



Concluding Remarks: The Power and Potential of the Concept *Sakprosa* (CPS): A Guided Tour Through Five *Topoi*

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Introduction

Let us imagine that the term *sakprosa* works like a mountain guide who leads us to places with a view to other places—or *topoi*—suitable for expanding our understanding of socially embedded utterances and texts. Coined by Finnish-Swedish Rolf Pipping in 1938, the term *sakprosa* is, until now, mostly developed in the mountain countries of Sweden and Norway. Maybe the success of the term and the concept, especially in Norway, can be explained through specific Nordic conditions, as Berge and Ledin implies in their chapter in this book. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the *sakprosa* concept may be of interest far beyond this region. The great obstacle is, however, that the potential in the prefix “sak” (close related to German “sach”) cannot be realized in today’s *lingua franca*.

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C. Nyström Höög et al. (eds.), *Nordic Perspectives on the Discourse of Things*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-33122-0_7

Neither “subject”, “objective”, “issue”, “cause” nor “case” are satisfactory synonyms to “sak”. I, therefore, recommend the Scandinavian idiom over time to be accepted as a foreign word to English, as has happened with the idioms, “slalom” and “ombudsman”.

In this chapter, for the most written as a commentary to my Nordic colleagues’ chapters in this book, I will start up by giving a brief presentation of the concept’s Scandinavian history. In the rest of the chapter, I will discuss its potentials by visiting five places or *topoi*, metaphorically named *the city*, *the anthill*, *the choir*, *the thing site*, and *the borderland*.

Sakprosa: From Anti-rhetorical Style to Textual Super-genre

The mountain guide, who in the following will be equipped with the initials CSP (the Concept of Sakprosa), starts by turning the historical binoculars placed on the mountain top towards her own genesis. She lets us see Finland during the run-up to World War II, where linguist Rolf Pipping, who had Swedish as his mother tongue, in 1938 introduced for the first time the idiom *sakprosa* about a particularly objective style that would respond to “the intellectual need for release” (Pipping 1938: 271–273). This style and the need for release stood in contrast to, respectively, an expressive style conditioned by emotional needs and a will-driven need producing persuasive texts. His article did not go down well with contemporary theories of literature, language, and communication (Englund et al. 2003: 39), but the term he proposed has gradually gained a significant foothold, though increasingly with a strongly changed content. To insist, as he did, on the value of an objective style in a time dominated by demagoguery and fake news, appears today as an ethically reasonable program (Tønnesson 2012: 143, 2019: 98–99). The perception of *sakprosa* as a style is, however, still alive, as Almström Persson’s present chapter illustrates (see also Englund et al. 2003: 36–42). In the Swedish Academy’s dictionary, the entire definition of *sakprosa* is “prose (style) without (distinct) artistic intentions, normal prose” (SAOB 2021), whereas in the Norwegian Academy’s dictionary one of two meanings is

“relatively sober and impersonal prose (such as in dissertations and textbooks); normal prose” (NAOB 2021, my translation).

Pipping’s justification for the term *sakprosa* has rightly been criticized for being anti-rhetorical, in that he wanted to push both emotions and consideration for the audience completely into the background (Berge 2001). Today, it is widely accepted that a well-functioning subject-oriented text, as rhetoricians have always known, includes all three Aristotelian *pisti*: that is, *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*.

Moreover, CPS quickly became a genre concept that encompassed large parts of the non-fictional part of literary prose, such as essay writing, travelogues, and scholarly literature. In parallel, the genres’ common property *non-fiction*, seems to have become more dominating, at the benefit of stylistic criteria, in the understanding of *sakprosa*. This is not at least the case in Denmark, where the Danish national dictionary symptomatically defines “sagprosa” just as “Factual, not fictional, prose” (in Danish: “Saglig, ikke opdigtet, prosa”). From the early 1950s, *sakprosa*-texts were included in Sweden’s and Norwegian school curricula (Englund et al. 2003; Eide 2010; Skjeltbred 2010). This must, of course, have promoted the frequency of the idiom in various contexts.¹

When the first Norwegian research project on Norwegian *sakprosa* began in 1994, the premise was that books and journals were *the sakprosa* media. However, the Swedish research project that started two years later wanted to study “the much read”, which also included small print, newspapers, magazines, and speeches (Svensson 1999). Such criteria will be discussed in the final part of the present chapter. Several definitions concerning CPS’ intentional (text-internal) and extensional (text-external) aspects have been in circulation, but today it is common to include texts in a large variety of genres and media—from the instructions via the textbook to documentaries and doctoral dissertations. In Denmark, there is a tradition of using “non-fiction” mostly about texts outside the literary institution (Detlef 1988; Fibiger 2007). Since the turn of the millennium, the internet has obviously become both a medium and a

¹ A search in the comprehensive, digital Norwegian national bibliography *Bokhylla* which covers the period up to 2010 shows that the word did not appear in Norwegian books or newspapers before 1950. In the period 1960–1969 it was used 99 times in books and 200 times in newspapers, while it was used 2157 times in books and 11663 times in newspapers in the period 2000–2009.

communication channel for a major part of *sakprosa* (see Andersen's chapter in this book), which raises new issues inside and outside what I will name "the borderland". One can truly, with Berge and Ledin (in this book), talk about "the vast and dynamic field of non-fictional texts".

In addition, *sakprosa* has, most of all in Norway, been a keyword for a series of cultural-political efforts to promote non-fiction literature and to raise awareness of the textuality of a wide genre of utterances in politics, government, business, and daily life (search for "The relatively strong position" in Brinch and Nergaard's chapter in this book). The present chapter will argue that our mountain guide (CSP) is capable to contribute both descriptively and normatively to the study and practices of this large field of texts.

Methodology

This commentary will address the potential for scholarly activity in the, until recently, exclusively Nordic concept of *sakprosa*. Reading the other chapters in this book forms an important basis for this discussion. Inspired by the *inventio* phase of classical rhetoric, I have, as already mentioned, organized the discussion as a rhetorical journey. Wanderings in the *silva rhetorica*, the rhetorical forest, or in this case the mountain, to identify relevant *topoi* (Greek) or *loci* (Latin) is, of course, a classic-rhetorical way of establishing an argument (Aristotle 2007, book XII; Gabrielsen 2011; Söderberg 2017; Tønnesson and Sivesind 2016). Instead of naming my topics conventionally as, for example, the Community, the Societal Organism, the Political and Forensic Institutions, the Text, and the Definitions, which are all conventionalized metaphors (cf. the tradition following Lakoff and Johnson 1980), I suggest some less conventionalized ways of grasping "places in the landscape of consciousness, branches on the tree of ideas", as O. Tøgeby once defined *topoi* (1986).

The present chapter is not an empirical study but an academic meta-discussion based on rhetoric, guided by a purpose: I want to argue that *sakprosa* has not only academic potential as social facts to study. In my opinion, it is also a concept well fit to discuss and strengthen the quality

of socially and culturally important texts in a democratic-ethical perspective. In my doctoral dissertation (2004), I did close reading of two texts in this genre where the authors argued for the value of “discourse analysis” and “psychoanalysis” as methodological tools in historical science. According to my analyses, both authors created, with varying degrees of success, a certain type of multivocality, where opponents were let into the texts. Still the “melody voice” was not to be mistaken. It is my hope that the present chapter has some similar qualities.

The Five *Topoi*

The City

From the mountain top the guide (CSP) shows us a city in the distance. She points to it and says: In this city there is not, as in antiquity, one square (agora), but a multitude of squares where people meet, express themselves, and exchange texts. Originally, “prose” meant colloquial speech, and prose may still connote the utterances in the streets and squares and today’s sites of social media. Today “prose”, however, is most often understood as written texts, and prose does also connote literary ambitions.² If the utterances shall make good sense for those who interact, norms must be developed that can give the utterances status as texts. Textual norms do not only distinguish between texts and utterances that are not (yet) texts, but also between texts of higher and lower quality, and thus decide who gets a breakthrough in the squares of the city (*search for* “an instantiation of a text norm” in Berge and Ledin in this book). There are a great number of buildings in the city, and the norms for utterances vary greatly between them. What is inappropriate in the church fits well in the town hall, and what makes good sense in the courthouse can be almost incomprehensible in the café. In the academy, all ideas must be

² Cf. this part of Merriam Websters definition of prose: «a literary medium distinguished from poetry especially by its greater irregularity and variety of rhythm and its closer correspondence to the patterns of everyday speech»

allowed, but the text norms here are particularly strict (*search for* “the research article” in Brinch and Nergaard’s chapter in this book).

Most of the utterances and texts in the city describe and comment things in a directly and tangible way, but often people compose narratives or create allegories and metaphors, to get their points across and engage the audience. Poets, novelists, and playwrights are those who take the time to process the language and the composition of the text in the smallest detail. In this way, their prose becomes “*belle lettres*” with certain artistic qualities. But even many of those who do not regard themselves as creators of art, understand that the old Latin commandment *Rem tene, verba sequentur* (grasp the subject, and the words will follow) does not hold true. The words do *not* come by themselves. Even when prose, not to mention poetry, is to write about the world and reality without establishing a fictional or abstract-poetic contract with the reader, one must work hard with what the rhetoricians call the *elocutio* phase. This is, however, not really a separate phase, but a process fused with *inventio* and *dispositio*, the phases where the *rhetor* seeks out knowledge from various *topoi* to build arguments and arrange them.

Text norms are often based on well-known genres, from everyday greetings and letters via the school’s written assignments to the newspaper report. Following Miller (1984), genres should be considered as formalized responses to recurring challenges in what Berge (1990) named text cultures. On the other hand, genre innovation often means shaping new text norms, as shown by Berge and Ledin’s examples in this book of children’s utterances and the genesis of the newspaper genres. Such innovation or evolution (Miller 2016) is often to be regarded as responses to political challenges. Koskela, Enell-Nilsson, and Hjerpe’s meticulous inquiry in the present book of minor changes in the genre systems of Finnish business Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports provides valuable insight in the ways that mighty actors navigate rhetorically in a landscape of commercial, political, and ethical demands. One finding is that the correspondence between naming and content of a genre may often be blurred, a fact we must believe has consequences for the reception of such seemingly socially responsible reports. Almström Persson’s inquiry in this book is also about genre innovation. Not very far from

Finnish firms' alternation between traditional reports and websites, we learn that contemporary Swedish authorities alternate between classic internet-based information and social media communication during crises. In both cases, the technological preconditions seem to determine innovations in style and content.

Many inhabitants of the city commute between different buildings and thus between text cultures with their specific norms. The city (or nation, region, continent) certainly has its "Öffentlichkeit", a common public sphere with a dominant text culture. But many buildings have historically been closed to parts of the city's population. They have had to build their own houses—in Scandinavia literally "Folkets hus" (houses for the people)—or they have had to meet in their homes to read and study to prepare for a struggle that may not yet be fully defined. Here, too, some actors may choose to create fictions to promote their interest. But first and foremost, the rhetorical struggle is fought through *sakprosa*. In the history of the Nordic welfare model, such popular association activity has been a vital emancipative force.

One of the most exciting activities for the text historian is to examine how new text cultures are created, either through the renewal of old genres or on the ruins of them. Such renewal can be determined by technologically and materially changes, as described by Andersen in this book. Renewal also takes place when new groups break into the common sphere, as convincingly and well-documented described in *sakprosa* professor Anders Johansen's rhetorical history of the emergence of Norwegian democracy, *Komme til orde* ("Have a say"; 2019). In Brinch and Nergaards chapter, we learn about how a non-fiction writers' education—once founded to make a less prestigious group of authors having a say—contributed to the establishment of what they name a new epistemic environment. As teachers in the programme, they reason self-reflective on how an educational programme in *sakprosa* writing can create students as "sheep, watchdogs and wolves" who, respectively, reproduce, renew, and exceed the environment's text norms. These writers in this text culture should be understood as individual *authors* with identities far from the collective *sakprosa* writer in, for example, the bureaucracy, one of the institutions constituting our next *topos*.

The Anthill

Just below the tree line, we can imagine the mountain guide drawing attention to an anthill. Up to half a million ants work here with a huge number of specialized tasks. In the human anthill, we are not, contrary to the city, very concerned with discussing and developing new textual norms, but just with getting the job done. In an age of automation and digitization, however, the job is not primarily to transport building materials by hand and convey eggs to the queen ant. Instead, or in addition to physical work, most people in occupational work such as truck drivers, home carers, and shop assistants exchange utterances and texts (Karlsson 2006). Of course, many of us produce, give, and exchange physical goods and services, but more and more of the tools to achieve these goods and services are semiotically mediated. Before ordering an item online, we often go through fairly large amounts of texts to find the item in question (Andersen 2021). The order itself, which today is often identical to the payment, has more the character of a directive speech act than yesterday's handover of coins and banknotes. After ordering, there may be a series of alerts about where the item is in the transport chain, and finally we receive the confirmation that we can pick it up, now for the first time as a physical artifact. If we are dissatisfied and want to complain and return the item, we again must deal with several texts, that is, cultural artifacts. We have thus been through an entire chain of utterances and texts where the physical actions themselves only constitute one or two links (cf. my brief discussion on circulation below). Here, too, it makes good sense to call the texts *sakprosa*, as they are often about very specific matters and because the word "prose", if connoted to literary ambitions, can remind us of how important the texts' design and language is to make them function. Hence, we can describe such non-fiction texts as *functional* because they are so intimately connected with their intended functions (Tønnesson 2012: 34).

The same applies to public services. Applying for and receiving or not receiving welfare benefits involve huge cycles of texts, often in writing, and almost always on the internet. For most of us ants, this can be a relief: What previously required paper, mailing, and phone calls can now be

replaced with a series of customized operations on a smartphone. Artificial intelligence is about to make application processes redundant: the machines ensure we get the welfare benefits we are entitled to. In this contemporary and slightly futuristic context, the ant metaphor actually becomes even more apt than applied to previous societal formations: today we automate communication. By becoming aware that the frequently robotized utterances are still semiotically mediated, we have the opportunity to become less naïve and obedient “recipients”. Despite the positive possibility to interact by answering standard questions like “Did this answer help you?”, it has been argued that our role as readers is diminished in the digital service system (*search for* “interaction is changed from the act of reading” in Andersen’s chapter in this book). When considering the form which we have in front of us as a text, where the authorities and ourselves are both authors and readers, we may realize that both the text and genre could have been different. The ant may stop and reflect before wandering its daily route around its tuft. Through such reflection, the inhabitants can strengthen their rhetorical citizenship (Kock and Villadsen 2012; Seljeseth 2021; *see also* “nowhere is the citizen invoked as citizen” in Andersen’s chapter). And by naming the texts *sakprosa*, we can at the same time draw critical attention to the *sak* (case/subject/object/fact/issue) and the prose. Clear or plain language has for a long time been a field of research, education, and public communication among Nordic *sakprosa* researchers, especially in Sweden. In Norway, there has been a strong growth in this field during the last ten years as the result of governmental efforts in combination with new educational programmes and research initiatives (Nord et al. 2015; Tønnesson 2021).

Jack Andersen’s chapter in this book describes and theorizes the technological preconditions for interaction through *sakprosa* in today’s ant-hill. His task is to promote

**an understanding in sakprosa research of digital media as not an opposition to sakprosa, but rather as a material condition in digital culture, just as print has been some time ago.*

A well-known feature in media history is human’s tendency to use old technologies to understand the new ones. Certainly, much *sakprosa*

research, not only text-historical studies, is still bound to printed media, even when the texts are digitally communicated. The interweave of archive, database, and algorithms in today's circulation of texts opens for great opportunities. But also, as numerous scandals during the last decade have revealed, it opens for until now unknown forms of abuse of power as well.

To regulate power and interest is not the anthill's business, but the task of another hill, to which we will soon return. But how is communication done in the city and in the anthill?

The Choir

On a mountain top, an entire choir has lined. The guide tells us that they are about to perform songs composed or arranged according to three principles: One-voiced (monophonic) song, multi-voiced song with a clear melody (homophony), and polyphonic song where the voices are independent, where no one is unequivocally subordinate to another voice (Tønnesson 2001, 2004, 2007). This model sounds well with the etymology of the word *textus*, which originally means "tissue". The textual piece can consist of a single thread, but most often several voices are woven together. Polyphony fits best with the fictional prose, as Bakhtin has argued in his famous study of Dostoevsky's poetics (1984). Most of the non-fiction is multi-voiced, though homophonic, as stated by Bakhtin himself. When Julia Kristeva coined the word "intertextuality" in 1966, it was to a great degree inspired by Bakhtin, and the connection between voices and texts-in-texts are today regarded as obvious.

In the present book, Koskela, Enill-Nilsson, and Hjerpe contribute to intertextual theory by proposing three forms of intertextuality, distinct from the "phonic" models above: convergence, adaptation, and divergence. They acknowledge these to be intertextual strategies. This taxonomy enlighten our understanding of genre change in general, as well as in the politically and commercially important topics sustainability and social responsibility.

As we learn in Berge and Ledin's chapter, there has been a strong development in the understanding of what texts are, or can be, during the last

50 years. This process is described as a move from text linguistics, with its strong emphasis on internal cohesion and coherence via more contextually oriented studies, to multimodal and sociosemiotic textual research that first and foremost considers the text as a cultural artifact. Most such artifacts of today are not only multimodal—multimodality should be regarded as a feature for all texts—(Ledin et al. 2019)—but *utmost* multimodal. Andersen informs us in his chapter about radically technological changes that shape new conditions for *sakprosa*, and thereby a demand for a new understanding of CSP. He pinpoints that digital texts are no longer multimedia, there is only one integrated medium. A most often very multimodal one, we must add.

The text—or chorus—sings in a unique situation every time the choral work is performed. Moreover, the text is performed not only for us but also with the choir itself as addressee. This tension between the speaker-in-text's self-communication, with its Bakhtinian latent corresponding utterances, and a more outward communication, forms the first of six constitutive features of text, according to Berge and Ledin (search for *unique situated utterances* in their chapter). The next two constitutive features in their list are that all texts are semiotically mediated, as we have already indicated, and that the text, although it can be part of long, intertextual chains, has clear boundaries that make it possible for the addressee to respond to it. An interesting result in Almström Persson's chapter is concerning such boundaries: Somewhat contra-intuitive, the stylistic features of the actual Swedish authorities' ordinary information on the internet and their communication in social media do not blur but co-exist in parallel.

The next constitutive feature in Berge and Ledin's list is that any text has a genre-determined inner structure. To reconstruct this structure, frame models and identification of explicit and implicit voices are often more productive than using linear or two-dimensional models like, for example, Propp's old actant model.

Despite being Berge/Ledin's two final characteristics of the text, we remember that the mountain guide chose to start with introducing the relationship between text cultures and text norms by her first topos, "the city".

Due to latent opposing class and identity interests both in the anthill and the city, a large amount of the *sakprosa* texts is about negotiation and struggle.

The Thing Site

Our mountain guide thus points to an elevation in the landscape down in the valley, a tinghaug—a site for “things” in the Viking ages, which was both a place for forensic and deliberative negotiation, cf. today’s terms at the democratic national assemblies in Denmark, Iceland, and Norway: the Folketing, the Allting and the Storting, or the Norwegian “tinghuset”, meaning a courthouse. At the thing site, exchange of utterances and texts have been crucial from the first moment; the assemblies were supposed to replace or at least regulate the use of physical force, as known from the emergence of rhetoric in Greek antiquity.

In courthouses and parliaments there has always been controversy over the prose in general as over concepts. Conservatism in debates on law language reform is, as an example, well-founded in the argument that an established legal concept has a long forensic interpretation history and should not be disturbed by efforts to make the language plain or clear. This dilemma has called for *sakprosa* studies which have to be sensitive towards legal traditions specific for regions and nations (Orrbén 2020). In politics: what does the concept “freedom” mean, for example? It is a word that everyone acknowledges, but partly interprets diametrically opposite. Another utmost polysemic word of our time is “sustainability”, an idiom that really entered the globally verbal war zone with the Brundtland Commission’s report *Our Common Future* in 1987. Episodes from this “war” has been studied in recent *sakprosa* research, as documented in Koskela, Enell-Nilsson and Hjerpe’s chapter and its reference list. While power may be hidden by subtle textual strategies in The Anthill and is distributed unfairly among text cultures in the City, the deliberative and forensic assemblies should be regarded as places for open and legitimate exercise of power. This calls for *sakprosa* studies of chains of governmental texts, not at least concerning of the powerful report genre (Bjørkdahl 2018).

Law texts are, globally, in the core of the “sak” in all discussions about plain language in communication between authorities and citizens. Very few letters are sent, or forms filled, without an explicit or implicit juridical component in the text. In an “anthill” perspective, plain language is very much a question of effectivity. In the “thing site” perspective, however, it is about handling the necessarily asymmetric power relation between institutions with the authority to distribute welfare benefits as well as to prosecute and punish—and the public. A necessary precondition for the rule of law is, of course, a reciprocal confidence between the police, the forensic institutions, and the public. This confidence is for the most shaped by utterances and texts.

The thing site will nevertheless serve here as a metaphor for deliberation and ensuring rule of law in a much broader sense. First, the conditions for politically and legally informed *sakprosa* are determined by the today’s “things”. When there are genre renewals and negotiations related to the slogan “sustainability” in Finnish companies’ annual reports, they are partly stimulated by law and political orders and partly by companies’ desire to make profit and secure their reputation. Here, CSP can be helpful for the understanding of small changes in the way the *sak* is constructed through prose.

Nonetheless, the arenas of democracy and the rule of law do also consist of the common, public conversation. “The authorities of the state shall”, it is stated in the “freedom of expression clause” (§ 100) in the Norwegian constitution which was revised in 2004 (The Constitution), “create conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse”. Public discourse may concern major political topics, as well as current affairs like the two crises in Stockholm analysed in this volume (*see* Almström Persson in this book). Somewhat contra-intuitive and encouraging, the main conclusion in that chapter, based on Critical Discourse Analysis, is that the authorities did a good job, with one important exception—that they chose to be silent when they had no new news to present. To translate this into a Norwegian constitutional discourse: They succeeded in facilitating an open and enlightened discourse.

Rhetorical citizenship is a condition for being able to participate in this open and enlightened conversation in the public sphere. Democracy erodes if this citizenship is not maintained, developed, and expanded.

The undoubted democratic potential of the internet with its blogs and other social media has gradually been strongly challenged, even counteracted, by the innumerable algorithms sat in turn by the major communications giants. This is another justification for broad as well as narrow *sakprosa* studies.

In my opinion, it is fully legitimate for *sakprosa* researchers to engage in open and enlightened discussions in the political domain. As intellectuals, our right to do so is obvious. As researchers we should be encouraged to contribute to public debates where our academic competence is relevant. Our topics and perspectives have certainly often political implications. The most explicit political text in this volume is discussing the somewhat political mountain guide—the CSP herself. Brinch and Nergaard take a critical stance to the legitimacy of, with financial support from a writers' copyright fund, to build what they name an epistemic culture with *sakprosa* as its unifying episteme. For this reason, I will stage a short dispute at the thing site, with myself as a combatant. I quote:

What are the cultural, political, and social impacts on a society's cultural life and knowledge production when one institution has the economic power to introduce and support a new field of study and its associated research and publications? (Brinch and Nergaard in this book)

This is a legitimate question, raised by two very competent actors in the epistemic culture in question. Being another actor with high involvement in the mentioned strategic work as well as in the academic activities for a quarter of a century, I will answer: The internal structures of the academic, the literary and cultural-political institutions, as well as the school, have for a long time been in favour of literary fiction as privileged objects of study and promotion. In addition, the level of consciousness about everyday texts as culturally important and powerful artifacts has been low. When an association of non-fiction writers chose to put their copyright revenue into a collective fund and spend some of this fund's income to stimulate academia to cultivate *sakprosa* and *text* as skill and area of knowledge, this is highly legitimate.

This said, academia must of course have full freedom to make their own choices when it comes to theory, methods, topics, and perspectives, not at least when research involves critique of one's own sponsor.

The Borderland

The mountain guide has now focused his and our eyes on *topoi* that include almost all texts and utterances in the past, present, and future. She points to the horizon in all compass points. Does no outer border exist to the land of *sakprosa*? If any borders, where are they, and which texts are in the borderlands? Self-ironically, she quotes Shakespeare:

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, the cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve. And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind. (1998/1611: 19)

If CPS is to cover everything, it will mean nothing. Berge and Ledin mentions this dilemma briefly in this volume (*search for* “the notion of *sakprosa* is too wide”). However, they do not point to other solutions than the demarcation towards “belle lettres” before they propose an epistemological basis for continued *sakprosa* research. This is in line with how Englund, Ledin, and Svensson reasoned in 2003 (p. 36):

both a shopping list and a scientific dissertation become sakprosa. This also means that sakprosa can hardly be regarded as a scientific concept in the narrow sense—it is simply too wide. Rather, it becomes a kind of compass that points to texts that for various reasons are not considered fiction and to different text cultures. (My translation)

I wrote in the introduction to these concluding remarks that the idiom's meaning has partly changed from Pipping's concept of style to a concept of an increasingly global super-genre. How can the concept still become academically beneficial and politically-culturally valuable? Should the research community draw some borders?

Descriptiveness Versus Normativity

Our first possible borderline goes between description and assessment and will be a follow-up of my reasoning about ethically engaged research above. Should the ambitions in *sakprosa* research be just to map the textual worlds or also to change the world? All chapters in the present anthology seem at the first glance to be basically ambitious in their *descriptive* ambitions: Through their critical-constructive perspectives on CSP, they widen our insights in some significant historically and contemporary areas in a vast and dynamic field of texts. Is analytical description the single purpose for the research field to be internationally introduced in this volume?

This is of course a rhetorical question, but the mandatory “no” must be a nuanced one. I will recommend a moderate normativity. Such research practice may be illustrated by some examples from the current volume: Berge and Ledin’s chapter is a significant contribution to text theory *sakprosa* with texts in the core. This implies that they support—normatively—the efforts to study a vast field of texts which have been strongly under-acknowledged in literary studies and not sufficiently understood by linguists. In addition, it is further fully possible to interpret the chapters analysis of the child Espen’s drawing as an acknowledgment of children’s capabilities in re-shaping culture. Even more implicitly normative is the attention of Norwegian peasants Einar and Reier’s achievements to have a say towards the authorities in the eighteenth century.

Koskela, Enill-Nilsson, and Hjerpe’s conclusion is not explicitly political, but a potential interpretation of the following quote is that the authors are sceptical to the values underlined by me: **“A potential interpretation is offered by the ideological dispute of neoliberal free market economy and government regulation vs. self-regulation”*. Almström Persson’s analysis of crisis communication ends up with implicit recommendations to the authorities concerning choices of style and media.

Jack Andersen’s critique is partly directed towards *sakprosa* researchers for not taking the radical consequences of digitalization sufficiently into consideration. This is a normativity in line with existing norms concerning scientific debate, though the wordings are tough, in that his colleagues’

indifference implicitly is characterized as “close to foolish and not least [...] arrogant and ignorant”. His chapter also includes a critical-normative stance towards Danish government’s all-in-one public website *borger.dk* for being individualistic and lacking “appeal to the public institution as a public good”. Additionally, in the description of his second example, the SAGE publishing system, there is an immanent critique of the technology’s power over academic publications, hence over academic research as a whole. It goes without saying that his re-use of German media researcher Friedrich Kittler’s somewhat prophetic expression from 1990 “the *unarticulated* as background of all media” (my italics) in the discussion on today’s algorithmic power does inherit normative assessment.

Brinch and Nergaard’s critical stance, mentioned above, towards the effective, copyright-financed efforts to support *sakprosa* as an epistemic culture is clearly normative, as is their three-phased strategy for authors’ education.

Is, then, the promotion of *good sakprosa* a legitimate task for researchers in their research activities, or does this produce a non-scientific bias? In literary studies, it is an obvious task to identify and assess the qualities of literary texts and cultivate norms for this scholarly activity. Controversies around norms will arise, and this may cause a shift of paradigm. When it comes to everyday *sakprosa*, plain or clear language are frequently used as normative concepts. A crucial motivation for plain language research is just to promote plainness, though there are ethically grounded controversies around what plainness means (Seljeseth 2021). First, in dialogue with plain language activists, the researchers’ contribution should be to offer solid research-based knowledge, and correct non-scholarly perceptions, for example, the popular belief that nominalization—to make a substantive of a verb—a *priori* promotes unclearness. On the other hand, the researcher’s motive will most often be to promote clear language for the sake of democracy, the rule of law, effectiveness, or other values.

In conclusion, I will argue that no border should be drawn around the field of *sakprosa* research that excludes ethically grounded normativity. However, this does not imply a recommendation of a restitution of Marxist-feminist ideology-critical research practices well known from the 1960s and 1970s, where narrow ideological standpoints pre-determined the results of the analyses. Neither does it call for an academic activity of

today where researchers are obliged to demonstrate solidaric humbleness towards all social groups who claim respect for just their identity project. *Sakprosa* research should neither return to a positivist position apparently free from values, where the researcher's ethical situatedness is hidden, or the opposite: Activist research where the results are prefabricated.

“The great globe itself, Yea, all which it inhabit”

Which genres, modalities, and texts should be excluded from CSP to make it operational?³ Our suggestion for a definition of “sakprosa” (Tønnesson 2012/2008) was launched as a practical or pragmatic definition, not an absolute and philosophically fully acceptable one. The most voluminous part of our definition delimits the *sakprosa* universe and divides it into two:

[...] *Sakprosa*-texts communicate through verbal language, but often this happens in interaction with other sign systems.

Literary *sakprosa* are texts written by named authors and published by publishers. The authors are understood here as individuals. The author addresses himself as an independent writer to a public sphere that is publicly available. In literary *sakprosa*, all literary means are available, [...]. The media of literary *sakprosa* are currently electronic and printed books, booklets and magazines.

Functional *sakprosa* are publicly available texts written by private or public institutions or by named or unnamed individuals. The authorship should be understood as collective. The author addresses himself as a writer on behalf of an institution towards the general public or other institutions. The genre requirements of this *sakprosa* are intimately associated with their intended function. Functional *sakprosa* media range from books via newspapers radio, brochures, and subtitles, and includes a variety of Internet media. (Tønnesson 2012: 34, my translation).

³Though I was the author of the book *Hva er sakprosa. (What is sakprosa)* (Tønnesson 2008/2012) where a definition was launched in 2008/2012, a larger environment of researchers and students had taken part in the previous discussions. Hence, I use second person plural in the following.

Let us briefly comment on the parts of the “great globe” which are excluded by this definition:

Totally non-verbal texts: It would, of course, be possible to regard a picture or a piece of instrumental program music as “prose”. But to do so, we reasoned, would mean to water down the CSP too much. Hopefully, perspectives from *sakprosa* research can inspire experts in e.g., musical, and visual communication and vice versa. As “interaction with other sign systems” indicates, multimodal texts should not be excluded, quite the contrary (Ledin et al. 2019).

In *sakprosa* studies, relevant contexts must always be taken into consideration. Often the text will be part of a chain of non-verbal utterances and actions that together can explain the phenomenon we are studying. After describing, among other things, a process of diagnosis and communicative processes concerning a fetus with heart defects, Anna-Malin Karlsson and Mats Landqvist have argued:

If none of these [multi-semiotic and pragmatic processes. JLT.] were to be regarded as sakprosa, in our opinion sakprosa would be a very narrow concept that does not contribute sufficiently to our understanding of texts as a resource for fact-based knowledge building in the public. (Karlsson and Landqvist 2018, my translation)

There should be no reason to exclude such research of processes and circulation of texts and practices from *sakprosa* research (cf. Maybin 2017; Sörlin 2017).

Anonymous authors of literary texts: this is not an important point of exclusion, as such authors may very well be regarded as named through analogy.

Texts published by non-publishers: this criterion is slightly problematic in a period of rapid changes in publication practices, as texts from own publishers or texts published in authors’ blogs are excluded.

Texts that are not publicly available: this is not problematic with regard of literary *sakprosa*, since the definition obviously connotes the literary institution, where the notion of “publishing” is synonymous with public publishing. But the definition has been intelligently challenged by

scholars studying the semi-public genres of social media (Juuhl 2013; *see also* Berge and Ledin in this book, *search* “social media”). The private/public border is often blurred, following information-technological innovation.

“The baseless fabric of this vision?”

More disputable are these excerpts of the definition:

Sakprosa are texts that the addressee has reasons to perceive as direct utterances about reality.

[... in literary non-fiction, all literary means are available,] if the contract of the fundamental, direct connection with reality is maintained.

This formulation, which is a further development of Danish Claus Detlef’s definition (1988: 6), anticipates some objections (cf. Berge and Ledin in this book):

There do not exist any direct utterances about reality: this is true, as any linguist after Saussure probably will agree in. However, in the *doxa*, the contemporary system of common senses we identify with, it is a common perception that factual texts have a *more* direct relation to reality than fiction texts have. In everyday conversations, as in literary texts, we expect an implicit contract between text and reader/listener which says: Text A is factual, text B is fictional, and text C is something in-between.

The definition is essentialist, in that it states that the relationship text/world is an ontological matter: This is not the case. The definition refers only to the addressees’ ontological anticipations, cf. the statement from Englund, Ledin, and Svensson from 2003 (p. 45):

A [...] division between non-fiction and fiction is made by Detlef (1988), whose reasoning lands in an explicit definition: “A sakprosa text is a text that the addressee—based on his expectations—perceives as a direct statement about reality. The expectations are created i.e. in the context of the text. “Note that the definition must be seen as non-essentialist. (My translation)

Due to the two objections above, it is of course legitimate to criticize our definition for defending a naïve and conservative perception about the text/world relationship. Such legitimate critique is raised in Brinch and Nergaard's chapter in this volume. However, I (the following is my sole contribution) do not find the basic distinction factual/fictional neither naïve nor contra-progressive, in that I have proposed "the *regime of accountability*" as a precondition for vivid democracies:

Democracy is based on trust at all levels: Voters must have confidence that the candidate they are voting for will act accountable. Candidates must mean what they say, and they must not speak out against knowing better when they state facts. How can voters trust a candidate who is missing one clarified relationship to the distinction between fiction and reality? If politicians express themselves falsely according to general perceptions of the distinction between truth and untruth, it gives a good reason to cast them at the next election, if not sooner. (Tønnesson 2012: 128, my translation)

These words were published five years before Donald Trump was elected president, and they may sound naïve in light of political history in the last decennium: Many democracies are less arenas of truth-seeking deliberation than of harsh struggle and verbal wars. In my opinion, this development gives no reason to give up the *accountability regime* as an ideal.

Certainly, the response to fake news and the decline of sincerity may easily turn into primitive positivism, as I warned in 2012 (pp. 140–141):

An extreme defense [of the accountability regime] is often provided by scientists who want to distance themselves from all "alternative" thinking and who find it pressing to define such as a hoax. Such accountability fundamentalists will often be anti-religious and show little professional interest in phenomena that obviously cannot be handled with reason alone: love, intuition, the sublime—to name a few. And in the journalistic community, we can come across many actors which can be called fact-fetishists.

However, in my opinion, today's political situation globally asks for a basic amount of sincerity, accountability, and *saklighet* (German:

sachlichkeit), as the brutal international context asked for in 1938, when Pipping coined this essay's core idiom.

Sakprosa should be regarded as a social fact, two chapters state in this volume (Brinch and Nergaard; Berge and Ledin). I agree. Obviously, to regard *sakprosa* as a transhistorical and universal ontological genre, based on presumed common human worldviews stored like universal grammars in brains of *Homo sapiens*, would be to ignore the major achievements in philosophical thinking in social science and the humanities during the last 70 years. On the other side: we—researchers, teachers, intellectuals, writers, and readers—and all other citizens—ought to use our capacities to consciously create and cultivate social facts along the way. There should be no opposition between studying and cultivating cultural and social facts like *sakprosa*, and “singing” in choirs that promote ethically desirable changes at the thing sites, as well as in cities, anthills, and borderlands.

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