the Board of Research and directly interested Alva Myrdal (through Hans Palmstierna). In the early 1950s, Torsten Hägerstrand became the pioneering leader of a new generation of innovative cultural geographers based in Lund. Hägerstrand took a profound interest in theoretical models and quantitative analysis, drawing inspiration from international scholarship and ongoing advances in the social sciences. In developing this new form of "planning geography" he collaborated closely with fellow geographer Sven Godlund. Together they sought to invigorate their discipline but also demonstrate the usefulness of cultural geography for the rational planning of society.

In the mid-1950s, Godlund moved from Lund to Stockholm to start working in various stately commissions. Through this new position he recruited, in close collaboration with Hägerstrand, other young "planning geographers" from Lund. In the 1960s, the models and methods developed by the cultural geographers had a profound influence on policy, notably on the major municipality block reform that created larger municipalities in order to better implement the social policies of the welfare state. This early part of Hägerstrand's career has recently received some attention, but the turn from "planning geography" to "futures studies" has not been explored.[42]

Torsten Hägerstrand embraced a thoroughly scientific worldview. While Odén wanted to bring history closer to the social sciences, Hägerstrand wanted for the social sciences to adopt the methods of the natural sciences. In 1969, he was interviewed for the Christian cultural journal *Vår Lösen* about the role of values and scholarly priorities in cultural geography. In

42 Wikman, *Kulturgeografin tar plats*. See also Lundin, *Bilsamhället*; Nordström, *Trängsel i välfärdsstaten*.

a letter to the editor, Hägerstrand lamented that the interviewer, a "traditionally schooled humanist," had been estranged by his "contemporary cultural geographical views." He underscored that there was an "increasingly widespread superstition" that knowledge developed through discussions, rather than by theoretically informed observations. Before natural scientific methods started to truly inform the social sciences, no reliable results could be achieved, he commented.[43]

In the published interview, Hägerstrand emphasized that cultural geography was a scientific undertaking seeking to construct general theoretical models. Hence, even though most Swedish geographers studied Swedish conditions, their theoretical findings could be applied anywhere, for example in foreign aid projects in the Third World. Hägerstrand stressed that the cultural geographer's scholarly undertaking was not driven by political values or worldviews. He considered it "one of the gravest mistakes of our time" that research was increasingly steered toward immediate practical needs. Scientific knowledge, Hägerstrand maintained, was best generated through "aesthetic needs": that is, the will to construct consistent and logical theoretical models that helped explain various observations.[44]

However, Hägerstrand also cherished that cultural geography was now put to use in national planning. He believed that the cultural geographer's studies could help politicians make more informed decisions about how to prioritize. Yet, the usefulness of this knowledge was dependent on scientific rigor and method – which were not to be conflated with political values. Hence, this knowledge could be used for various ends and in a multitude of political systems. However, on a personal note, Hägerstrand conceded that he had his reasons for wanting cultural geography to be applied more widely in the planning of society. He hoped it could be used to make the life of men as equal as possible. Moreover, he believed that in the long run the role of the political opposition would increasingly be "replaced by systematic social science."[45]

Additional glimpses into Torsten Hägerstrand's views on future studies and the humanities can be found in parts of his personal correspondence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This material makes evident that he held speeches on futures studies for small local societies, participated in panel debates and symposia, and that he – together with Birgitta Odén – met

43 Torsten Hägerstrand to Carl-Henric Grenholm, April 14, 1969, Torsten Hägerstrand's archive (hereafter THA).

44 Bexell, "Intervju med Torsten Hägerstrand," pp. 369–373.

45 Bexell, "Intervju med Torsten Hägerstrand," pp. 369–373.

with the Danish future studies group in order to discuss the role historians could play in the development of this emerging field. Hägerstrand and Odén seem also to have shared an interest in longitudinal studies of individual "life-histories."[46]

Yet, Hägerstrand's view on the majority of humanities scholarship seems to have been rather negative. In a letter to a vicar in 1970, he stressed that "theology and humanities scholars should stop looking backwards. The past cannot be restored." Instead he wished that those who "ponder our values" should engage in the present and the future. Otherwise technological and medical development would make the backward looking humanities obsolete.[47] Moreover, Hägerstrand was reluctant to accept traditional historical explanations. He found them theoretically underdeveloped and too focused on empirical exactitude. In his view, historians tended to be wild makers of hypotheses and prone to overestimate anecdotal evidence. The historian's problem was the lack of a conceptual system that could demonstrate how events and occurrences generated new values.[48] To both Hägerstrand and Odén, there was an urgent need to contribute a social and humanistic understanding of the interaction between technological, economic, and value systems in order to understand dynamic temporalities.

Converging Trajectories: Concluding Remarks

The Alva Myrdal committee is an illustration of a specific understanding of the role of the humanities and the social sciences in the social construction of future time, that has to be understood from the specific context of assumptions of a Cold War "Third Way" of neutrality and solidarity for Sweden. Coming to the end of the chapter, we can again put this in the context of the literature on the social sciences and humanities in the Cold War, and suggest that this is an original contribution to the emerging history of the many forms of systems analysis that proliferated during the Cold War. Generally, systems analysis has been understood as a call to strengthened

46 Walter Ekstrand to Torsten Hägerstrand, April 1, 1970, THA; Stevan Dedijer to Torsten Hägerstrand, December 8, 1971, THA; Henning Friis to Birgitta Odén and Torsten Hägerstrand, August 16, 1972, THA; Torsten Hägerstrand to Tormod Hermansson, September 25, 1972, THA; Birgitta Odén to Torsten Hägerstrand, December 14, 1972, THA.

47 Torsten Hägerstrand to Georg Franzén, September 27, 1970, THA. "både teologer och humanister skulle sluta med att se bakåt. Det gångna kan inte återställas."

48 Torsten Hägerstrand to Olof Wärneryd, October 28, 1971, THA.

control and as embodying a "high modern" turn where social science was identified as a form of steering and planning of complex societies.[49] Here, the particular reflection on the multiple temporalities of a human and value governed system seems relevant, far outside of the Swedish context. The epistemological position of wanting to use science in order to increase the human reach (translated metaphorically to Sweden's neutral stance in the Cold War, to problems of reformist policy in a welfare statist culture, to democracy and participation in a high growth society), marked not simply an ambition of relevance, but also a concern with democratization and public accountability. Odén's and Hägerstrand's plea for history as social science and a more humane planning from the perspective of the "elementary particle" are a far cry from the technological determinism that is often described to, mainly American, systems theories.[50]

Throughout the 1970s, Torsten Hägerstrand and Birgitta Odén continued to grapple with the future and futures studies. Their viewpoints on the role of science and scholarship converged in important ways. Hägerstrand started to distance himself from the scientistic stance he had embraced in the late 1960s. By 1977, he openly argued that the natural sciences "should no longer be a model" for the social sciences and the humanities.[51] At heart of Hägerstrand's claim was his growing conviction that scientific specialization had become directly harmful to social development. "Science as it is practiced today," he stated, "is in itself deeply anti-ecological." Hence, it could no longer perform the reflection on human time that he considered vital to face problems of industrial society.[52]

At the conference "Man in Technological Society," arranged by The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History, and Antiquities in January 1977, Hägerstrand thus focused on "the ecological crisis" and argued for a new integrative role of science and scholarship to counteract atomism. The label he tentatively proposed was "human ecology," which today is an established field in Swedish academia.[53] He believed that Sweden was particularly well-equipped to develop this new integrative undertaking, as the nation combined affluence with solidarity. Hägerstrand hoped Sweden could

49 Heyck, *Age of Systems*.

50 Odén, "Historiens plats." See Holmberg, "Historikerna blickar framåt"; Salomon "Historievetenskapens flirt med statsvetenskapen."

51 Hägerstrand, "Att skapa sammanhang," p. 192.

52 Hägerstrand, "Att skapa sammanhang," p. 189. "vetenskapen av i dag är i sig själv djupt anti-ekologisk"

53 See Hornborg, *The Power of the Machine*.

make a transition from "material welfare" to "cultural welfare," and thereby provide an example for the rich world.[54]

Another glimpse into the converging trajectories of Hägerstrand and Odén can be found in two parallel interviews from 1979. They were conducted by educators at the teacher training college in Malmö who sought to discuss how the learning outcome *framtidsberedskap* [preparedness for the future] could enter the school curriculum. Hägerstrand was sympathetic and argued for the need of a human – or social – ecology that combined insights from geography, history, and philosophy.[55] Hägerstrand's sentiments were mirrored by Odén, who stressed the need for ecological thinking and the need to develop a political and moral responsibility among the youth for future generations.[56]

Evidently, Torsten Hägerstrand's and Birgitta Odén's engagement with future studies paved the way for a shared and profound environmental concern. While this is discernible already in the 1960s, environmental issues kept rising on the agenda throughout the 1970s and rose to the fore in Sweden with the referendum on nuclear power in 1980. To Hägerstrand and Odén, the environmental crisis was a social and political problem. Hence, the natural sciences could not have a privileged position in relation to the social sciences and the humanities. What was needed was an integrative form of expertise that transcended disciplinary boundaries and specialization.

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54 Hägerstrand, "Att skapa sammanhang," pp. 5–14.
55 Ingelstam and Wiberg, *Samtal om framtidsberedskap*, pp. 3–17.
56 Ingelstam and Wiberg, *Samtal om framtidsberedskap*, pp. 18–34.

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