

# Unleashing Science Popularisation

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Studies on Science as Popular Culture

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### **Abstract**

This thesis aims to broaden the concept of science popularisation. It argues that the conventional view of popularisation as the public communication of appropriately simplified versions of established facts to lay audiences fails to capture the multifaceted nature of popularisation practices through which science and popular culture are recombined. Drawing on perspectives from Science and Technology Studies and from Cultural Studies a number of case studies are presented in order to explore anew what can be analytically treated as science popularisation.

The thesis commences by critically interrogating the conventional view of popularisation as a way to enhance public understanding and appreciation of science in society. This thesis argues that science popularisation needs to be thought of as a meaning making process where much more than the understanding or misunderstanding of established scientific fact is at stake.

To extend the conventional view of popularisation, both science and popular culture are discussed in relation to constructivist theories and perspectives. For science, this means an emphasis on contingency in knowledge production where scientific practices are deprived of their 'specialness' and are considered more similar than different to other forms of ordinary human action. Similarly, Cultural Studies scholars have argued for an anthropological concept of culture emphasising meaning making processes and the very distinction between fine arts and ordinary culture as objects of study. From these two traditions the thesis borrows a set of theoretical and methodological tools to examine the meaning of science in popular culture.

Four studies have been carried out promoting an expanded concept of science popularisation. In "The First Swede in Space" the character and orientation of the conventional view of popularisation is explored in relation to the attention given to Sweden's first astronaut launched into space in 2006. In "Food Fight!" the strict division between knowledge production and dissemination implicit in the conventional view of science popularisation is problematised. In "The Advanced Liberal Logic of Nicotine Replacement", the idea that science popularisation is just as likely to come before as after the establishment of scientific fact is explored further. "Genetik i fiktion", finally, was written as a licentiate thesis and published in Swedish in 2006.

Keywords: science popularisation, popular culture, public understanding of science, science and the media.