

Negotiating Value A Case Study of the Gothenburg Book Fair

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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NEGOTIATING VALUE: A Case Study of the Gothenburg Book Fair

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ABSTRACT

The Gothenburg Book Fair is one of the most important cultural events in Scandinavia today. Since 1985, it has grown into a meeting place for book lovers, librarians, and people in the book industry. However, it has also been surrounded by scandals and controversies. Inspired by Brian Moeran's notion of the book fair as "a tournament of values," and Barbara Herrnstein Smith's constructivist approach to value, this article analyzes the Gothenburg Book Fair as an arena for negotiating value. The article first discusses how the value of the Gothenburg Book Fair has been under constant negotiation since its inception, and then examines how different actors participated in consolidating the fair's value and function at the beginning of the 2010s. Finally, it considers the intensive debate about the Gothenburg Book Fair in 2016–2017, due to the decision to allow the extreme-right newspaper *Nya Tider* to have a stand in the exhibition halls, which above all resulted in a renegotiation of the book fair's social and economic value. Through this diachronic and historical perspective, the article shows how a more pronounced theoretical value perspective in relation to book fairs and literary festivals provides new knowledge about these types of literary events and their role in literary culture as a whole.

RÉSUMÉ

La Foire du livre de Göteborg est l'une des manifestations culturelles les plus importantes de la Scandinavie. Depuis 1985, elle est devenue un lieu de rencontre pour les amoureux du livre, les bibliothécaires et les personnes travaillant dans l'industrie du livre. Cependant, les scandales et la controverse ne l'ont pas épargnée. S'inspirant de la notion avancée par Brian Moeran, à savoir qu'une foire du livre serait « un tournoi de valeurs », et de l'approche constructiviste de Barbara Herrnstein Smith, le présent article analyse la Foire du livre de Göteborg comme une arène où se négocie la valeur. Il y est d'abord montré que la valeur de la foire n'a jamais cessé d'être négociée depuis sa création. L'article s'attarde ensuite à la participation de différents acteurs à la consolidation de la valeur et de la fonction de la foire au début des années 2010. Enfin, est examiné l'intense débat ayant entouré la tenue de la Foire du livre de Göteborg en 2016-2017, en raison de la

décision autorisant le journal d'extrême droite *Nya Tider* à tenir un stand dans les halls d'exposition, ce qui a surtout entraîné une renégociation de la valeur sociale et économique de la foire. De manière diachronique et historique, l'article montre qu'une perspective plus axée sur la valeur théorique en matière de foires du livre et de festivals littéraires génère de nouvelles connaissances sur ces types de manifestations littéraires et sur leur rôle au sein de la culture littéraire dans son ensemble.

Keywords

The Gothenburg Book Fair, book fairs, literary festivals, negotiating value, tournament of values

Mots-clés

Foire du livre de Göteborg, foires du livre, festivals littéraires, valeur de négociation, tournoi de valeurs

Book fairs and literary festivals are important meeting places in today's literary field and book market, due to their capacity to bring different actors together.¹ Following Bruno Latour, fairs and festivals can be described as actor networks, through which readers, authors, journalists, publishers, and other intermediaries connect with each other.² Viewing book fairs and literary festivals as actor networks also implies that they are essentially unstable; they must be recreated year after year by all of the participating actors.

This process of renewal is evident in the case of the Gothenburg Book Fair, which is known colloquially in Sweden as simply the Book Fair. Since its start in the early 1980s, the Book Fair has grown to become one of the largest cultural events in Scandinavia in the twenty-first century. Over four days at the end of September, it attracts about 85,000–100,000 visitors and 800 exhibitors yearly. A broad range of Swedish and international authors appear on the fair floor and in the seminar rooms. The program activities amount to 3,500–4,000 in total, depending on the year, ranging from intimate talks at publishers' stands in the exhibition space to larger events in the big conference halls on the second floor of the Swedish Exhibition and Congress Centre, which is located at the heart of Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city. The fair is annually monitored by almost 1,000 journalists.³

Without doubt, the Gothenburg Book Fair is the single most important book-related event in the year in Sweden. The importance of the fair as a structuring force for the Swedish book industry can hardly be overestimated, not least considering that book publishers largely plan their publication schedules around it. The Gothenburg Book Fair is also Northern Europe's largest book fair, and is the literary event against which other book fairs and literature festivals in the region must position themselves (such as, in the Swedish context, Littfest, the Umeå International Literary Festival, and the Stockholm Writers Festival).

But even though the Book Fair is undeniably one of the most important institutions in the Swedish book market today, the question of its value and function has been debated from the beginning. This fact has become even more salient in recent years, in the wake of the organizer letting the extreme-right newspaper *Nya Tider* exhibit at the fair in 2016 and 2017. This decision led to unexpected consequences: in 2017, the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement more or less hijacked the fair by holding a demonstration near the congress centre that houses the event.

Against this background, this article takes an analytical and descriptive approach to examining the value discussion about the Gothenburg Book Fair over its 35-year history. By applying a diachronic and historical perspective the article more specifically focuses on the question of how different actors—publishers, authors, readers, and other participants—have constantly been involved in negotiating and renegotiating the Book Fair's value. As will become apparent, the negotiation of the value of the fair does not, however, only imply heated debate, struggle, and controversy in a Bourdieusian sense.⁴ In the years just before the *Nya Tider* incident, the negotiation, as we shall see, was about consolidating and strengthening the value of the fair rather than contesting it.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

“Values are the very stuff of fairs,” Brian Moeran states in his discussion of the large international book fairs in Frankfurt, London, and Tokyo.⁵ In line with this statement, Moeran views the book fair as “a tournament of values” involving different actors in the publishing industry—primarily book publishers—who constantly negotiate economic, social, and symbolic

value.⁶ In my study of the Gothenburg Book Fair, I take Moeran's perspective on the book fair as a tournament of values as my theoretical departure. Unlike Moeran, however, I do not limit myself to examining only book publishers' participation in value creation and value negotiation when it comes to the question of what a book fair is and what function it has. By looking at the book fair and literary festival as an actor network, I want to expand the range of actors participating in the tournament of values to include journalists, authors, readers, and various intermediaries. I also want to highlight the complexity of these different actor categories. A brief look at the publishers participating at the Gothenburg Book Fair, for example, reveals a wide range in terms of large, medium-sized, and small players in the field. The same could be said about the authors, as a wide range of authors participate in the fair, from self-published writers with local connections to first-time authors, midlist authors, and celebrity authors with a national or international reach. Each author has his or her own agenda to carry out, and thus at least potentially value the fair in their own unique way. The same applies to readers in their capacity as visitors. Even though the audience at the Gothenburg Book Fair largely corresponds to Beth Driscoll's description of the female, middle-class, middle-aged, and middlebrow audience that attends literary festivals, the fair also attracts a younger audience of book lovers who may attribute other values to the event.⁷ To truly capture the negotiation process of the value of book fairs and literary festivals, it is therefore necessary to be aware of how the fair occurs both within and among groups of participating actors. In other words, it is not enough to restrict oneself to one category of actors—as Moeran restricts himself to publishers—if one is to obtain a complete picture of the book fair as a tournament of values.

Another problematic aspect of Moeran's discussion is that the concept of value is largely left untheorized. In the present article, *value* is understood to be the result of performative acts. This definition implies that value does not exist on its own, but is rather the result of a constant doing and undoing. Here, I am inspired by Barbara Herrnstein Smith's concept of value as expressed in *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (1988).⁸ In that study, Herrnstein Smith argues that value is to be seen as the result or effect of different evaluative acts. Value is therefore always in motion, and is not fixed beforehand. In the following discussion, the Gothenburg Book Fair is viewed in a similar way. As the diachronic and

historical perspective makes evident, the Book Fair's value is under constant negotiation and renegotiation, depending on both the actor in question and the time of his or her evaluative act.

To operationalize the concept of value further, I use the five value categories that were developed in the research project "Negotiating Literary Value," in which I participated in 2013–2017, and which aimed to show how literary value is created and negotiated today by investigating the contemporary Swedish literary field and book market. These five categories are:

- *Style and form value*, which concern the aesthetic dimension of the literary experience;
- *Knowledge value*, which refer to how literature can convey knowledge about historical events, human experiences, and existential issues;
- *Emotional value*, which relate to the ways in which literature can be said to convey and awaken feelings from admiration to disgust;
- *Social value*, which concern the social dimension of literature, such as reading in order to manifest personal identity or to mark affiliation with or distance from a particular reading community; and
- *Economic value*, which concern the economic dimension of literature, and accommodate everything from a certain title's price and sales success to marketing issues.⁹

This list of literary value categories should not be viewed as exhaustive in any sense; neither should the value categories in question be seen in isolation from each other, except for analytic purposes. In practice they often overlap, thus indicating the same kind of complexity as seen in the actor categories discussed above. In addition, not all of these value categories, which originally were formulated to give an understanding of the literary value attributed to books, are immediately applicable to the book fair phenomenon. As will become obvious in the following analysis, the negotiation and renegotiation of the value of the Gothenburg Book Fair has from the very start primarily concerned its social and economic value.

Methodologically the analysis presented here, like much earlier research on book fairs and literary festivals, consists of a case study, with a special focus on the period from 2013 onward, when I examined the Book Fair in a detailed and systematic way as a member of the above-mentioned research

project. However, my interest in this fair goes further back. I have been a dedicated visitor since at least 2004, when I walked through the book fair floor in Gothenburg for the first time.

But even if the article consists of a case study, and like Cori Steward's thesis on writers' festivals to a large extent "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context," it is also theoretical.¹⁰ The intention is not only to generate empirically based knowledge of the Book Fair, but also to present, use, and refine a more narrowly defined theoretical value perspective in relation to previous research on book fairs and literary festivals.

The material on which the study is based has been assembled through multiple qualitative methods. It does not, however, make use of any quantitative data produced through surveys, as is often the case when it comes to research on audiences and organizers in this context.¹¹ On the one hand, the study is based on source material gathered through traditional archive studies and netnographic research. This material to a large extent consists of newspaper and magazine articles, opinion pieces, radio and television programs, newspaper columns, blogs, web pages, and other sources. On the other hand, the study is based on material I myself have produced through participant observation conducted on the book fair floor and in the larger seminar rooms at the Gothenburg Book Fair over the last seven years. While the material generated through participant observation is not analyzed in detail, it has nevertheless been of great importance to the study. My participation in some of the activities of the fair, from being on the crowded book fair floor or getting a book signed at author-signing events to speaking with different actors and witnessing a great number of author performances, has given me a deeper understanding of the fair experience, especially from the visitor's perspective. The method of participant observation has also made me aware of how the actor network that constitutes the Gothenburg Book Fair recreates itself year after year in an almost ritualized way. However, the limitations of using participant observation as a method in this context should not be ignored. Due to the size of an event such as the Gothenburg Book Fair, as a researcher you simply cannot be everywhere, and the knowledge produced through participant observation also inevitably has a subjective bias.

In the following, I have chosen to present my analysis in three parts, which tracks the negotiation of the Book Fair's value and function from its establishment in 1985 to today. This approach inevitably implies that the analysis is characterized by a certain degree of historical description. But it also has the advantage of making it possible to fully demonstrate how the value of the Gothenburg Book Fair has consistently been under negotiation. This negotiation, as the article aims to show, has been more noticeable at certain times, and less noticeable at others.

The article begins by exploring how the question of negotiating value has been an integral part of the fair's history from its establishment in 1985 to its heyday at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It goes on to analyze in more detail how journalists, publishers, authors, and readers as visitors ascribed value to the Gothenburg Book Fair during the first half of the 2010s. I argue that this period, in comparison with earlier years, was largely marked by a widespread consensus concerning the value and function of the fair. It is also only on the basis of understanding this previous consolidation that the renegotiation of the Book Fair's value and function in recent years can become fully comprehensible. The article closes with a discussion of the intensive debate about the function and value of the Gothenburg Book Fair in the wake of the *Nya Tider* incident, which has left a lasting mark, and which makes the political dimensions of the fair abundantly clear.

Establishment and Institutionalization

When it comes to the establishment of the Gothenburg Book Fair, questions of value and function come immediately into focus. The first version of the fair took place in the fall of 1985, when the book fair phenomenon was just beginning to spread around the world.¹² Notably, the establishment of the Gothenburg Book Fair contrasts with that of other book fairs and literature festivals at the time because it was not the result of a state or municipal initiative.¹³ On the contrary, the Book Fair can be seen as an early example of the link between the book fair phenomenon and the so-called creative economy.¹⁴ The idea for this book fair, which was initially marketed as a library fair, came from two cultural entrepreneurs, Bertil Falck and Conny Jacobsson, both with strong connections to the Swedish library sector. At first, their intention was to start a stimulating seminar activity to train librarians. This initiative led to Bibliotek '85 (Library '85), which was

intended to serve as a trade fair aimed exclusively at the library sector. In the fall of 1985, Bibliotek '85 attracted 5,000 visitors.

By the following year, 1986, the fair had opened up to a wider public and changed its name to the Gothenburg Book Fair. Yet it was still intended to be a stimulating environment for the continuing education of librarians through a seminar program.¹⁵ This focus on education defined how the fair at this early stage was marketed—and still is marketed—by the organizers: it is supposed to provide visitors with knowledge value. At the same time, it is also evident that the organizers wanted the fair not to be too serious. For Falck and Jacobsson it was important that the fair also signalled festivity and entertainment.¹⁶ In the conference program for the 1986 fair, visitors were invited to “experience joy, enthusiasm and excitement,” and let themselves be “inspired by creativity, spontaneity and new thinking.”¹⁷ In other words, the fair was marketed as offering its audience not only knowledge value but emotional and social value, too.

At this early stage Falck and Jacobsson also became aware of the potential commercial and economic value of the fair. This is demonstrated by the fact that, from 1986 on, they started to invite prominent Swedish authors and international stars and celebrities to the fair, although on a much more modest scale than today. During its second year, the restyled Gothenburg Book Fair had guest authors such as André Brink, Anthony Burgess, Ken Follett, Doris Lessing, and Astrid Lindgren. Using a broad range of authors as a “hook” proved to be a successful move right away. The visitor numbers in 1986 far exceeded the organizers’ hope of a doubled audience from the year before. A total of 25,000 visitors came to the fair and the media interest in the event was very high.¹⁸ This underlines both the importance of authors bestowing social value on this kind of event for the audience, and the fact that authors contribute to the economic value of the fair from the organizers’ perspective.

But while the book-reading audience was eager to come to the newly established Gothenburg Book Fair, it is striking that the major publishers of the Swedish book industry were more cautious about participating in this kind of literary event, which was, it should be remembered, the first of its kind in Sweden and Scandinavia. In this regard, it is possible to identify a first important negotiation of the book fair’s value and function, with the

organizers in one corner, and the big publishers in the other. The reason for the latter's skepticism was on the one hand economic. In short, the major publishing houses were uncertain about what economic value their participation would actually generate. They thought the cost of having a stand was too high, and that moving the business from the Swedish capital Stockholm to Gothenburg for one weekend was too expensive. On the other hand, the reason for this skeptical attitude was connected with the question of aesthetic value, and especially with the fact that the Book Fair quickly turned away from focusing on the so-called "high," serious literature, in order to let the commercial, popular, and market-driven literature gain what the publishers saw as a dominant, almost hegemonic position.¹⁹

But not all publishers were as critical of the fair as the big ones, which also shows that the value and function of the fair differ depending on the player in question. In particular, the small and medium-sized publishing houses were much more inclined to attend the fair. For those who did not have the same opportunity to make themselves visible in the Swedish literary public as the major publishers, the fair became an important place to promote their literature and authors vis-à-vis an audience that was constantly growing over time. In 1987, the Book Fair had 45,000 visitors, and in 1988, 60,800.²⁰

However, the ever-increasing number of visitors did not affect the major publishers' attitude toward the fair to any great extent, although it is possible to discern some shifts in the arguments they used. Where their criticism some years earlier explicitly had concerned what the publishers saw as the fair's low economic value, the problem with the fair in the late 1980s and early 1990s was said to be its lack of a clear, well-defined identity. As one publisher put it, "Is it supposed to be a trade fair? A PR fair? A sales exhibition? A rights fair?"²¹ In this regard, the famous Swedish publisher Per Gedin praised the Frankfurt Book Fair, to which one travels for useful business, to negotiate rights, while he saw the Gothenburg Book Fair as merely a diffuse party that only strives to draw attention to itself.²² In other words, the real problem from the publishers' perspective was at this stage the "crisis of identity" that Driscoll argues lies at "the heart of all literary festivals."²³ From a historical perspective, this is especially interesting to note, because it is the fair's multifaceted identity that many, including the

major publishers, highlight as the aspect of the Gothenburg Book Fair that they value most highly today.

The major Swedish publishing houses' criticism of the Gothenburg Book Fair was not only expressed in speech, but also in action. At the beginning of the 1990s, several of them chose to boycott the fair. On a rhetorical level the background to this rather drastic decision was said to be the organizers' decision, in 1989, to invite Jackie Collins, who at the time represented a new type of author: the literary celebrity and scandal queen. Collins's presence was considered to be another sign that the fair was promoting "low," best-selling, Anglo-Saxon literature at the expense of domestically produced high-quality literature. Along with economic arguments that the cost of exhibiting had become too high on the one hand and arguments that the publishers had no influence over the fair's content on the other, this situation caused publishers to refrain from participating in the fair in 1990 and 1991.²⁴

The Book Fair's organizing team managed to bypass the publishers, however, by entering into an agreement with the Swedish writers' union that made it possible for union members to come and visit the Book Fair for free—which many writers subsequently did. Ulf Roosvald argues in the only book-length journalistic account of the Gothenburg Book Fair's early history that Falck and Co. succeeded in winning the battle with the publishers through this manoeuvre.²⁵ This argument is in line with the general focus of Roosvald's account of the rise and establishment of the Gothenburg Book Fair, which largely centres on the constant disputes between the organizers and publishers. However, it could just as well be said that the real battle took place between the Book Fair audience and the publishers, with the authors acting as dark horses.²⁶ It became obvious that visitors were unaffected by the lack of large publishers in the exhibition halls. Instead, it was clear that what visitors longed for in the first place was the social value—and, especially, the opportunity for readers to meet authors face to face. In 1991, the fair had its highest visitor listing thus far, with a total of 70,000 visitors.²⁷ By the very next year, in 1992, the major publishers were back, with their tails between their legs.

From 1993 onward, the Gothenburg Book Fair gradually strengthened its status as Sweden's largest cultural event. The criticism from publishers

diminished significantly, except in 1997, when the major publishers once again chose to boycott the fair for reasons of cost. As in the early 1990s, this turned out to be an unsuccessful move that only gave other actors—especially small publishers and cultural magazines—the opportunity to expand their stands and take over the attractive positions in the middle of the floor, which the major publishers had previously seized. After being defeated for the second time, the publishers could no longer close their eyes to the fact that the Book Fair was of great value to Swedish literature and to books as a medium. One question remained unsettled for some time, however: should exhibiting publishers be allowed to sell books, or should this be reserved for the exhibiting book stores and distributors?²⁸ This question further underscores how integral the economic value dimension has been to the Gothenburg Book Fair from the beginning. In the end, this Gordian knot was solved as the publishers and bookstores began to collaborate instead of competing. Today, commerce is in full swing in the exhibition halls, with a noticeable increase in intensity when the event opens to the wider public on the Friday afternoon of the fair.

Consolidating Value

This brief history of the Gothenburg Book Fair shows that vigorous debates swirled around its value and function during its first 10 years. In particular, this negotiation included two actors: the organizer and the major publishers. Nonetheless, the audience's role in this process of definition should not be overlooked. Their ever-increasing participation in the fair testifies that they recognized its great social value as a place to meet other literary-minded people, and also as a place where they could enjoy new kinds of literary experiences, and meet their favourite authors in the flesh. Besides the social value dimension, the value negotiation in this early stage of the fair's history touched upon all of the value categories presented in the introduction to this article in one way or another: knowledge value, style and form value, emotional value, and, not least, economic value.

I will now focus on the beginning of the 2010s in order to highlight how different actors during this period participated in the discussion of the Book Fair's value and function in ways that at first glance may appear not to involve any value negotiation at all. But from the theoretical perspective provided above by Herrnstein Smith, value is always in motion, even when

it appears to be fixed. Value, she argues, is “continuously *produced and sustained*” through the repetition of different evaluative activities. Value is in other words the effect of these activities, and could not be said to be intrinsic to an object, let us say a literary work, or, as in this case, a book fair.²⁹ In the middle section of this article, I consider in more detail the repetitive way in which value is produced and sustained, by showing how journalists, publishers, authors, and readers as visitors participated in the consolidation of the Book Fair’s value between 2013 and 2015. However, consolidation should in this context not necessarily be understood as conflict-free. As will become evident, the consolidation process involves both agreement and, if not disputes, at least discussions about how to best describe the value in question.

Journalists

As Jill Onsér-Franzén argues, the Gothenburg Book Fair has been “hard currency” for the media from the start, and the relationship between the organizer and the media has in many ways been characterized by reciprocity.³⁰ While the media exploited the news value of the Gothenburg Book Fair starting early on, their extensive coverage of the fair was important in strengthening the Book Fair’s brand, and promoting its cultural and economic value. The way in which value begets value is evident here, and it is hard to make any clear distinction between these actor categories. The position of the media in relation to the Book Fair has also changed over time. The media has largely gone from covering the fair to becoming a part of it by having their own lavish stands where they can market themselves through author talks and other activities. Thus, it is not particularly surprising that the media, during the analyzed period, largely valued the Book Fair in a positive way.

One interesting example of this is an article written by Daniel Sandström, at the time the cultural editor of Sweden’s second largest daily newspaper, *Svenska Dagbladet*. In this article, published before the opening of the fair in 2013, Sandström emphasized that the value of the Book Fair was precisely the thing that, in its early history, had been seen as a big problem, especially from the major publishers’ perspective, namely its hybrid identity, its unique way of providing its visitors with both commercial and cultural experiences. “The Book Fair is a circus, a company party and the literary equivalent of

Kivik market,” Sandström contended: “But [it is] also a unique arena for conversations, meetings, and in-depth discussions.”³¹ With his use of the metaphor of a circus and his reference to “Kivik market”—one of the oldest and biggest annually occurring popular markets in the south of Sweden, characterized by its *heterotopia* carnivalesque nature—Sandström connected the Gothenburg Book Fair with social and emotional value that revolves around pleasure and entertainment, along with implicitly economic value concerning the consumption of kitsch and mass literature. His description of the Gothenburg Book Fair as a “company party” further accentuated its social value dimension from the perspective of the book industry. In the second half of his statement, Sandström paired this positive valuation of the fair’s social and commercial orientation with a description of how the fair also provides knowledge value through “in-depth discussions.” In other words, the overall value of the Gothenburg Book Fair was seen to be its middlebrow nature, its capacity to bridge the “great divide” between high art and mass culture.³²

Another example of a similar valuation of the fair was expressed by Per Svensson, a senior columnist at *Sydsvenskan*, before the fair’s opening in 2015. He described the fair as a “cultural potluck” offering “something for almost everyone; high, low, narrow, wide, deep, superficial, surprising, safe.”³³ Like Sandström’s account, Svensson’s description values the fair’s open and multifaceted character positively, and portrays it as a reason for the fair’s success—even though it was originally seen as a problem by book publishers, among others.

As these two articles demonstrate, the negotiation of the Book Fair’s value during this period was largely about highlighting certain values in an almost identical way, which in turn makes them appear almost fixed and unchanging. They also further indicate that the value of the Gothenburg Book Fair lies in the fair’s ability to combine the two value discourses Herrnstein Smith considers to have been standing in an antagonistic relationship since the eighteenth century: the aesthetic and economic value discourses.³⁴ Sandström’s and Svensson’s statements above clearly indicate a positive valuation of this development in a Swedish context. The high and the low, the serious and the commercial are thought to intervene in the Gothenburg Book Fair in a unique way, creating a Swedish version of what Jim Collins calls “literary popular culture”—that is, a culture distinguished

by precisely this kind of collapse of a traditional value hierarchy that assumes that high art differs from mass culture.³⁵

However, not all cultural journalists viewed the middlebrow nature of the fair positively. One illustrative example is the criticism verbalized by Karin Olsson, the cultural editor of *Expressen*, about the fact that the Swedish pod-celebrities Alex Shulman and Sigge Eklund had their own giant stand at the fair in 2015, centrally located in the exhibition halls. Olsson argued that this in itself was evidence of how the Gothenburg Book Fair had finally become more of a celebrity fair than a book fair, and of how its cultural value had become totally outweighed by its economic value.³⁶ This media criticism is especially interesting because of the almost nostalgic longing for a book culture free from economic interests that it implies, on the one hand; and because, on the other hand, it points out how the value of the Gothenburg Book Fair was still under negotiation at this time—although the value negotiation itself seemed to consolidate the fair's position as a cultural event rather than question it.

Publishers

Consolidation of the Book Fair's value and function was also of interest among the large and medium-sized publishers during this period. From the publishing point of view, the original negative valuation of the Book Fair was not as prominent as before. One example of this changing attitude is a discussion among four publishers broadcast live on Swedish radio from the exhibition floor in 2015, and distinguished by their general consensus on the fair's social value.³⁷ One of the participants, Svante Weyler, who is regarded as one of Sweden's most experienced and reputable publishers, emphasized in an interesting way that the social value of the Gothenburg Book Fair far exceeds the economic risks from a publishing perspective:

Nowadays, everyone knows that during the year, money comes into the bank thanks to the attention the whole of Sweden devotes to the Book Fair. This pumps in a kind of energy, a kind of attention to literature—all kinds of literature—which goes far into the autumn, but also over the year. This is an important component of the system, and then you must not look so carefully at the accounts.³⁸

The most thought-provoking part of this statement is its description of the Gothenburg Book Fair's social value in relation to its economic value—that is, how the fair heightens the general attention that is paid to literature within Swedish culture, and how the fair's social value is thus more or less interchangeable with its economic value, at least when one views the fair as part of the literary system as a whole. At the same time, Weyler hints that the fair still presents a business loss from the publisher's perspective, although this loss is not seen as sufficient reason for not attending the fair.

The view of the social value of the Gothenburg Book Fair was also emphasized by two of the other publishers participating in the conversation, but in slightly different ways. Nina Eidem, publisher at Natur & Kultur, one of the mid-sized Swedish publishing companies, argued that the social value of the Gothenburg Book Fair lies in its ability to create a public literary sphere in itself; more specifically, she highlighted the meetings between authors that the fair facilitates, which result in many new artistic projects and collaborations.³⁹ She thus connected the social value of the fair with style and form value. Dorotea Bromberg, the owner and publisher of the independent publishing house Brombergs Bokförlag, which is the publisher of several Nobel laureates in Swedish translation, argued that the Book Fair's social value lies in its popular appeal, and stated that it allowed her to receive direct feedback as a publisher from her readers: "Here we meet the people who tell us what they want and what they think about our books."⁴⁰

Together, these statements indeed exemplify how the publishers at this moment in time accentuated the Book Fair's great social value. But underneath this consensus it is evident that Weyler, Eidem, and Bromberg define the social value in various ways, which indicates that this same value was under negotiation. Where Weyler saw the social value of the fair in relation to economic value from the perspective of the Swedish literary system as a whole, Eidem viewed it in relation to the author category, and from the perspective of literary production and creativity. Bromberg focused more on the social value in relation to the reader, and saw her encounters with readers on the book fair floor as a kind of market research. Like Weyler, she evidently connects the social value of the fair with economic value, but from a micro-perspective.

The fourth participant in the radio program, Håkan Bravinger, a publisher at Norstedts, one of Sweden's biggest and most famous publishing houses, was more critical of the Gothenburg Book Fair overall, although he too gave a carefully positive description of the fair's social value. At its best, Bravinger considered that the fair can give rise to a "magical moment" when "the author meets the reader"—a meeting that the publisher inevitably enables and is part of as well. Yet this realization of the fair's social value could not, Bravinger argued, outdo the fact that the fair all in all "is a commercial incentive for the book industry and for everyone involved."⁴¹ In a similar way to Kari Olsson above, Bravinger's criticism focused on the fair as the ultimate expression of the pervasive commercialism in the cultural sphere. The fact that this criticism came from a representative of Norstedts is interesting, considering that Norstedts was the only major publisher that was loyal to the fair when the other publishers chose to boycott it in the early 1990s, based on similar arguments. Norstedts was also the publishing house that, in the Book Fair's early history, was a driving force in precisely the kind of commercialization that Bravinger is critical of, through the ways in which they opened up their stand for author performances and various marketing stunts.⁴² Bravinger's criticism could, however, partly be explained by the fact that he is also an author, held in high esteem by peers but not on the overtly commercial side. In this role he had presumably personally seen the reverse side of the fair for such authors, which in turn may have affected his negative valuation of the Book Fair.

One interesting issue touched upon but not discussed at any length by the radio program is the way in which the social value of the fair is conditional upon the amount of money that publishers are prepared to invest in order to participate in this kind of literary event. In his discussion of the negotiation of value at the book fairs in Frankfurt, London, and Tokyo, Moeran stresses the importance of this topic and connects it with the question of stand location and visibility. In Frankfurt, he argues, the "importance of stand location and visibility can be seen in pricing mechanisms, where an aisle stand costs less than a corner stand, which itself costs less than a 'peninsula' stand (fronting three aisles), which costs less than an island stand."⁴³ In this regard, the Gothenburg Book Fair differs from the Frankfurt Book Fair: the price is the same for a stand in any of the four exhibition halls. In 2015, the price per square metre to participate was SEK 1900 excluding VAT (about USD 190), regardless of the location of

the stand. This means that the participation in the fair for the major publishers approximately amounts to half a million Swedish kronor just in stand rental. Everything else (equipment, marketing, staff, catering, etc.) constitutes additional expenses. Thus, the social value that was discussed on the radio program depends on the publishers' willingness to make major financial investments in the Book Fair. In other words, social value inevitably comes with a price.

This fact is further emphasized if one looks more closely at the small publishers at the Gothenburg Book Fair that lack the economic margins of large and medium-sized publishers. Even among these publishers, it is clear that they embrace the great social value of the fair, although they also testify to the difficulty of making themselves visible to the visiting readers. The economic investment required to participate at the fair is thus a real problem. One small publisher stated that she had paid SEK 25,000 for a stand on the outskirts of the floor during the fair of 2013. She had paid SEK 1285 for a single electrical outlet, which she laconically noted as proof of the organizer "knowing its value."⁴⁴ From the perspective of the small publishers, who struggle to survive on a daily basis, Weyler's conclusion that the Gothenburg Book Fair results in a business loss for most publishers, but a profit for the book industry in general, seems undeniably to be a modified truth.

Throughout the Book Fair's history some independent publishers have also made a point of not participating in the fair at all. The most well-known example in this regard is the independent publisher Modernista. Asked why they have never wanted to be a part of the Book Fair, Modernista's founder, Pietro Maglio, answered frankly that the Book Fair makes him "depressed":

It is the antithesis of everything we dreamed that a life under the sign of art could be. The antithesis to the work of running a publishing house and publishing new, exciting and intriguing literature. You get there and everything looks mediocre, inverted and ugly. Paltry. It's like when you're at a party, and then suddenly all the lights in the ceiling light up, and then you see everything for what it really is.⁴⁵

But even this negative evaluation of the Book Fair, which echoes the criticism Bravinger expressed in the radio program above, elucidates that it

is simply not possible for publishers to be indifferent to the fair. Thus, even for Modernista, the Book Fair can ultimately be said to have some kind of inverted social value. The fair is something that the publisher can profile itself against to strengthen its own brand in the Swedish publishing landscape, as a serious, independent, and non-commercial book publisher which, through its book publishing, aims to convey style and form value and knowledge value.

Authors

In much of the research on book fairs and literary festivals, the author is predominantly seen from the viewpoint of readers or other participating visitors. The presence of authors—and celebrity authors in particular—is often cited as an explanation for the popularity of book fairs and literature festivals. For example, Driscoll highlights “star power” as an important value criterion for the Melbourne Writers Festival and for literature festivals in general.⁴⁶ Wenche Ommundsen similarly describes how literature festivals respond to readers’ pent-up need to meet the author in the flesh, while Michael Meehan emphasizes that literature festivals allow readers to confirm that the author who wrote the book in question really exists.⁴⁷

Organizers, publishers, and the media also, to a large extent, use the figure of the author, and especially of prominent star and celebrity authors, to attribute value not only to the event but also to themselves. The exhibition program for the Gothenburg Book Fair is usually adorned by some kind of author portrait to attract potential visitors; publishers use their authors to draw attention to their stands, and consequently to sell books; and the media create content through interviews and coverage from the book fair floor. In short, the author could in this context be said to yield social value that organizers, publishers, and the media then convert into economic value. In this regard, it is interesting to contrast the author’s role at the Gothenburg Book Fair with the role the author plays at the big European book fairs in Frankfurt, London, and Bologna. The author’s role at these events, Simone Murray argues, is primarily “to boost foreign and translation rights sales for big-ticket acquisitions, less so to engage directly with their readerships.”⁴⁸ This focus on business and trade is not quite the same at the Gothenburg Book Fair, though it does have a designated venue for negotiating rights and conducting business—the so called, Rights Centre,

which is promoted by the organizers as “the largest market place for Nordic literature.”⁴⁹ It is not, however, to partake in sales discussions and to negotiate literary rights that authors are at the Book Fair, but rather to meet and interact with their readers.

Evidently, then, the relationship is somewhat reciprocal: not only do book fair organizers, publishers, and the media make use of authors to aggregate economic value, but authors themselves make use of book fairs for their own purposes. Some (male) authors, such as the Swedish star authors Jan Guillou and Björn Ranelid, have participated every year since the early days of the Book Fair, and are nowadays more or less standing elements of the event. For them, the Book Fair is an arena where they can market their new books, and above all manifest and strengthen their author persona in relation to their readers. For other authors, the social value of participating at the fair is more about finding a welcome break in daily, monotonous author life.⁵⁰

The fact that many authors actually articulate a very strong desire to participate in this kind of literary event became apparent to me during my participant observations. This dimension—authors’ motivation to be a part of book fairs and literary festivals—has not been given much attention in previous research. In the case of the Book Fair, many authors view an invitation to participate as an acknowledgement of their success as a writer. The fair in this regard undeniably has a consecrating function, much in the same way as literary prizes.⁵¹ This fact was emphasized by the authors I met and by the publishers in the above-mentioned radio program. Furthermore, Roosvald’s account of the fair refers to a publisher who

knows authors who travel abroad if they have not received an invitation to the Gothenburg Book Fair. They do not want anyone to call them during the fair, so they must explain why they are not in Gothenburg. For many, it is a great defeat not to be invited.⁵²

This comment demonstrates that the Gothenburg Book Fair is powerfully linked to social value from an author’s point of view, and that it ultimately determines which authors are “insiders” and which are “outsiders” in the world of Swedish literature.

This power of the fair is especially evident when it comes to debut authors, but it can also be said to apply to a wide range of authors, from star to midlist authors. On *Debutantbloggen* (The debut blog)—a Swedish blog where debut authors share information and experiences from their struggle to fulfill their dreams of becoming an established author—the desire to be a part of the Gothenburg Book Fair is an often-recurring topic, as is the disappointment of not being invited to participate. The latter is evident in a blog post titled “Drömmar om en bokmässan” (Dreams of a book fair), in which Camilla Jönsson speaks frankly about how she had always dreamed of “not just being a regular visitor but a writer. Standing on the publisher’s scene, maybe even getting involved in a seminar. Moving around on the fair floor with a nice nameplate giving access everywhere. A little extra everything, simply.”⁵³ When her debut novel was finished and ready to be launched, she began to plan for her full Book Fair participation. However, she soon realized that her publishing house had not included her in their Book Fair planning. Her dream of participating in the Gothenburg Book Fair as a writer had completely crashed. “And I died a little in that moment,” Jönsson writes; “Here was my dream just within reach, and then I don’t get a chance to realize it this year either.”⁵⁴

As this blog post demonstrates, the Book Fair functions as a kind of introductory rite from a debut author’s perspective, which transforms her or him from a “wannabe” author into a “real” author. At least, this is how debut authors picture the fair in their dreams.

In reality, participation in the fair as a debut author does not automatically yield a positive experience. Another debut author during the period under study, Carina Bergfeldt, testified in a column in *Aftonbladet* (a major evening paper in Sweden) about the marginalization and invisibility one can experience at the Book Fair as a writer in the crowd. Yet she emphasizes that it is impossible not to be part of the Gothenburg Book Fair as an author: “The only thing worse than being at the Book Fair is not being at the Book Fair.”⁵⁵

From an author’s perspective, the desire to participate in the Gothenburg Book Fair is inevitably connected with viewing the fair as a stage to act upon. Another dimension of the fair is how it gives participating authors the opportunity to socialize with and “show off” to a wide range of people in

the book business, especially during the many festivities surrounding the event. Yet another debut author emphasizes this fact when describing her experience of participating in the fair in 2015:

The Book Fair is not just about the fair itself. A large part is the social life after closing, and especially at the Park [a hotel]. There, all the publishers, editors, writers, PR people, and journalists gather and mingle into the small hours. Here, you encounter most people, and I must say that I love it! For three nights in a row, I didn't get to bed until after two in the morning.⁵⁶

In line with Moeran's study of the book fairs in Frankfurt, Tokyo, and Paris, this quotation stresses how the festivities surrounding the Book Fair in Gothenburg are an integral part of the informal value making and value negotiation that is part of the book fair phenomenon.⁵⁷ In particular, it reveals how authors believe that the social value of the fair comes from the opportunity it affords to make themselves visible—not only to readers, but also to other actors in the book industry and in the literary field at large, including publishers, editors, PR people, and journalists.

Nevertheless, not all authors judge the Book Fair's social value in this positive way. The famous Swedish crime writer Leif G.W. Persson expresses, for example, a more ambivalent stance. At the same time as he desires to "meet his readers" he claims to be "horrified to meet all author colleagues."⁵⁸ This negative valuation is also expressed by Sara Kadefors, a Swedish author and playwright, when in the same article in *Göteborgs-Posten* she was asked what she looked forward to the most during the 2013 fair: "To survive. I think the Book Fair is a shit job, it is a stressful context and an environment where you cannot breathe."⁵⁹ Although few authors voice their criticism of participating in the fair in this public way, presumably because it could reflect poorly on them, it is possible to discern how some of them perceive their participation in the fair more as a burden than as something they appreciate and find meaningful. During my participant observations I witnessed many performances, especially by unknown debut authors and more established midlist authors, in which they gave the impression that they would rather have been somewhere else. Some of them performed on small stages in stands located on the periphery of the exhibition halls, in front of modest audiences of five to ten spectators. Thus,

it is clear that even among authors the social value of the fair is up for negotiation to some extent.

Readers

In much research and theory about literary festivals and book fairs it is possible to observe a divided attitude toward the audience and the readers who choose to participate. In this context, an important issue has been whether the audience should be regarded as passive or active in relation to the organizers, the media, the publishers, and the authors.⁶⁰ As indicated in the account of the early history of the Gothenburg Book Fair, readers are important actors—possibly the most important—in the negotiation of the value and function of the fair in their role as visitors. Their loyalty turned out to be crucial in the 1990s, when the major publishers chose to boycott the fair not once, but twice. More generally, it could be argued that it is for the visiting readers that the media and the publishers invest enormous amounts of money year after year to participate. It is also the readers' attention and acknowledgment that most of the participating authors desire in one way or the other. In short, without visitors, the fair's whole existence would be threatened. This fact is further underscored by the question that is asked each year when the doors of the Book Fair close on Sunday afternoon: Has the number of visitors decreased or increased?

In recent years, the research on literature festivals and book fairs has increasingly abandoned an ideological or critical position that involves a negative evaluation of the festival audience. Instead several empirically based studies have focused on exactly what value and function these events have for the audience members in question. Driscoll analyzes, for instance, over 3,200 responses to an audience survey gathered at the Melbourne Writers Festival between 2010 and 2013, which, according to her, “provides both demographic data and qualitative accounts of the *value* audience members derive from the festival.”⁶¹ In terms of the value categories presented at the beginning of this article, the audience, according to Driscoll, primarily attributes social value and knowledge value to the festival. She contends that what the audience members value is the chance to socialize with authors, to listen to serious, intellectual discussions, and not least to be part of a larger bookish community.⁶²

The most ambitious study of the literary festival audience to date is without question Millicent Weber's *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, from 2018.⁶³ Weber draws on blog posts and semi-structured interviews to discuss audience members' experiences and perceptions of a range of different festivals, such as the Edinburgh International Book Festival and the Melbourne Writers Festival. Weber argues explicitly against the often negative valuation of the literary festival audience as passive and uncritical. On the contrary, she claims that her material shows that the audience's interest in literary festivals is in fact very complex. A large share of the participants in her study valued the social interaction with other people, known or unknown. As in Driscoll's study, the social value attributed to the festivals in question was high. But the audience members also remarked that the festivals involved learning experiences, what I call knowledge value, and "fun, humorous, and entertaining aspects"—that is, emotional value. The aesthetic dimension, or the "literary" aspects of the experience," was, according to Weber, "not important or only slightly important".⁶⁴ But even though larger patterns like these can be discerned, Weber is careful to point out that the question of why one is visiting a literary festival is multifaceted, and cannot really be answered in any simple way.

My research at the Gothenburg Book Fair largely supports Driscoll's and Weber's observations concerning the social value dimension of literary festivals. During the short and often intense conversations I had with visitors in 2013–2015, it became apparent that most of them valued the Gothenburg Book Fair positively, as a "heaven" for book lovers, although many certainly complained of sore feet and the crowded fair floor. Some first-time visitors also spoke of the overwhelming size of the Book Fair, and noted the difficulty they had in orienting themselves within the hustle and bustle of the crowd.

What the audience valued above all about the Book Fair were the meetings to which it gave rise. On the one hand, there is a desire on the part of the readers to meet authors, a desire that we have seen is in many ways mutual. This kind of meeting is realized when readers are able to listen to the author speaking on stage—whether a small stage in a publisher's stand, or a large stage in a big seminar room on the second floor of the exhibition building. From the readers' perspective, however, these meetings, where the writer talks about his or her work or oeuvre, are not exclusively connected with

social value, but also with knowledge value. As some of the visiting readers that I talked to after one of Jan Guillou's many performances in 2013 attested, what they valued most, besides seeing one of Sweden's most famous popular writers performing live, was the learning experience of hearing him talk about his new fictional book about interwar Sweden. This view of the Book Fair as a learning environment for readers suggests that the organizers are meeting their aim of providing education and *Bildung*, and further supports the findings in recent research focused on the motives for attending literary festivals.⁶⁵

On the other hand, the most important and desirable meeting from the readers' perspective seems to be the author signing event, where readers have the opportunity to meet and talk to authors face to face. This is certainly the impression given by the many queues to different signings that were a common sight on the Book Fair floor during my participant observations, or by the many photographs shared on Instagram with the hashtag *#bokmässan*, in which visitors document their autographed books or display selfies with their favorite author.

It can be argued that the interaction between the reader and author—which often is highlighted as essential in understanding the popularity of book fairs and literary festivals—is realized in a particularly concrete way at author signing events, in contrast with author performances. As Driscoll states, these performances often paradoxically emphasize the distance between reader and author, rather than bridging it, since the authors stand at small podiums or sit on large stage sets.⁶⁶ It is also apparent that values other than social ones come into play at author signing events—especially economic value—and we might therefore view these events as constituting an interesting platform for value negotiation in themselves. From the author's and publisher's perspective, the function of an author signing event is not primarily to meet readers—although many authors and publishers do stress this as important, at least in theory—but rather to sell books and to increase the economic value of the book in question. From the reader's perspective, the social value of the meeting is paired with the fact that the author's signature raises the economic value of the purchased book, both by establishing an “indexical authenticity” through linking the book with its originator, and by giving the mass-produced book an air of singularity.⁶⁷ Still, from a reader's perspective, the social value bestowed on a signed book

by the signature is unquestionable. The signature is a material trace that proves that the meeting has taken place; therefore, it allows the reader to use the signed copy to strengthen his or her identity as a reader in other readers' eyes.

The social value of the Gothenburg Book Fair from a reader's perspective is also evident in bloggers' descriptions of their fair experiences.⁶⁸ In text and pictures, they strongly confirm the importance of the Gothenburg Book Fair, which makes them a part of what Joe Moran calls "meet the author" culture.⁶⁹ However, from an audience perspective the blog posts also direct attention to a new dimension of the social value of book fairs that has not been noted in previous research: for many bloggers, it is not only the meetings with star and celebrity authors that they desire and seek out, but meetings with niche authors who, for example, work within a specific genre.

While bloggers frequently emphasize the social value of the Gothenburg Book Fair in this way and in others, much of their focus is on shopping and the consumption of books and book-related goods. In this regard, it is evident that author performances and author signing events should not be seen as entirely separate things. As one book blogger summarizing her experiences after the 2015 fair pointed out, the author performance often results in attendees purchasing the book in question, to subsequently get it signed.⁷⁰ Some of the bloggers also note that before entering the book fair floor, they had sworn not to buy any new books, but once at the fair they could not abstain. "Of course, I brought some new books home with me too, but even though my shopping fingers were itching to purchase I held back and reminded myself of my overcrowded bookshelf at home," one of the bloggers ended her report from the fair in 2015.⁷¹

Thus, when it comes to readers, it is obvious that the Book Fair is connected not only with social value but also with economic value. However, as in the case of the authors, it is striking that it is not necessarily the large or medium-sized publishers' stands that are viewed as the most attractive to visit. Instead, bloggers direct their attention to smaller, more niche book publishers. One illustrative example comes from a reader using the signature "Judit" on the blog *Beas Bokhylla* (Bea's Bookcase), who states that the "most fun" thing during the fair of 2013 was to "walk around and socialize with the smaller publishers. In view of the Bonnier monopoly, it

was liberating to find other little pearls.”⁷² From this perspective the large publishers’ efforts to make themselves visible do not seem to be particularly successful.

The book blogs also make it evident that the social value of attending the Gothenburg Book Fair is largely about manifesting identity—that is, becoming someone—and more specifically about becoming part of a larger reading community. Second only to the many meetings with authors that the fair involves, meeting other readers and book bloggers has distinct social value. This corresponds well with Weber’s description of how the literary festivals she investigated offered the festival attendees “access to a social space, somewhere they could meet friends and colleagues and make new connections.”⁷³ But it is also evident that the Book Fair for readers more generally is a kind of *heterotopia*, in a Foucauldian sense.⁷⁴ It is a space where they can forget about their ordinary lives for a couple of days, to totally indulge instead in what they love the most: books, and conversations about books.

Renegotiating Value

During the first half of the 2010s, then, journalists, publishers, authors, and readers all repeatedly emphasized and thus consolidated the great social value of the Gothenburg Book Fair. The cultural journalists accentuated the social value of the Book Fair by comparing it to a circus, and by highlighting its hybrid character, the fact that it successfully merges high art with mass culture. The publishers viewed the fair as a place for social meetings of various kinds, including meetings between publishers and readers, and between authors and other authors. From the authors’ perspective, the fair was largely linked to questions of identity, especially to the desire to be seen and confirmed as an author in the eyes of readers, publishers, and colleagues. Similarly, readers appreciated the fair’s social value above all, as the fair provided opportunities for them to encounter a broad range of authors and other readers. At the same time, if one looks more closely at the actor categories separately, it is apparent that the fair’s social value was under negotiation in more subtle ways. It also becomes obvious that the social value dimension is inevitably intertwined with the economic value dimension in one way or another.

In this third and last section of the article, I will focus on the recent debate concerning the Gothenburg Book Fair's value and function in the wake of the organizers' decision to let the extreme-right newspaper *Nya Tider* exhibit at the fair in 2016 and 2017. My intention is not to fully describe and analyze this debate, which generated extensive media coverage comprising several hundred debate articles in newspapers and magazines.⁷⁵ Rather, what I want to address here is how this development once again highlights the way in which the Book Fair's value is constantly under negotiation and renegotiation, and how this process is expressed differently over time.

The background to the debate was the organizers' inconsistent actions toward *Nya Tider*, when it became known publicly that it had received permission to exhibit. First, the organizers allowed *Nya Tider* to have a stand; next, they refused to allow the newspaper to attend; and then, finally, they let the newspaper participate after all, because of what was declared a legally binding contract. The criticism of the organizers' final decision began immediately after it was announced. On social media, publishers, authors, and visitors were called upon to boycott the fair. In a debate article, over 100 Swedish writers pleaded that the Book Fair not "let racist exhibitors participate next year."⁷⁶ More intellectual Swedish cultural magazines, such as *Ord & Bild* and *Glänta*, wrote open letters to the fair organizers asking for guarantees in advance regarding what kind of fair they would be participating in in the future.⁷⁷

It soon became apparent that the positive valuation of the Book Fair that had been so prominent during the first half of the 2010s had suddenly changed into a more critical and questioning attitude. This was even more noticeable in the spring of 2017, when it became known that *Nya Tider* would be allowed to participate again, despite the earlier protests, and despite the fact that new evidence of the newspaper's connection with the extreme-right racist movement had been broadcast on Swedish television. The debate escalated even further when the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement obtained permission to demonstrate near the fair premises that same year, which mobilized a large anti-racist counter-demonstration involving tens of thousands of people. On Saturday, September 30, 2017, large parts of Gothenburg were besieged; big barricades formed an iron ring around the Book Fair to prevent violent clashes between Nazis and anti-racists.

Considering the previous years' consolidation of the Book Fair's great social value, it is striking that, in light of the *Nya Tider* incident, it was precisely this value that now was under renegotiation. Although the Book Fair, as is often the case with book fairs and literary festivals, had not been entirely free of scandals previously, these had never in the same way raised such profound questions about the function and value of the fair for literature and culture.⁷⁸ Above all, the question raised by *Nya Tider*'s participation was about whether the Book Fair should be considered part of the public sphere or not.

One camp encouraged a liberal attitude toward the Book Fair and argued for the importance of allowing even those with uncomfortable views to be part of the fair. This group essentially viewed the Book Fair in accordance with Jürgen Habermas's famous description of the public sphere as an arena for a democratic and rational conversation.⁷⁹ The fair's social value was considered to be its open character, and especially its ability to allow different voices to be heard, regardless of the opinions raised. From this perspective, allowing *Nya Tider* to exhibit was the only right thing to do. If the Book Fair began to act as a censor, it ultimately risked undermining its *raison d'être* as an arena for free speech. This was also the argument put forth by the organizers when they were required—in the course of the debate—to define their principles regarding who should be allowed to exhibit:

Our position is that a book fair is a unique phenomenon in society, an open square—where opinions are met and broken. The possibilities of the open arena for free opinion formation and freedom of speech are the core of the Gothenburg Book Fair. Even horrible views can therefore occur at a book fair—as long as they fit within the common rules of democracy: the law.⁸⁰

For the other camp, who argued that a boycott of the fair would be the only valid response given the circumstances, it was precisely this view of the Book Fair as “an open square” that was the main problem. It was argued that because the Gothenburg Book Fair is run by a private and commercial company, it should not be viewed as part of the public sphere, even though many people, including the organizers, tended to view it as such. This camp

therefore believed it should be relatively uncomplicated for the organizers *not* to allow undemocratic forces like *Nya Tider* to participate in the fair.

In light of this debate, the question of whether or not to attend the Gothenburg Book Fair soon turned into a question of identity politics, which further accentuates the impression that the fair's social value was now under renegotiation. Ultimately, attendance or non-attendance at the fair became a question of positioning oneself within the political climate in Sweden, in which right-wing extremist views have advanced vigorously through the success of the Swedish Democrats—the second largest party in Sweden today, with direct links to *Nya Tider*. In this political context, it was simply not possible to avoid taking a stand for or against the Book Fair.

Considering the divergent views on the fair as a part of the public sphere or a privately owned public space, it is possible to discern at least two opposing arguments for attending or not attending the fair during these years. Those who chose to take part in the fair argued that their participation was the only way to battle undemocratic and racist forces: “I decided to attend the fair—along with other writers who stated that they would not be run out of the place by extremists,” the Swedish author Ola Larsmo declared.⁸¹ The other side argued for the opposite view and saw participation as a capitulation to and a silent acceptance and normalization of intolerable right-wing extremist voices: “I chose not to participate because it meant that I would have to appear on the same stage—broadly speaking—as these right-wing extremists, homophobes, conspiracy theorists, anti-Semites, Holocaust deniers and Putin supporters, and that would helped to normalise their views,” argued Peter Englund, former permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, in an interview published in *Index of Censorship* in December 2017.⁸²

These different positions were also taken by the international star authors who were booked for the 2017 fair. The Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o announced, in a manner similar to Englund, that he was not going to participate in the fair, in solidarity with the 200 Swedish authors who had signed a petition earlier in the spring declaring that they were not going to attend.⁸³ However, the Indian author Arundhati Roy stressed that she was “reluctant to renounce this very important room to such actors as *Nya Tider*.

I want to attend the fair and talk to those who agree with me—as well as with those who do not.”⁸⁴

In sum, then, the debate once again raised questions about the identity of the Gothenburg Book Fair, just like the ones that had been so prominent during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, albeit in a different way. Now it was not the lack of a clear identity that was seen as the main problem, but the fact that it was unclear what kind of space the Book Fair is and should be. More specifically, the discussion, as we have seen, focused largely on whether the fair should be considered a part of the public sphere or not. The ways in which the various actors positioned themselves on this issue became absolutely decisive in determining how they would evaluate the Book Fair’s actions, and in turn how they would justify their own participation or non-participation.

On the other hand, the debate also made it clear that the Book Fair, by allowing *Nya Tider* to exhibit, had itself been drawn into a larger political discussion concerning how best to respond to the right-wing extremist forces that have strengthened their position throughout Sweden and the rest of Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This reveals that book fairs and literary festivals are always involved to varying degrees in major conflicts over cultural value, which are generally at least to some extent beyond their control. It also shows that other actors, such as *Nya Tider* and the Nordic Resistance Movement, can benefit from the great media publicity that surrounds these events, which in this case clearly affected the social value of the Book Fair.

It was also considered problematic that the focus in the wake of the debated was drawn away from the very thing that should be at the centre of a book fair: *books*. Evidently, the Book Fair’s social value was significantly reduced during these two years when many authors, the ambassadors of the Book Fair, chose to boycott the event, which in turn resulted in a decline in visitor numbers. In 2017 the fair had 77,292 visitors in total, which was about 20 percent less than in 2016, when it had 96,263 visitors. On the otherwise financially rewarding Saturday alone, when the Nordic Resistance Movement held its demonstration, the audience attendance declined by 37 percent.⁸⁵ The diminishment of the Book Fair’s social value that this development entailed thus also had real consequences for the fair’s

economic value, especially from the publishers' perspective. The fact that almost one in five visitors who had attended the fair in 2016 failed to return in 2017 was clearly reflected in a decline in sales. At the same time, this development meant that the publishers strengthened their negotiating position vis-à-vis the Book Fair. Immediately after the fair closed in 2017, publishers received an offer to book a stand at the next year's fair at a discounted price.⁸⁶

In light of this background, it is not surprising that the Book Fair's management, shortly after the 2017 fair, once again made a complete reversal. Just weeks after the 2017 Book Fair, its CEO, Maria Källson, who had previously stubbornly defended the decision to let *Nya Tider* exhibit, announced that she was immediately leaving her position.⁸⁷ It was not long before the fair's new leadership, which also consisted of a new program director and communication manager, announced in a press release that *Nya Tider* were no longer welcome at the fair because the newspaper's "participation and the attention it has received has taken too much focus from the Book Fair's main task," that is, to focus on literature and reading.⁸⁸

But despite these and other efforts by the Book Fair to try to restore its status and value, the loser following this debate was unquestionably the Book Fair itself. Although the authors, the publishers, and the audience have begun to return, the Book Fair's social value is still far from what it once was. The number of visitors in 2018 and 2019 remained stable at around 85,000—that is, 10,000 fewer than in 2016. Several publishers I talked to after the 2019 fair stated that they have now begun to reconsider the value of participating in the fair: "Maybe it is not as obvious to participate as it used to be?" or "Maybe we should spend our resources on something else?" were questions raised in these conversations. While the Book Fair has slowly begun to recover after the *Nya Tider* debate, and many of the actors who chose to boycott the fair are back on the fair floor, such doubts are nevertheless noticeable under the surface, which indicates that the renegotiation of the fair's value and function is far from over.

Conclusion

As this case study of the Gothenburg Book Fair shows, the value and function of the fair has been under constant negotiation from its

establishment in 1985 until today. The longer diachronic and historical perspective applied in this article reveals that this negotiation has especially concerned the fair's social and economic value in various ways over time. And the fair is not only concerned with these two intimately entwined value dimensions. The analysis of the way in which the social and economic value is negotiated by different actors demonstrates that they also are connected with knowledge value, style and form value, and emotional value.

Thus, the Gothenburg Book Fair, viewed as a tournament of values, is, like book fairs and literary festivals in general, a very complex phenomenon. Although I do not claim to have exhaustively analyzed and described all the facets of the value negotiation during the 35 years of the fair, I hope that this article, and especially its theoretical and methodological underpinnings, will inspire similar studies in the future. In my view, a focus on negotiation rather than, for example, struggle or strife, in a Bourdieusian sense, inevitably opens up a more nuanced discussion of how value is created and dismantled in the context of a book fair or a literary festival. The value negotiation perspective provided by Barbara Herrnstein Smith also addresses and recognizes the complexity of these phenomena without locking them into a pre-established scheme where cultural value in a broad sense are seen as standing in opposition to economic value. As the example of the Gothenburg Book Festival makes very clear, even when these values and functions appear fixed, they are in fact always in motion. What the value and function of the Book Fair will be in the future remains to be seen.

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Notes

¹ An earlier version of this article was published in Swedish in the edited volume *Litterära värdepraktiker: Aktörer, rum, platser*; see Christian Lenemark, “Bokmässan: Arena för värdeförhandling,” in *Litterära värdepraktiker: Aktörer, rum, platser*, ed. Torbjörn Forslid et al. (Göteborg: Makadam, 2017), 27–66.

² Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³ In 2019 the number of visitors was 86,132, and the number of exhibitors 798. In total 816 authors and lecturers from 38 countries participated in 4,185 program activities, and the Fair was monitored by 927 journalists. “Statistik från Bokmässan,” accessed January 23, 2020, <https://bokmassan.se/for-press/pressmaterial/statistik/>.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁵ Brian Moeran, “The Book Fair as a Tournament of Values,” in *Negotiating Values in the Creative Industries: Fairs, Festivals and Competitive Events*, eds. Brian Moeran and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 136.

⁶ Moeran, “The Book Fair,” 119.

⁷ Beth Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 162–63.

⁸ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). See also the following article by the same author, “Value/evaluation,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 177–85.

⁹ Torbjörn Forslid et al., *Höstens böcker: Litterära värdeförhandlingar 2013* (Göteborg: Makadam, 2015), 63–89, and Forslid et al., “Introduktion,” in *Litterära värdepraktiker: Aktörer, rum, platser*, eds. Torbjörn Forslid et al. (Göteborg: Makadam, 2017), 19–22.

¹⁰ Cori Stewart, “The Culture of Contemporary Writers’ Festivals” (PhD dissertation, Queensland University of Technology 2009), 59, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/10896828.pdf>.

¹¹ See, for example, Beth Driscoll and Claire Squires, “Serious Fun: Gaming the Book Festival,” *Mémoires du livre/Studies in Book Culture* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 2–5, doi: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1046988ar>, for a discussion of the methodologies primarily used in research on book festivals.

¹² Moeran, “The Book Fair,” 123–24.

¹³ As Håkan Östlundh states in his master’s thesis on the Gothenburg Book Fair from 2007, the idea behind a library fair was from the beginning met with skepticism from authorities and various interest organizations, such as the Swedish National Council for Culture and the Swedish Public Library Association. See Håkan Östlundh, “Litterära

toppförfattare och scandal beauties: Bok & Biblioteksmässan 1985–2005. Om meningsutbytet mellan utbud och mottagande” (Master’s thesis, Uppsala University, 2007), 25, accessed January 23, 2020, <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:213467/FULLTEXT01.pdf>. See also Jill Onser-Franzén, *Kulturens giganter: En studie om fenomenen bokmässan och filmfestivalen i Göteborg* (PhD dissertation, University of Gothenburg 1996), 47.

¹⁴ See Erling Bjurström and Andreas Nyblom, “Kulturekonomi: Framtidens lokala tillväxtmotor?,” in *Samtal pågår ... från forskare till politiker och tjänstemän i kommuner*, eds. Tora Friberg and Sabrina Thelander (Linköping: Linköpings universitet, 2010), 26.

¹⁵ See Onser Franzén, *Kulturens giganter*, 45–46.

¹⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷ Cited in Östlundh, “Litterära toppförfattare och scandal beauties,” 35. [my translation]

¹⁸ Ulf Roosvald, *Boken om Bokmässan* (Göteborg: Bok & Bibliotek i Norden AB, 2009), 47.

¹⁹ Ibid., 50, 52, 55.

²⁰ These numbers are taken from Roosvald, *Boken om Bokmässan*, 51, 63.

²¹ Cited in Roosvald, *Boken om Bokmässan*, 66. [my translation]

²² Per Andersson, “Sista mässan med gänget,” *Expressen*, September 13, 1990.

²³ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 153.

²⁴ Roosvald, *Boken om Bokmässan*, 74–82, 88–89.

²⁵ Ibid., 91–92.

²⁶ See Lisbeth Larsson and Christian Lenemark, “Bokbackanalen,” *Glänta*, no. 2–3 (2013): 50.

²⁷ These numbers are taken from Roosvald, *Boken om Bokmässan*, 91.

²⁸ Ibid., 174–75.

²⁹ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Value/evaluation,” 181.

³⁰ Onser Franzén, *Kulturens giganter*, 45. [my translation]

³¹ Daniel Sandström, “Litteraturen en vara—och ett sätt att vara,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, September 26, 2013. [my translation]

³² See Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, and Andreas Hyussen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

³³ Per Svensson, “Det kulturella knytkalaset,” *Sydsvenskan*, September 19, 2015. [my translation]

³⁴ Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value*, 127.

³⁵ Jim Collins, *Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

³⁶ Karin Olsson, “Välkomna till Kändismässan,” *Expressen*, September 13, 2015.

³⁷ *Kritiken*, Swedish Radio, P1, September 25, 2015.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Roosvald, *Boken om Bokmässan*, 96.

⁴³ Moeran, “The Book Fair,” 131–32.

⁴⁴ Kristian Ekenberg, “Bokmässans små...,” *Arbetsbladet*, September 27, 2015. [my translation]

⁴⁵ Andreas Ekström, “Det måste bli som jag säger,” *Sydsvenskan*, July 4, 2009. [my translation]

⁴⁶ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 166.

⁴⁷ Wenche Ommundsen, “Literary Festivals and Cultural Consumption,” *Australian Literary Studies* 24, no. 1, (2009): 19–34, and Michael Meehan, “The Word Made Flesh: Festival, Carnality, and Literary Consumption,” *TEXT: A Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, no. 4 (2005), accessed June 14, 2019, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue4/meehan.htm>.

⁴⁸ Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 85.

⁴⁹ “A Nordic Meeting Place,” accessed January 23, 2020, <https://goteborg-bookfair.com/home/rights-centre/nordic-meeting-place/>.

⁵⁰ See Göran Greider, author and one of Sweden’s foremost opinion makers on the left as a journalist, who views the Book Fair as “a literary carnival” conveying knowledge values, and above all, from his position as an author, constitutes a “nice break from writing

which is otherwise quiet and monotonous solitary work.” “Vad har du för förväntningar inför Bokmässan?”, *Göteborgs-Posten*, September 26, 2013. [my translation]

⁵¹ See James English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵² Roosvald, *Boken om Bokmässan*, 168.

⁵³ Camilla Jönsson, “Drömmar kring en bokmässa,” September 26, 2013, accessed May 16, 2019, <https://debutantbloggen.wordpress.com/2013/09/26/drommar-kring-en-bokmassa/>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Carina Bergfeldt, “Det enda värre än Bokmässan är att inte vara på Bokmässan,” *Aftonbladet*, September 23, 2013. [my translation]

⁵⁶ Rebecka Edgren Aldén, “Bokmässan 2015,” accessed June 14, 2019, <http://blogg.edgrenalden.se/2015/10/04/bokmassan-2015/>. [my translation]

⁵⁷ Moeran, “The Book Fair,” 135–36.

⁵⁸ “Vad har du för förväntningar inför Bokmässan?” [my translation]

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See Magnus Persson, “Litteraturfestivalen som offentlighet,” *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap*, no. 4 (2019): 82.

⁶¹ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 153–54, my emphasis.

⁶² Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 165–73.

⁶³ Millicent Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁶⁴ Weber, *Literary Festivals*, 82.

⁶⁵ Besides Driscoll’s and Weber’s already mentioned studies, see for example Giulia Rossetti and Bernadette Quinn’s exploration of some Irish literary festivals where they argue that “literary festivals can be understood as learning environments, and as arenas for individual embodied and objectified cultural capital acquisition where tourists can enhance their cultural knowledge, tastes and skills through participation.” Giulia Rossetti and Bernadette Quinn, “Learning at Literary Festivals,” in *Literary Tourism: Theories, Practice and Case Studies*, eds. Ian Jenkins and Katrín Anna Lund (Wallingford, UK: CABI, 2019), 108.

⁶⁶ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 159.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of “indexical authenticity” versus “iconic authenticity,” see Kent Grayson and Radan Martinec, “Consumer Perceptions of Iconicity and Indexicality

and Their Influence on Assessments of Authentic Market Offerings,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 31, no. 2 (September 2004): 297–98, doi:10.1086/422109.

⁶⁸ In this regard I have been inspired by Weber, who partly uses blogs as material for analyzing audience experiences at the literary festival. See Weber, *Literary Festivals*, 43–47, and Weber, “Conceptualizing Audience Experience in the Literary Festival,” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 29, no. 1 (February 2015): 84–96, doi:10.1080/10304312.2014.986058. As Weber argues, however, one should be aware that “online blogs are likely to be limited in their ability to provide a representative sample of the literary festival audience” (Weber, *Literary Festivals*, 47). Nevertheless, I argue that bloggers’ description of what they value about the Book Fair can point to the complexity of the fair from an audience perspective—that is, the fact that the fair is used for many different things depending on who the visitor is.

⁶⁹ Joe Moran, *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 154.

⁷⁰ Bokmania, “Bokmässan 2015 i korthet: Fredagens bildkavalkad,” accessed February 10, 2020, <http://www.bokmania.net/2015/09/bokmassan-2015-i-korthet-fredag.html>. [my translation].

⁷¹ Läsa och skriva, “Bokmässan 25/9,” accessed February 10, 2020, <https://lasaochskriva.com/category/bokmassan/>. [my translation]

⁷² Judit, “Sammanfattning Bokmässan,” accessed June 14, 2019, <https://beasbokhylla.blogg.se/2013/september/sammanfattning-bokmassan.html>. [my translation]

⁷³ Weber, *Literary Festivals*, 131.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 22–27, doi:10.2307/464648. See also Stewart, who in “The Culture of Contemporary Writers’ Festivals” uses Foucault’s concept of heterotopias, but without linking it to the audience experiences of the writers’ festivals she explores.

⁷⁵ In the following, unless otherwise stated, I refer to the anthology reproducing most of the central articles in the debate concerning *Nya Tider*’s participation at the Gothenburg Book Fair in 2016 and 2017: Mikael Löfgren, ed., *Ska man tala med nazister? Debatten kring Bokmässan och Nya Tider* (Göteborg: Nätverkstan, 2017).

⁷⁶ Martin Aagård, et al., “Håll rent mot rasism Bokmässan!,” *Expressen*, September 27, 2016.

⁷⁷ Göran Dahlberg, et al., “Öppet brev till Bok- och biblioteksmässan,” <http://glanta.org/oppet-brev-till-bok-och-biblioteksmassan/>; Ann Ighe and Marit Kapla, “Öppet brev till Bokmässan,” <http://www.tidskriftenordobild.se/ordoblogg/category/ppet-brev-till-bokmssan>. Both accessed June 14, 2019.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of literary festivals and scandals, see Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 204–214.

⁷⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

⁸⁰ “Bok & Bibliotek. Utställarprinciper,” in *Ska man tala med nazister? Debatten kring Bokmässan och Nya Tider*, ed. Mikael Löfgren (Göteborg: Nätverkstan, 2017), 362.

⁸¹ Ola Larsmo, “Why I Attended Gothenburg,” *Index on Censorship: The Global Magazine for Free Expression* 46, no. 4 (2017): 76.

⁸² Dominic Hinde, “Words Apart,” *Index on Censorship: The Global Magazine for Free Expression* 46, no. 4 (2017): 75.

⁸³ AFP, “Leading Author Joins Boycott of Swedish Book Fair Due to Extremist Newspaper’s Presence,” *The Guardian*, June 29, 2017.

⁸⁴ Arundhati Roy, “Därför kommer jag till Bokmässan i Göteborg,” trans. into Swedish by Peter Samuelsson, *Dagens Nyheter*, August 16, 2017. [my translation]

⁸⁵ Sölve Dahlgren, “Bokmässan 2017 tappade var femte besökare jämfört med 2016,” *Boktugg*, October 1, 2017, accessed February 12, 2020, <https://www.boktugg.se/2017/10/01/bokmassan-2017-tappade-var-femte-besokare-jamfort-med-2016/>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Tobias Holmgren, “Bokmässans VD slutar,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, October 25, 2017.

⁸⁸ “Inriktning för Bokmässan 2018 klar,” accessed February 12, <https://bokmassan.se/2017/11/inriktning-bokmassan-2018-klar/>.

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