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A sovereign abode

Democracy, discipline and deliberation in a Swedish housing
association from 1943 to the present

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Master's thesis SOCM04 30 credits

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Supervisor: Carl-Göran Heidegren

ABSTRACT

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Since its inception, the discipline of sociology has struggled to bridge the gap between structure and agency. How is it that individuals can be free whilst also part of a larger context that determines their actions? This study aims to make a small contribution towards solving this conundrum. It departs from the theories of Habermas, Arendt and Machiavelli, and ventures into an archival study of a Swedish housing association, chronicling how it grappled with this very issue over the eight decades of its existence. It concludes that autonomy – and the agency that follows from it – is something that has to be deliberated into being in a collective setting. It also concludes that housing associations as an organizational form, whilst structurally a potential site for such deliberations, do not guarantee that they take place, and that the hard-won lessons of deliberative decision-making have to be kept alive in practical use, lest they be forgotten.

Keywords: autonomy, civil society, collective decision-making, freedom, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas.

Popular science summary

This thesis studies the archives of a housing association (bostadsrättsförening), and analyses the history of the association in terms of freedom and necessity. Freedom is the things you want to do. Necessity is the things you have to do. By looking at how freedom and necessity log heads over the course of eight decades, the thesis comes to the conclusion that necessity has a tendency to win out over freedom, and that it takes a tremendous amount of work to get to a point where all the necessary things are done to such a degree that the freely chosen things can be done. It also takes a considerable amount of time. Learning the necessary things is a project in and of itself, and during the history of the association it often turned out to be the only project that time allowed for. More often than not, when a board got comfortable in the role of steering the association, it resigned and replaced itself with new members, who had to learn from scratch all over again. Thus, the time for freedom never came; necessity ruled the day.

This thesis concludes that in order to assert its freedom, an organization (such as a housing association) has to have two things. The first is that it needs members who are willing to take on the roles of functionaries within the organization, such that the work gets done. The second is that the organization needs to put in place routines and a set of traditions that allow members to learn what needs to be done, and what potential freedom opens up once those things are done. Having one or the other is insufficient. Without members, nothing happens; without routines and traditions, every new generation of members have to learn everything from scratch each time. Only when the two act in concert are the domains of freedom opened, and the struggle to keep afloat turned into a project of collectively deciding what is to be done. The aim is to get to a point where everyone involved feels like they have a say in where the organization is heading, and knows how to say it in a way that makes a difference.

Deeper joy is the issue of deeper refinement; and so, instead of immediate joy, the Lord led you into the discipline of severity, that the chords of your soul might be rendered more sensitive, that so to their more delicate responsiveness there might be given more exquisite delight. You asked for sovereign beauty, spiritual beauty; you asked that "the beauty of the Lord" might be upon you. You know not what you asked; for between you and that sovereignty there lies Gethsemane, with its exhausting but beautifying ministries of intercessory prayer and sacrifice. You are asking for heaven, for a sovereign abode in the seats of the blest. You know not what you ask!

John Henry Jowett

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1. Introduction

Home is a decision. In the most fundamental sense, it is the decision that this is the place where I shall reside; this is my abode. Home is also the site for many further decisions, big and small. Most small decisions (what shall I have for dinner tonight?) tend to be forgotten as the years pass by, while the big decisions (who shall share this space with me?) are remembered with crystal clarity. In all things, home is where it happens. And as such, home is a site of intense sociological interest.

Sociology tackles the tension between structure and agency. On the one hand, human beings tend to be determined by the social structures they find themselves in, acting in predictable patterns; on the other hand, individuals do not tend to view themselves as structurally determined agents lacking agency. To paraphrase Ludwig von Bertalanffy: humans are not machines, but given the opportunity to act like machines, they will do so. This is something of a conundrum. How come humans act so predictably, whilst at the same time insisting that they are free beings acting on their own volition?

It would be to overstate the case that sociology has answered this question once and for all. It is, however, not for lack of trying. Bourdieu (1984) tried to bridge the gap with his concept of habitus. Giddens (1991) likewise tried to do so with his concept of structuration. Marcuse (1964), writing on the one-dimensional man, marveled at how the application of rationality on a large scale led to the loss of rational agency on individual scale. Foucault tried to find a place for humans in the order of things. Habermas, the main theorist of this thesis, wrote a thousand page tome trying to sort out where social systems end and individuals begin. Bauman, the other main theorist of this thesis, tried to sort out the contradiction of what happens to individual agency when the structures surrounding us insist on imposing individuality to the exclusion of community. If home is a decision, then the text you are about to read decidedly has a very distinct home.

This thesis will study the tension of structure and agency in the context of a housing association (Swedish: bostadsrättsförening), from its founding in 1943 up to the present day. The aim is to try to pinpoint the elusive middle between structure and agency – the intersections of local democratic decision-making where the residents translate *my problem* into *our problem*, and then proceed to tackle the problem head on together. While the association cannot claim to be a Hobbesian capital-S Sovereign, it has nevertheless been able to make decisions concerning its own fate within the constraints it found itself, and has exerted its autonomy many a time over the years. It is both a home and a sovereign abode.

2. Research questions

This thesis aims to further our understanding of the tension between structure and agency, by delving into the conceptual pairing of freedom and autonomy, as formulated by Arendt, Habermas and Bauman. Freedom is the capacity to act on one's own volition, while autonomy is the imposition of rules upon oneself. Autonomy is at once both an expression and limitation of freedom; to live in accordance with one's own rules is the epitome of freedom, but these rules are nevertheless rules that must be obeyed. The two concepts reinforce and contradict each other. This goes for individuals as well as small organizations, where the latter has a greater capacity to promote both freedom and impose rules, depending on its democratic disposition. This thesis explores the tension between freedom and autonomy in light of these questions:

How can the tension between freedom and autonomy be formulated on a meso-level?

How can the history of a housing association be used to illuminate this tension?

2.1 Delimitations and demarcations

This study aims to investigate the historical development of a cooperative housing association, and how it has navigated the tension between freedom and autonomy over time. It is at once both a theoretical and empirical study. The study is theoretical in that it seeks to explore and develop the theme of autonomy/freedom using sociological thought. The study is empirical in that it seeks to explore this theme by means of an archival study. The aim of this thesis should be understood in that order: theory first, historical empirical facts second. This is not the history of these kinds of associations – barely even the history of *an* association. The aim is to illuminate sociological theory using an historical example, not to write capital-H History. This is also not a commentary on the present conditions for attaining memberships in these associations, or on fluctuations in the pricing of housing over the last decades (on this, see Sørvoll & Bengtsson 2018).

2.2 Disposition

Chapter 3 will provide a short historical overview of the legal category of housing associations, as well as define a number of key concepts. Chapter 4 will conduct a short research review regarding civil society, a category within which housing associations are frequently placed. Chapter 5 will discuss the nature of autonomy, freedom and communicative rationality at some length. It will also discuss

Arendt's definition of human activity, Jacobs' and Lefebvre's analysis of urban development, and Machiavelli's concept of republican virtues. Chapter 6 will outline the methodology employed in this study. Chapter 7 consists of a chronological analysis of the history of a housing association. Chapters 8-10 will, with increasing levels of brevity, conclude this writ.

3. Background

In the 1910s and 1920s, it was not uncommon for groups of individuals to come together to start an economic association whose purpose it was to construct and/or maintain a residential building. These associations were run as general purpose economic associations, with all the rules and regulations regarding accounting, board meetings and economic governance that applied to such organizations. In the 1920s, however, it had become clear that the particular situations that arose between landlord and tenant could not be easily mediated through the existing legal framework, and thus emerged a desire to reform said framework. In 1930, the first law regarding associations whose main purpose was to provide its members a permanent residence came into effect, and the Bostadsrättsförening was born.

Two things characterize these associations. The first is that an individual gains membership by buying it from a previous member; membership is tied to having the right to live in a particular apartment. The association cannot deny the entry of new members, except in very specific circumstances. Thus, membership is something that can be bought and sold on the market; when a person “buys a flat”, this is usually the kind of transaction that is referred to. The second characteristic is that the association is administered by a board elected democratically by and from the membership of the organization. These elections take place annually, under a slightly modified version of the legal framework that governs other economic associations and companies. This gives the residents a high degree of democratic and autonomous control over matters regarding their domicile, such as rents, renovations, decoration, maintenance etc, while the association remains a distinct legal entity which owns the building members exert this democratic influence over.

Together, these characteristics lead to a highly specific form of a housing cooperation, where residents come together to administer and maintain their abode. From a democratic standpoint, these associations can do just about anything they set their minds to and have the capacity to perform. From a legal standpoint, these associations have to maintain a paper trail such that its activities are well documented and readable to both existing and prospective members, as well as to accountants and financial inspectors. In short, these associations are – constitutionally, in theory – instances of small scale accountable democratic self-governance.

3.1 Some notes on terminology and translations

There are some terms that need clarification, so as to avoid confusion. Upon sharing early drafts of this thesis, feedback indicated that Swedish readers could not easily identify which English term referred to which Swedish legal concept or document type. I have thus included a small glossary.

There is no single translation of the term “bostadsrättsförening”, even though the social practices contained therein have equivalencies in other countries and legislations. In order to avoid getting entangled in the complexities of legal comparisons and approximate terminology, I have chosen to use the word “association” throughout, mainly in definite form, to denote the bostadsrättsförening under study. This is due to the practice of these kinds of organizations to refer to themselves thusly in internal and external communication.

3.1.1 A short glossary

Annual meetings: årsmöten

Annual reports: årsredovisningar

Association: (bostadsrätts)förening

Auditor: revisor

Board: styrelse

Chair: ordförande

Discharge: ansvarsfrihet

Minutes: protokoll

Secretary: sekreterare

Treasurer: kassör

4. Research overview

When it comes to civil society, the broad consensus is that there is no broad consensus, except with regards to the overall shape of what civil society is not (cf Clemet 2013; Göransson 2005; Salamon & Sokolowski 2016). It is not the state, although the state might depend on or interact with civil society in various ways. Further, civil society is not the market, although – again – the two interact in a number of ways. That the term “the third sector” is used in a Swedish context to denote civil society is indicative of the extent to which it is negatively defined; it is not this, it is not that, and through this double negation the concept emerges. When Vetenskapsrådet (Lilja & Åberg 2012) set out to formulate a bare minimum definition, the result was a 70 page annotated bibliography which concluded that the state of the field was inconclusive. The aim of this chapter is not to retrace this bibliography, but rather to set the stage for how an understanding civil society informs the theoretical discussion of this thesis.

Before we proceed, a few notes on methodology. When conducting this review, I employed two methods. The first was the time-honored method of walking into my local university library and selectively read every book featuring the words “civil society” on the cover. While not exactly the pinnacle of refined methodological subtlety, it nevertheless yielded results. The second method was to turn to the Sociological Abstracts database and enter the search string “civil society” Sweden housing autonomy”, and then gradually sorted through the results until a manageable amount of articles remained. The search terms were chosen so as to hone in on the theme of this thesis. In both methodological endeavors, I was guided by Petticrew and Roberts (2006).

Despite – and possibly because – the underdefined nature of the concept of civil society, a whole range of attributes and characteristics are ascribed to it. If civil society can not be pinned down to a neat conceptual framework, it can however be described in terms of its effects. In brief, these effects can be divided into two themes. The first is an elaboration on the relation between civil society and the two other sectors (state and market), with an aim to show how continuities or discontinuities of these relations will play out in the years ahead. The second is to catalogue the changes participation in civil society (potentially) has on individuals and local communities, with an aim to support these outcomes.

The relation between civil society and the state is marked by change and negotiation (Amnå 2005; Wijkström 2012). The state often has an interest in structuring civil society by means of regulations, economic policy and financial aid (Trädgårdh et al 2013). These structuring efforts are guided both by an aim to maintain order and to achieve certain ends. Dekker (2019) discusses how in the Dutch

context, old established forms of social engagement and voluntarism (pillarization) are invoked as justifications for cutting social spending; the rationale is that civil society will step up and take over the now defunded activities. Aiken et al (2016) note the same trend in a UK context, albeit with a more proactive process of building up the civil society organizations supposed to do the stepping up. Light and Seravalli (2019) study in some detail two such example of civil society taking over defunded activities. Lang and Mullins (2020) discuss how civil society organizations act as housing agents for those unable to find a place to live. Scheller and Thörn (2018) outline a process wherein municipal governments enter into negotiations with civil society regarding the construction of communal housing, where the presupposed negotiation partners either do not exist or are created specifically to enter these negotiations. Ideström and Linde (2019) describe how the function of housing asylum seekers has been delegated to churches and local volunteers. Finally, Tahvilzadeh and Kings (2018) detail an act of refusal, where the implied responsibility ascribed to the third sector was rejected, and the chaos (their term) that ensued. A common thread throughout is that civil society (existing, created or spontaneously generated) is seen as a reserve pool of resources that the state can strategically tap into, so as to lower costs or offload responsibility for providing services.

A second theme is that of the effects of participating in civil society, particularly with regards to attaining skills or building character. Hill & Schoug (2020) edited an anthology on the inherent potential for learning following from such participation, tying it to traditional social democratic and labor union efforts to informally educate workers (cf Larsson 2013). Strömblad and Bengtsson (2017), as well as Sernhede et al (2019) and Kings (2018), discuss similarities and differences in ethnically distinct organizations regarding these traditional educational ideals. Papakostas (2011) traces the decline of mass membership organizations, and the rise of a third sector landscape characterized by many organizations with small memberships with professionalized management (see also Hvenmark 2016). Erman (2013) and Essen (2008) note that merely participating in an organization is insufficient for attaining democratic skill sets, and that this requires that participation takes place under conditions of individuals asserting concrete influence; this is corroborated in Suter and Gmür (2018), who studied participation in Swiss housing associations. Sørvoll and Bengtsson (2018) provide a short history of housing associations in Sweden and Norway from the 20s onward, and outline the contradicting tendencies of regarding membership in these associations as a financial investment and the potential civic virtues that might follow from participating in said associations; this is followed up in Sørvoll & Bengtsson (2020) which treats the Danish timeline. A common thread throughout these texts is that

participation does foster new skills, but that the conditions under which participation takes place is not a universal constant and varies heavily with context, as do the skills acquired from such participation.

This short summary is by no means a complete survey of the field, or a comprehensive account of the sum of accumulated knowledge¹. It gestures, however, towards the general outline of contemporary discussions, and puts into perspective where this thesis situates itself in relation to it. This thesis is best characterized as belonging to the second theme, that of the gradual formation of skills and the confidence to use them after participating in civil society. This thesis does not, however, engage with the broader issues of the first theme. I found it worthwhile to include the first theme in this overview, however, since it raises the question of just who the attained skills are for. It is a paradoxical notion indeed of someone attaining the skills associated with autonomy and self-determination only to serve someone else's agenda, but if my reading has told me anything, it is that there is much more to be said on this topic.

1 An aside: when reading the learning outcomes in the syllabi of and thesis guides for these kinds of theses, it is sometimes framed as if the student should attain sufficient knowledge of the current state of research to be able to summarize it in full and with confidence, all within the scope of a couple of months, rather than conduct a more modest first orientation of the field to get a rough sense of its contours. It always struck me as a case of overambitious confidence in the capacity of students at bachelor or master levels; for reference doctoral students are not expected to manage this feat of familiarity with the state of research until their third year or so.

5. Theory

The following chapter will be divided into five parts. The first part tackles the dialectics between what Habermas calls systems and lifeworlds, and the prospect of individuals navigating the demands imposed by these so as to eke out a modicum of autonomy. The second part tackles Arendt's classification of human activities, and how mere self-perpetuation is not a sufficient condition for human freedom. The third part tackles a shift in modern urban spatial organization, and how the contemporary modes of social interaction have changed alongside this shift. The fourth part discusses Machiavelli's concept of democratic self-governance, and how this relates to previous sections. The fifth and final part will return to Habermas, and to the concept of communicative rationality. Interspersed in all parts will be small interludes on Bauman, who very much wrote a sociology following in the footsteps of both Habermas and Arendt.

5.1 Habermas: autonomy and self-determination

Any entity capable of making decisions is caught in the tension between autonomy and freedom. Autonomy is the capacity to make and enforce laws for oneself – “auto” meaning “self”, “nomos” meaning “laws”. Freedom is the capacity to act on one's own volition – to exercise the powers under one's command in any manner that is deemed appropriate. Autonomy and freedom are two mutually reinforcing aspects of being in the world, but are also in constant tension with each other. Any law autonomously imposed on oneself is, by necessity, a limitation of the degree of freedom the self enjoys. An imperative to do something, or to not do something, limits the range of options available; that is the essence of a law.

This tension can be illustrated by a student who wants to finish their thesis, and thus graduate. In order to finish the thesis, the student autonomously imposes a law on themselves – every day, I will do this amount of reading and this amount of writing. The decision to harbor the ambition to do this amount of reading and writing is easy to make; to actually discipline oneself to do the mandated reading and writing is a different matter altogether, especially when the option of doing something else presents itself. Choosing to play video games, for instance, would be an act of freedom, but it would not lead to the desired outcome of a completed thesis; only a continued adherence to the self-imposed regiment of reading and writing will accomplish the task at hand.

Expressed differently, discipline is the means through which an entity translates freedom into results through sustained action. In the example of the student, the wish to graduate encounters the real-world constraints inherent in achieving this outcome, and thus the student has to perform the work over time such that graduation occurs. The paradox is that, while attaining the voluntarily chosen goal is an act of freedom, the process of attaining it is a sustained limitation of the very same freedom. The discipline required to translate the wish for a certain outcome into an actual fact can, in some cases, be indistinguishable from non-freedom, yet when autonomously imposed it is the ultimate expression of freedom. The tension is only resolved upon attaining the goal, and felt throughout the process of realizing it.

Habermas (1984), in his attempt to bridge the gap between individual freedom and structural determination, uses the concepts of system and lifeworld. A system is a macro-level structure that orders social activity, such as laws, norms, economic relations or organizational inertia. To be a system, a phenomenon has to transcend the personal (or even the interpersonal) and enter into the realm of Durkheimian (2014) social facts. The institutional makeup of a country's taxation efforts is a system, seeing as how it operates according to its own logic and imposes itself upon the world; how much a person is paying in taxes is not subject to charismatic bargaining strategies or other such variations in interpersonal fortitude, but is determined by how the system is structured. Economic activity x results in tax rate y ; thus it is written, thus it happens.

The concept of a system is not inherently complex or complicated. The biggest difficulty of grasping it is understanding its necessity. That the world consists of systems – nation states, economies, organizations, laws – is imminently graspable, even intuitive to some degree. The power of Habermas' theory comes from how he relates impersonal systems to their very personal counterparts, lifeworlds. Lifeworlds are defined as those aspects of subjective reality that are inherently phenomenological – the experience of being alive in the world, if you will. On the one hand, this is a very wide and underdefined concept. On the other hand, it captures an important aspect of what a lifeworld is – a lifeworld goes above and beyond the context it takes place in, and is never fully determined by the systems asserting themselves on it. The very underdefinition leaves room for dreams, thought, hopes, aspirations and modes of resistance that can not be immediately attributed to any given systemic aspect. A worker is defined by their role in the capitalist system, but they are never fully reducible to this role; there is always a lingering remnant of humanity present, which keeps the door open (if at times seemingly only ever so slightly) to the possibility of agency.

To return to our student example, the systemic circumstance they find themselves in may be such that finishing a thesis and getting a degree is the only way out of their present economic circumstances. This is a systemic, objective reality, observable by means of economic analysis of the labor market. For the student, however, it is never a mere equation of economic necessity forcing them to finish their writing. It is always a negotiation between the systemic imperative to do so, the actual capacity of making it happen, and the phenomenological experience of living through the process. The student is always, at any point, free to give up the project and do something else; this is a freedom inherent in the situation. The student is also heavily pressured to complete the writ so as to graduate. This systemic pressure is a contributing factor to their lifeworld, but it is not the only determinant of said lifeworld; the system has no concept of the anxieties, family negotiations, economic shortcuts or other acts of self-discipline that go into completing the thesis. Or, to rephrase: knowing that someone is writing a thesis tells us the overall shape of the systemic pressure put upon an individual, but informs us very little as to the contents of their lifeworld. A lifeworld might be colonized by systems, but never fully determined by them.

The interplay between system and lifeworld allows Habermas (1987) to answer the question what it means to be human in an increasingly modern, thoroughly systematically structured society. In volume 2 of his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas critiques Weber's (1978) concept of rationality for being grammatically incoherent. Weber's argument was that rationality forecloses the range of human choice to a few pre-scripted options, thus limiting the potential of life trajectories into the paths laid out by the rationally constructed modern institutional makeup. This dystopian situation is commonly referred to as the "iron cage" of modernity, per Parson's (1958) famous translation. Habermas, however, points out that it is not altogether clear whose rationality Weber is referring to at any given moment, and that Weber's argument seamlessly shifts from talking about individual rationality to institutional rationality without ever indicating which is which. This leads Weber to conclude that the role of reason in an institutional setting restricts the range of human possibilities for individuals to such an extent that there is only ever one rational option, outside of which only the irrational would venture. This formulation – while it captures a core intuition of modern phenomenology – serves to paint a picture of the world bleaker than it has to be. It is a lifeworld fully colonized. The Weberian lifeworld is a conceptual cage; Habermas' intervention is to open up said cage to allow for the possibility of freedom.

It is not a total freedom, however. At all times, it is circumscribed by the systems that make the world go round, and the individual must navigate these systems to the best of their abilities. The student must write their thesis, the worker must get to work on time, the tax forms must be filled out. The degree to which these systems are allowed to colonize the lifeworld of any given individual, however, is for Habermas a defining aspect of the modern condition. For the student, the months before graduation are a hectic, time-starved stretch of time with little in the way of relief; as colonized lifeworlds go, it goes very far indeed. For the worker, structuring their lifeworld to be at work eight hours a day is a big adaptation to the work process; half of a person's waking experience of life consists of work². For the taxpayer, there is an ever so slight ray of hope – it is possible to internalize the rules of taxation such that filling out the tax forms is an easy proposition, such that they can go about their lives afterwards without a second thought. We do not find ourselves sprung from the conceptual cage into a state of utopian freedom; rather, we emerge as disciplined subjects.

The prospects for freedom follow along these same lines, and follows as a result from how the individual navigates this Habermasian free space. External demands can be imposed such that the lifeworld is reduced to a mad scramble to meet said demands, with varying degrees of success. The response can also be a sustained adaptation to circumstance, such that work is always being performed and the demands are met in a continuous fashion. And, finally, the response can be a complete internalization of the systemic properties into the structure of the lifeworld, such that no further adaptation is required. The third option lessens the burden of the imposed demands, at the price of being fully disciplined by the system; the first option is arguably freer, at the price of the individual being an unstructured heteronomous chaotic mess. In the tension between autonomy and freedom, order and chaos, discipline and punishment (Foucault 1995), we find ourselves.

Bauman (1993) discusses this very same dynamic in the context of ethics. It behooves an ethical subject to act in accordance with their own code of values, but these very same values have to be formulated by the subject themselves. No one is born knowing what to do; this knowledge has to be attained from somewhere. A free agent can do any thing at any time; an ethical agent can do what they allow themselves to do, bound by the freely arrived at ethical constraints that flow from the application of the best knowledge at hand. No one can tell the subject what to do, but a sufficiently well-crafted argument will have a compelling force nonetheless. The systems colonizing a lifeworld – to borrow Habermas' terminology – can assert an influence upon the kinds of ethics a subject arrives at, but their

2 Readers of Durkheim will nod in solidarity with this thought.

mere presence are not sufficient grounds uncritically to accept them as universal truth. Mere reaction does not an ethical subject make.

The paradox, of course, is that neither reason nor circumstance are sufficient, yet both are necessary. The ethical self is socially situated, self-directed, governed by the systems surrounding them, an autonomous subject and – crucially – inescapably colonized. The dilemma for Bauman's postmodern ethics is that, while responding to the circumstances one finds oneself in is an inalienable aspect of being in the world, the means for finding the best knowledge for how to do so is not necessarily found within those very same circumstances. The ethical demand to do better does not confer the tools for doing thus, but it conveys a clear sense of something having to be done (cf Tester 1997). The ethical imperative brings with it the seeds of autonomy, and the impetus to impose on the self the kind of discipline that will ultimately see the living out of one's own laws. The intersection of system and lifeworld is the domain of ethics.

We will return to Habermas in later sections of this chapter. Before that, however, we will turn our attention from the individual to the collective, from micro to meso. In the next two sections, we will discuss the self-perpetuation of individuals and organizations, and how this can take the form of either treading water or of consciously directed concerted effort. Or, rephrased: how autonomy and freedom intersect with the demands imposed by Habermasian systems.

5.2 Arendt: self-perpetuation

Hannah Arendt (1959) makes a distinction between three forms of human activity. The first is labor – the activities required to keep things moving forward. This includes things like cleaning, doing the dishes, cooking and other routine maintenance activities, the absence of which would undermine the perpetuation of the individual or group in question. While labor is necessary for survival and maintenance, the energy spent does not result in anything outside of the perpetuation and reproduction of the social agent being thus laboriously maintained. Moreover, labor has to be performed again and again, so as to keep entropy at bay one more day. To borrow a famous feminist phrase: only in the fabled stories do King Augeas' stables remain clean after Hercules cleaned them.

Arendt's second form of human activity is work. What distinguishes work from labor is that work results in lasting things – products, art, texts, objects. The results of a bout of working remain in the world, and can be used by humans for whatever purpose they were made. The purpose of these

physical objects is of secondary nature to the enduring nature they possess. Work makes a difference in the world that is above and beyond its perpetuation. Moreover, work has an end; when the object under construction is completed, so is the work. A statue raised in the honor of a group of cleaners is a work, but the cleaning itself remains an instance of labor.

The third form, action, pertains to interventions in the social world. A speech to parliament is an action, as is a speech on the annual meeting of an association, as is participation in a mass demonstration outside the doors of either parliament or association. The end result of such an intervention into the social is never preordained beforehand, nor possible to predict. Unlike labor, which can be performed by any interchangeable unit of activity, an action is an expression of who a person is – the actor is not indifferent to the action. In a dialectic manner, actions also define who a person is. By intervening in the social, a person both expresses themselves and becomes themselves; we can, ever so slightly anachronistically, find echoes of this in Butler's notion of the performative. We become what we do, rather than do what we are.

The reason for Arendt making these distinctions is to make clear what manner of activity human beings are engaged with under modern conditions. Neither of these three concepts for Arendt map onto the category of employment, which can entail aspects of all three in its execution. Being employed means going to work, but the activities at work might be characterized as labor, work or action. Arendt, as a philosopher, is interested in disentangling the notion of productive human activity from going through the motions of economic productivity. The purpose of human life is not to be gainfully and productively employed; the purpose is to use your limited time on this Earth to make a significant difference in the lives of your peers and ancestors. In order to do that, it is important to differentiate between the labor that is necessary for survival, the manner of material is available to work with, and what scope of action is possible to achieve.

The first obstacle to becoming a subject being able to act in the world is to realize that this is in fact the case. To return to Habermasian terminology, the systemic colonization of a person's lifeworld is often thus that the scope of action is limited to the necessities of whatever demands is placed upon the individual. Sometimes this is temporary – such as in the case with the student trying to finish their thesis. At other times, it is more long term – such as for the worker engaged in labor and/or work not of their choosing. The worry is that these limitations will become Weberian, in such a way that individual autonomy finds itself reduced to whatever the necessities of biology and system happen to be. To wit,

this would be a person who works to live and lives to work. It would be to make a virtue out of necessity or – to paraphrase Sloterdijk (1987) – to descend into cynical reason.

For Arendt, it behooves a subject with aspirations to autonomy³ to be fully cognizant of what constitutes labor, what work can be performed, what actions are within reach, and how to go about these activities in a reflective manner. Self-perpetuation is vital, but it is not the ultimate purpose of being alive (cf Pitkin 1998). The exact nature of this purpose is up to the subject to decide, but – and this is the heart of the matter – it has to be in a position to decide, armed with what Matthew Arnold (1875/2010) called “the best possible knowledge”. Merely reacting to external stimuli is insufficient; autonomy means moving forward in a freely chosen direction and maintaining the appropriate levels of sustained activity to eventually, potentially, arrive at whatever destination awaits. When Habermas left the concept of lifeworld underdefined, this is what he had in mind (cf Carleheden 1996).

5.3 Jacobs and Lefebvre: knowing thy neighbors

When Jane Jacobs (1961) wrote of urban life in 1930s New York, she wrote of bustling streets bristling with activity of all sorts, some more recognizable than others. Jacobs also wrote of the people engaged in these activities, and how they – despite the distinctly urban setting – were part of a loose community of sorts. The looseness of these communities meant that people came and went (physically as well as socially), without the rituals of formal membership; being an ever so informal member of these communities meant that a person inevitably heard whatever gossip there were to hear at the moment, and at all times being engaged in the manner of small talk that occur between people who are familiar with each other on a surface level. This level of continuous communication led to neighborhoods knowing each other on the most basic of who’s who basis, such that everyone knew who to turn to when events occurred. Events were not isolated incidents; word got around to whomever was deemed in a position to do something about it, who promptly did. The frequent routine interactions left the community in a state of constant (albeit latent) preparedness to spring into action as needed. While this dynamic never fully left the possibility of Simmelian (1908) urban strangers off the table, or devolving into a rural ‘everyone knows everyone’ dynamic, the human connection described by Jacobs was at once both deeper and shallower than description can convey.

3 This should, ideally, be all of us. However, as Arendt (1963) noted in the case of Eichmann, we can not take such aspirations for granted. Merely following orders will get us through the day, but it is a bleak prospect indeed to have it as a mode of getting through life.

Jacobs does not describe these kinds of urban communities merely out of a sense of nostalgia (although the sometimes idyllic nature of these descriptions suggests nostalgia is a non-trivial part of her reasoning). She contrasts these half-familiar comings and goings of urban everyday life – shopkeepers greeting customers by asking about some small aspect of their lives, mailmen knowing everyone’s names, the gradual shift of the tenor that follows from the time of day – with what she sees at shortcomings of modern urban design, which greatly discourages these kinds of subtle human connections. By describing the mechanisms and functions performed by these low-intensity everyday social interactions, she illustrates what happens in their absence, where everyone becomes a Simmelian stranger and interaction beyond the strictly necessary becomes both optional and discouraged. What Jacobs mourns is the loss of these communities, and the rise of new, anonymous cities, whose streets only ever bustle with cars or – worse – function merely as spaces to traverse, silent and empty.

As to the reasons behind this transition, we can turn to Lefebvre’s (1995) description of a new town. Writing in 1960, Lefebvre muses on the difference in function and tenor between a newly constructed town and the various zones in it, each with its own function and purpose. Or, to be more precise, he muses on the fact that the newly constructed areas have functions, to which they are fully devoted, in contrast to older urban areas in which everything (and everyone) exist on top of everything (and everyone) else. This intermingling causes the ambient interactions of which Jacobs were so fond and described in such detail. Lefebvre’s new town, however, is constructed on the basis of a functional design, and the first thing accomplished by this design is to separate the functions to allow them to function that much better. Thus, there are areas devoted to housing, where the residential buildings are located, and industrial areas, where the various mysterious machinations of industry are located, and commercial areas, where stores of all description are to be found. The functional separation allows these areas to be built more rationally than the old way of going about things did – what with its constant negotiations with existing urban spaces and architectural realities – such that each area could operate more efficiently. The separation, Lefebvre argues, also left these places functionally soulless, and virtually empty whenever their main function was not performed. Nothing is quieter than a commercial zone after closing hours, except perhaps a residential area during work hours⁴.

4 Not without irony, Lefebvre notes that when the sole purpose of an area is to house people, nothing else happens there, which means there is no reason for anyone to go or be there. This leads to the paradoxical situation where these districts are at once both the most numerous, in terms of residents, and the emptiest, in terms of people encountered whilst walking through them. As urban spaces, they are a far cry from any notion of Jacobsian ambient interaction.

The key aspect in this development – for both Jacobs and Lefebvre – is that these levels of spatial functional differentiation greatly diminished the potential for spontaneously encountering others, and of routinely running into the same people often enough that it makes sense to form social bonds with them. Lefebvrian city life consists of going to a place designed for a function, performing that function, and then proceeding to a different yet similarly functional location. The familiar small talk of the small shop, where the owner remembers who usually prepares which dish on Wednesdays, is replaced with the imminently transactional interactions of the supermarket. The phenomenology of these two activities differ, and so too does the kinds of social relations that emerge from them. Even if the content of Jacobsian small talk is at times inane, the reliably recurring nature of the interaction is such that – should the need arise – a small favor can be asked, with a reasonable expectation that it would be performed, on the basis of familiarity alone. The same can not be said about the supermarket cashier, who could go through the entire ritual of finalizing a transaction without uttering a single word. These are two different kinds of social milieus, and the resulting social bonds that follow from existing in either of them differ accordingly⁵.

In a Swedish context, the Million Programme stands as an example of the trend described by Lefebvre. Initially a program to build a million new homes, it began as a beacon of modernity and progress: out with the old and dysfunctionally obsolete, in with the new and functionally separated. The key characteristic of a neighborhood built in this era is the grand scale of the design – the architectural ambition spans an entire area, rather than a single house. Initially, the inhabitants were primarily upwardly mobile working and middle class families. Gradually, however, the socioeconomic and ethnic character shifted, such that the term Million Programme became synonymous with large concentrations of immigrants and socially disadvantaged demographics. Subsequently, the term has transitioned into rhetorical commonplace demagogues invoke to foment anti-immigrant sentiments. The current residents, naturally, do not agree with this description (Sernhede et al 2019).

We find in Bauman (1999) is a description that in many ways continues the work Jacobs began. Jacobs decried the loss of local urban community, loose and at times impersonal as it was. Bauman describes a political landscape characterized by the loss of community altogether, and the various (dys)functional ways people adapt to it. Whatever community norms were transmitted in previous modes of social and urban organization, they are no longer transmitted thusly. All that was solid has melted into air

5 I trust the reader has at least one memory of spotting someone you vaguely know at a supermarket, and immediately making a detour to ensure that your paths do not cross. Such random encounters were, Jacobs argued, the bread and butter of social cohesion; we live in different times now.

(Bauman 2000; Berman 1998). The casual routine socializing with others has been replaced with far more fractured, fragmented social settings: family (increasingly less extended), a small circle of friends, and the people at work. And, of course, the media images of fear and catastrophe that constantly bombard even the most aloof of recluses. This is a much narrower assortment of people than those described by Jacobs, and as such it provides a much smaller insight into the lives of others. In short, the repertoire of actual lived experience a modern person has available to draw upon is smaller than it used to be, and is as a function of this less varied as well.

For Bauman (2002), this expresses itself in a generalized fear of those not of the ingroup. A person who rarely interacts with others, yet who frequently hears about the ill fates that befall those unaware and unprepared, finds it easy to succumb to fear and those who monger it. In a news environment ever more dominated by war, crime and other bad tidings, a siege mentality manifests itself. Society as such is under siege, with ever more sinister barbarians at the gate, be they criminals, immigrants or poor people. In lieu of the connective social tissue described by Jacobs, and the myriad of low-intensity interactions following therefrom, the individual is left to their own devices, literally and metaphorically. Alone, the viewer is presented with a world filled with frightening dangers, questionable characters and unequivocal neverdowells; Hobbes stalks the social fabric, with the threat of a life that is nasty, brutish, short and – most frightening of all – looming just around the corner. Fear, Bauman (1997) reminds us, is seldom fertile soil for an ethics of compassion, solidarity or mutual recognition; postmodern discontent is not conducive to knowing one's neighbors.

5.4 Machiavelli: democratic self-governance

We can contrast this new Hobbesian social setting – or the perception thereof – with a Machiavellian ideal of democratic self-governance (cf McCormick 2011; Vatter 2000). This might at first glance seem somewhat self-contradictory – describing something as Machiavellian is more likely to conjure visions of a ruthless autocrat than a self-defining democratic body – but we have to remember that Machiavelli wrote both *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*, two interrelated yet opposite works of political theory. The former describes a ruthless ruler who does whatever it takes to seize and maintain power; the latter describes the necessary conditions for local self-governance and the steps necessary to make it a sustained reality. Local self-governance does not, as one might suspect, arise spontaneously on its own; it has to be cultivated.

Machiavelli makes the distinction between *fortuna* and *virtu*. Fortuna is the overall situation reigning at a particular moment, be it storms, rebellions, festivals, besieging armies, bull markets or that one rare ordinary day. Needless to say, fortuna is a matter of historical contingency, and thus – much like the weather – outside the reach of individual agency. Virtu consists of the skills and traits possessed by an individual or association (or Italian city state), and how well those are mobilized in situations. Machiavelli argues that virtu is not a one-dimensional measure that can only be higher or lower (like strength, where one person is stronger than another), but rather that fortuna and virtu come together to produce different outcomes.⁶ There will always be an outcome, by feat of the passage of time, but depending on how fortuna and virtu interplay, the course of history could go this way or that. In good times, one kind of virtu is called for; in bad times, another kind is warranted. In middling times, a third kind. At no point, however, can we be certain that a particular virtu is appropriate for the situation; fortune is not known for its enduring stability. As circumstances change, so too does the definition of useful skills. The key to a stable democratic republic, for Machiavelli, is to build up a reserve of republican virtues, such that the citizenry as a whole possess whatever virtu is needed as situations arise. He thus finds three preconditions for democratic self-governance.

The first thing to note, argues Machiavelli, is that the capacity for democratic self-governance is an acquired skill in need of regular exercise and refinement. Virtu does not reside in a constitution or a set of institutional arrangements, nor can the imposition of a constitution or institution be sufficient to assure a democratic outcome. Rather, it is a function of people coming together to discuss issues that concern them (the *res publica*) and stake out a course of action that is deemed appropriate by those involved. The outcomes of these discussions are not preordained, nor are they necessarily the same the first, second or third time the same issue is brought up. A measure of contingency is always present, wherein the tension between autonomy and freedom can play itself out; someone who can not change their mind is not free.

The second thing to note, for Machiavelli, is that the capacity for self-governance is exercised in relation to fortuna. Or, slightly rephrased: every situation is an opportunity to refine the capacity of collective decision making. A situation occurs whenever a decision has to be made. No matter how

⁶ The Corona pandemic has seen the emergence of a similar kind of thinking, albeit without overt references to Machiavelli. It has become something of a genre to compare the readiness of different countries with regards to containing or handling the outbreak, where different countries are ascribed various *virtu* as time passed and *fortuna* shifted. An underlying motive of such comparisons is to find who performed better and/or worse, and to distribute blame; the subtext being that those who performed less than optimally lack virtue and possess malice. While such analyses are often less than useful, given the difficulties involved with international comparisons, it strikes me that a more dispassioned application of the conceptual pair might yield useful insights. Or, at least, be food for thought.

small or trivial the situation might seem at first glance, the fact that a decision has to be made, argued for and executed constitutes the very essence of democratic self-governance. Within the situation, the decision is where autonomy, self-perpetuation and lifeworlds intersect. By constantly getting into and moving through situations, the democratic process exercises its capacity to make reasoned decisions according to whatever ethical norms it strives to act out.

The third thing to note is that the mere presence of a responsibility to do something does not confer the requisite knowledge to do that something. It merely constitutes an imperative to act, which – depending on virtue – can result in either (1) a reasoned debate with regards to what to do, (2) a functionally structured sense of anxiety that propels those involved to find out what possible courses of action there are, or (3) a frantic panic where a solution must be found at all costs. The kind and quality of a decision resulting from these modes of deliberation differ, as you might imagine. Crucially, the level of panic induced by getting into a situation can be used as a gauge to measure virtue, and by extension the capacity for democratic self-governance. If a new situation can be neatly folded into the preexisting mode of operating, then the capacity is well-established; if pandemonium reigns supreme, then the reverse is the case. In all cases, those involved learn from the experience, with both wisdom and scars to show for it.

The key insight here is that the capacity for self-governance is not a fixed property or attribute, but rather a skill that comes into being through exercise and remains potent through continual use. It can not be delegated or commanded into being; it only appears as a function of having been performed. Democratic self-governance is a practical set of skills where the results of past activity consist of a readiness for future activity. As such, it needs an arena where it can be performed; there is no republican virtue in the abstract. Only by frequently, regularly and by force of contingency being thrust into situations where decisions have to be made, where the democratic body comes to see itself as a legitimate entity capable of making those decisions, does self-governance come into its own. Every decision that has to be made in the present lays the groundwork for the future.

To call the Machiavellian ideal process-oriented would be something of an understatement. We do find in it a useful way to operationalize the previous sections on autonomy and self-perpetuation. The Habermasian tension between freedom and autonomy is given a democratic forum to play out. The abstract Arendtian distinction between labor, work and action is given a concrete set of circumstances in which to be understood. And, crucially, the transition from a Jacobsian mode of socialization to a

Lefebvrian can be seen in context – the differing modes of social organization lend themselves differently towards finding oneself in situations where democratic self-governance is called for and thus exercised. In Machiavelli, we find a way to steer clear of the grammatical confusion that beset Weber. And, I maintain, a way to underscore what Habermas actually meant with the term communicative rationality.

5.5 Habermas: communicative rationality

One of the more nebulous of Habermas' concepts is that of communicative rationality. It lies at the heart of his attempt to bridge the gap between system and lifeworld, and constitutes a way of navigating the pressures of the former on the latter. It is not, I hasten to add, an additional fifth kind of rationality to those already proposed by Weber, but a distinct mode of social interaction that brings with it rationality as a side-effect. Weber proposed four ideal types of rationality and proceeded to attempt to understand human actions retroactively. Habermas, on the other hand, proposes this mode of interaction as a way for humans to understand both themselves, and the situation they find themselves in.

The nebulosity of the concept follows from the confusion carried on from Weber as to just who the rational actor is. Weber, I remind you, grammatically confused the term so as to apply it to both individual and collective simultaneously, foreclosing on the possibility of individual freedom as the rational powers possessed by organizations grew ever stronger. The same confusion has a tendency to slip into the thought of communicative rationality – it is possessed either by the individual or the organization, or both. Habermas insists that it is not an attribute possessed by either, but a byproduct of humans being in communication with each other. Whenever humans get together to discuss matters that concern them, the mere act of voicing their opinions, fears and rationales brings with it a mobilization of thoughts and affects that elevates the thought process of everyone involved from the personal to the social. It is not, therefore, the contribution of any one particularly rational individual, or the organizational structure of whatever forum the speakers find themselves in, that bring about this kind of rationality, but the very act of communicating. Communicative rationality follows from communicating; it is an inherently interpersonal quality.

Jacobs and Lefebvre mourned the loss of this interpersonal quality when they chronicled the passage from one mode of urban organization to another. Especially Jacobs, whose nostalgia for a time quickly slipping out of fashion was always tinged by a palpable sense that something important faded away as we approached the present. To be sure, the communicative rationality arising from a series of recurring

but fluid surface level interactions was not always of the sharpest or most obvious kind, but seeing it gradually fade away into no interaction at all must have been a painful experience indeed. When Bauman, decades later, wrote in search of politics (1999), he very much had this sense of loss and pain in mind, albeit perhaps not articulated quite in these terms.

We should, of course, resist the impulse to wax poetic about nostalgic times past. We should also resist the impulse to simplify the concept of communicative rationality to all forms of small talk in general. Instead, we ought to see it as a Machiavellian republican virtue, a capacity to analyze the current situation and discuss the proper way to go about dealing with it (whatever “it” is). Communal self-governance is a function of past self-governance, and like communicative rationality it is firmly of the interpersonal domain. It is neither system nor lifeworld, but brings the two together in such a way that those involved in the discussions find themselves not fully subjected to either. The systemic forces at play impose demands on the lifeworlds of those affected, but (and this is Habermas’ liberatory hope) by means of communicative, Machiavellian rationality there is the possibility of carving out a slice of freedom in the present. Perhaps even a measure of autonomy.

A housing association might not, at first glance, seem an intuitive arena for exercising communicative rationality or communal autonomy. Yet, the project of democratically administering a shared dwelling brings with it a set of emergent situations where decisions, big and small, have to be made. The routine maintenance of shared spaces encourages neighbors to get to know each other, and to break the functional isolation so dreaded by Lefebvre. What we find in a housing association is the institutional potential for people coming together to discuss their future in a manner where they have an actual say in the outcome. It is an opportunity to, within the confines of lived experience, translate *my problems* into *our problems*. Which, if we take Mills’ (2000) sociological imagination at face value, is the point of sociology. Bauman (2014), as you might imagine, agrees.

6. Method

History lingers in the form of fragments (Bauman 1995). As Foucault (2002) put it, history surrounds us, stacked in layers upon layers of language, metaphors and physical objects. We can understand this layering as a function of discourse – patterns of linguistic use remain despite no longer having a direct physical correlate, expressions linger despite no one knowing to what they originally refer, grammatical rules persist despite the reason for them having evolved out of languages as they currently exist. Paying attention to these lingering turns of phrase can yield historical insight. We can also – more immediately pressing in the context of this thesis – understand this layering as a way of expressing that human activity imprints itself upon physical objects in the world. Discourse is in this sense physical, in that we can quite literally see its imprints in the surviving fragments lingering from earlier time periods. In a literal sense, this takes the form of words printed on said fragments – such as dedications to long dead royalty on coins and stamps. Slightly less literally, the very existence and creation of these objects is an indication that some process or another took place. Given enough historical fragments pointing in the same direction, we end up with a strong suggestion that past events were informed by certain states of things; the very objects suggest a shape around which to structure our understanding of past events.

Honneth (1991) suggests we use the term “monument” to capture the physicality of these layered histories. The definition of a monument is something you can not readily move through – it has to be navigated around, understood as both a roadblock and landmark whilst exploring a space. A monument is both an organizational principle and an inevitability – once identified, it serves to both structure our understanding of the artifacts we study, and as an entry point towards reconstructing an appreciation of the internal logic of these very same objects. In the case of documentation, frequent references to the same clusters of topics allow us to reverse-engineer the priorities that informed the process creating of these documents. If the same topoi keep cropping up again and again, we have found ourselves a monument, around which we can scaffold our understanding of past events. Given that such repetition, given enough objects, is nigh inevitable, we are bound to find monuments if we read closely enough; monuments exist as much in our interpretation of the artifacts as they do in the artifacts themselves.

The term “monument” also highlights another aspect of the physicality of history. Each fragment is, in a very concrete manner, a historical monument, which has to be understood as such. We can not navigate around them, nor ignore them in our effort to orientate ourselves. Every aspect of each historical fragment – document – has to be understood in its monumental totality. The fact that the

document survived at all is the first thing to consider, followed by how this longevity was achieved, and the condition under which it lingers as history. Discourse is fleeting, ephemeral, in the air, and it is also very concrete, manifested in the objects that remain.

This presents us with the ever so slight methodological quandary of whether the organizational principle we seek can be reconstructed solely from the objects themselves, or if we have to impose it through our pre-existing knowledge of world history, such that we hermeneutically use the one to inform the other. Foucault (2002) would reply with a resounding “yes”, and gesture towards the fact that the mere act of going through the archival motions is sufficient to fuse the two aspects into a single activity. Which, given of what we know about Foucault’s penchant for generative ambiguity, moves us ever so slightly up the chain of abstractions. While we may not find that the universe is holographic, such that every aspect is found fractally in each of its fragments – Blake’s world in a grain of sand – we can appreciate that we have to proceed along both methodological lines at once. That is, both use the archival material to the best of its extent to inform ourselves about the historical events as they unfolded around its creation, and use our broader historical knowledge to infer what these historical events might be. We will, to paraphrase Cannadine (2011), have to both make history and make do.

As the reader might have surmised after these ruminations on the materiality of history, this thesis aims to make an historical archival study – the history of an association. The material used to study this history is the surviving internal historical records of the association in question, dating all the way back to its founding in 1943. It is an instance of what might be called micro-history (Götlind & Kåks 2014); a deep dive into a very small, very local historical dataset. This presents three main methodological considerations. First, the documentation was created for immediate practical use by the association, rather than as an accurate historical record. Second, the documentation is fragmentary at times, meaning there are any number of gaps to fill in with speculation, educated guesses and general knowledge of the historical context. Third, the history of the association spans eight decades, which means that there is substantial variation in terms of the activities undertaken by the association over time. Let us turn to each of these considerations in turn.

As Hellspong (2001) so aptly points out, the first difficulty for any researcher endeavoring to read documentation intended for practical use, is that it is intended for practical use. This does not always lend itself towards social scientists or historians arriving decades later being able to read said documentation with perfect clarity and full insight into the relevant aspects of the practice being

documented therein. The authors at the time wrote down what was important to write down at the time, without regard for extraneous elements such as creating perfect retroactive historical cohesion. While this does create an imprint of what was relevant at the time – see above – it also creates the difficulty of the material not being immediately accessible to an external reader. Furthermore, it adds an element of comparing apples to oranges – given different prevailing priorities at different times, different things will be deemed necessary to record. Thus, we can not assume that the same information being recorded at one time is equivalent or comparable to it being recorded at another. Every moment in time is equidistant from eternity, and will have to be understood as such.

The second methodological consideration is that not all documents have survived the ravages of time, and thus there are gaps every now and then. Some documents have been lost – plain and simple – while others have been purged by virtue of becoming old and irrelevant to current use. This means that we will have to make the best use of what documentation remains, and fill in the gaps best we can. Some years will be more fully documented than others, and those less documented years will have to be extrapolated by using adjacent years. While the scope of this thesis is insufficient to capture every activity of the association in full, thus prompting its author to focus on the more fully documented aspects, this is a methodological consideration necessary to keep in mind at all times. We do not possess the full picture of what transpired in the history of the association, and we never will; the records are by necessity incomplete.

The third methodological consideration pertains to the construction of relevant theory and concepts. Many of the authors in the theory chapter wrote at a particular moment in history, addressing concerns that were very much of their time. This poses a methodological problem for this study, in that the activities of the late 1940s should not be understood the same way as those of the 1980s or the 2010s. While it is tempting to create a universal theory of human activity (Parsons [1952] springs to mind), we do have to bring with us a historical sensibility and contextualize where in relation to the theoretical frame of reference we find ourselves. For instance, Jacobs wrote of a manner of urban life that was prevailing in the 30s and 40s, while Bauman theorized the phenomenology of the 90s; while the one leads to the other, we can not apply them equally across time. For the 50s, the lingering remnants of Jacobs' remembered urban life will be more relevant than the solitude of Bauman's hyperindividualized modernity. The same goes, vice versa, for the 90s. Applying the theoretical frameworks uniformly to each time period would be to do violence to both the frameworks and the historical record. This simply will not do.

Thus, we have to carefully craft a theoretical framework before approaching the archival material, and then be prepared to enter into a process of hermeneutic interpretation as the reading progresses. Every time period will reveal its respective monuments, which we will have to navigate around. Depending on the overall shape of said monuments, the general historical context of the time period and the relative temporality of the applied theories, we will have to very carefully approach each moment in time with sociological and historical sensitivity, with an ever present humble acknowledgment that the past is deeper and denser than we at present can appreciate (Josephson & Lundgren 2014). History is layered all around us, and our task is to carefully examine what remains of these layers (Foucault 2002).

6.1 Nuts and bolts

With these more abstract considerations out of the way, it is time to get down to the nuts and bolts – the steps taken by me, and the steps necessary should someone wish to replicate my results. The first step was to read through the material in a somewhat aimless fashion, so as to gain an understanding of the genre these documents belong to, and of the particulars of this specific association. We can call this a cursory read, to survey the data and assay its contours. I chose to conduct this first read in reverse chronological order, from the present towards the past, for the expedient reason that I had begun reading the most recent material and only had to turn the page to move one unit of time backwards.

Armed with the knowledge of the rough outline of the association's history, I then set about to write a timeline of said history, beginning with the years each chairman – or chairwoman, as the case often was – sat in office. While the nature of an association is such that it by necessity consists of more than one person, I found that it helped immensely to have a visual list of names to pin events on. Much like US history likes to talk of what happened during this or that presidency, so too I found it useful to link events to a certain chairperson. After a while, the records morphed from an undifferentiated mass of historical events to a series of progressions and discontinuities. Each chair brought their own distinct personality to the proceedings – or, at least, the surviving minutes – and being familiar with the characteristics of each successive chair brings a certain clarity to one's understanding. Indeed, the minutes even look different depending on during whose administration they were written.

The third, and most rigorous, reading was conducted after writing the theory section. Having outlined the theoretical framework and concepts to be used in the analysis, I returned to the documents and set about reading them closely with said frameworks and concepts in mind. While the first two readings

did give me an inkling of which periods would be likely to garner interesting results, upon this more thorough read I found nuggets I had previously overlooked or interpreted differently. The Foucauldian monuments came into sharper relief, as it were.

It would not be incorrect to call this a hermeneutic approach (Sjöberg 2018), where the parts inform the understanding of the whole, which then feeds back into an understanding of each subsequent part. At times, reading the documents through the eyes of theory made them appear in new light; at other times, reading the documents recontextualized the theory and brought it into sharper focus. Thus, we are not dealing with a straight line, where I first formulated a distinct plan and then executed it to the letter, but rather a more dialectical and circular trajectory where the process of going back and forth resulted in a greater understanding of both.

6.2 Material

The studied material consists of the collected records of a housing association. These records primarily belong to three categories. The first category is constituted by the minutes from board meetings and annual meetings. The minutes from 1943 to 1977 are collected in two hand-written bound books. The minutes from 1977 to the present are typewritten⁷ and later computer printed paper pages collected in a dozen or so binders, sorted chronologically by year and date. The second category is constituted by the annual reports, reporting on the association's financial status per the legal requirements of each subsequent decade. The annual reports are typewritten on paper, until computer written documents become standard. These papers are all collected in two binders, sorted chronologically. The third category is constituted by everything else, an eclectic assortment of documents that for one reason or another have been kept in the archives. This category straddles the line between being just big enough to warrant subdivisions, whilst also being sufficiently miscellaneous that any such subdivisions would lead to categories with only one member. While this does fit with the theme of archival monuments – singular in their appearance – it would not aid reader clarity to pursue such subdivisions. Whenever a third category item is invoked, I will make a mention of it.

7 The first document thus typewritten contains a mention that the association had bought a typewriter. This is both a monumental act and a very concrete illustration of discursive activity imprinting itself upon the world.

6.3 Potential methodological limitations

This is an $n=1$ study, which inherently brings with it a whole host of issues, not least of which is that of how representative and generalizable the results are. Patton (2002) discusses this in terms of depth versus breadth – depth means studying a few objects extensively, while breadth means studying a great number of objects on a surface level. In an ideal world, a study would be both deep and broad, meaning a large number of objects are studied in great detail. However, there are resource and time constraints at play, and so researchers have to make a choice: depth or breadth, few or many. Both choices have merits and drawbacks, which must be weighed against each other.

My argument for conducting an $n=1$ study is that the association in question is one of the oldest in existence, and that its extensive surviving records span a sufficiently long time that the benefits of going deep outweighs the benefits of going wide. At the same time, the very volume of documentation would make it an overoptimistic endeavor indeed to try to become familiar with the history of two associations of roughly equal age. The insights garnered from such an endeavor would, moreover, carry the risk of being redundant; two different variations of the same theme, as it were. While seeing different strategies for balancing autonomy and freedom would be useful, the aim here is to establish that such balancing acts take place. Moving to $n=3$ would run into identical issues, and so forth. It is my hope that future readers, armed with this thesis, will be able to devise a more expedient way of increasing n .

6.4 Ethical considerations

As the minutes and documents contain references to actually existing persons, past and present, alive and dead, we have to safeguard the identities of those involved. Whenever possible, I have tried to generalize my account of events and processes such that no one individual can be identified. This can at times lead to a somewhat reified language – the association did this or that – but safeguarding the anonymity of those involved outweighs such imprecisions. When two different chairs dealt with the same issue, I try to include an indication that such a transition has occurred.

Given that the association is still a living organization, where the individuals involved are both alive and potentially affected by the account given of them, the level of detail will fade the closer we come to the present. I have chosen to indicate the gender of each chair, to underscore that it was, in fact, not all men.

7. Analysis

When pondering how to structure this chapter, I considered a number of potential organizational principles. One was to structure the chapter along different topoi, and to bring up various events from different times in the association's history as examples of how these topoi played out at different times. After a while, I realized that this would cause a non-trivial amount of confusion, both on my part and that of reader, in terms of keeping track of when things happened. It would also run the risk of becoming a fragmentary account of a multitude of isolated anecdotes, which, while interesting as an historical excursus, would not be a fair account of either the historical context or the implications for sociological theory. Another potential organizational principle was to select a few such anecdotes and use them to illuminate the concepts in depth; letting key moments play out the concepts, as it were. Again, I came to the conclusion that this would risk becoming fragmentary, both in terms of presentation and in terms of source material; what I have in terms of sources is a long account of gradual developments, rather than in-depth accounts of individual events. While the temptation to become a modern day Thucydides is undeniable, I can not support it methodologically. Thus, at length, I chose to organize this chapter as a chronological account of the association's history, from its founding to the present. This has the double advantage of being able to parse on a cursory read – time moves forward along with the text – and of treating every moment as equidistant from eternity. We thus avoid comparing apples to oranges without first defining which is the apple and which is the orange.

What follows is first a description of the source material (both as genre and as content), and what a reader who seeks to replicate this study in another association ought to keep in mind. In a sense, this is a continuation of the methodology chapter, but I include it in the analysis because the theorists I draw upon do not discuss these specific kinds of documents, and because a non-trivial part of my analytical process consisted of coming to grips with the nature of these documents. We might call it a transition between the general and the specific. After this follows an account of the time prior to and after the founding of the association, with all that entails. Subsequent sections will cover different time periods characterized by either continuity or discontinuity; as the title “the long thirty years” suggests, these sections are not uniform in time.

7.1 Annual reports and minutes as genres

When reading a document, it is imperative to know what kind of document it is. While each document is a unique item with its own characteristics, it is also arranged in a system of other documents, which it refers to and which in turn refers back to it. Sometimes, these links are explicit, in that the references are overt and present on the pages themselves. More often than not, however, the links follow along the implicit lines of genre, tradition and practice. Being able to follow the explicit linkages is a crucial skill for any ambitious reader, but being able to internalize the implicit conventions that govern a particular kind of document at its specific moment often conveys more information than even the most scrupulous of close readings. A document fills a space in a system of documents, much like an individual fills a space in a system of individuals.

In addition to genre, documents also form small secluded contexts of their own, where a document from one year might reference its predecessor from the year before, and in turn be referenced by its successor. This goes for form as well as content. If a certain form has been adopted and established, it will recur again and again with variations on theme; there is no need to reinvent the wheel when there is a tradition already in place⁸. With regards to content, if a document states that something will be done the coming year, the document chronicling that year might detail how the work proceeds or its results. In both cases, the combined forces of habit, tradition and continuity exert an influence on what appears on the pages.

When it comes to annual reports, it is important to keep in mind that housing associations were a legal offshoot of general-purpose economic associations and joint stock corporations, which were required to maintain a certain level of bookkeeping in a specified manner. This places annual reports in the context and genre of accounting – the purpose is to give prospective buyers, auditors and an economically interested public at large a representative and accurate representation of the financial status of the organization. As a result, annual reports in housing associations have a very distinct form and function, and tend to include much the same information regardless of the specific association in question. An accountant trained in general purpose bookkeeping will be able to glance at the annual report of a housing association and know exactly what they are looking at. There is a very definite genre at work here.

8 In a similar fashion, someone who does not know how to write a certain genre of documents might very well turn to its previous iteration and update it to the current moment. If the previous year's annual report was accepted without remark, then copying its form will probably yield the same result this year. Tradition establishes itself by repetition and difference.

Annual reports come in three parts. The first is a statement from the board, outlining in concise prose the events that have transpired over the last calendar years, any upcoming activities that might be of note, and their overall assessment of the current financial status. There is also a list of names, specifying who held what position (chair, secretary, treasurer, handyman, groundskeeper, etc), such that it becomes clear who did what. The overall nature of this part is to summarize the current moment, without expanding into detail or context. The overwhelming majority of the annual report statements in this study were exactly one page long, with great pains taken to not exceed this limit.

The second part consists of a series of figures, where incomes, expenses and other financial assets are laid out and summarized. The exact categories used depend on the manner of economic activity takes place, but the general rule is to give each of the major sources of monetary movements its own category, whilst lumping small one-offs into a general category of “miscellaneous”; if a category appears one year only to disappear the next, this implies an extraordinary event. The point is to quickly convey what the money comes from and what it is used for, such that the summation given in the statement can be put into fiscal context. If the statement says “this winter was colder than usual, so we had to spend more on heating than previous years”, then this is likely corresponding to an increase in the expense labeled “heating”.

The third part consists of a statement from the auditors, who make a thorough investigation of the bookkeeping so as to ensure that everything adds up. If there are any discrepancies, then those are noted in the statement. If everything is in order, then that is noted. Depending on how the audit unfolds, the auditors can either make a statement to the effect that the members of the association should accept the previous two parts as written, thus giving discharge for the board, or make a statement to the effect that the board has mishandled the finances, with an explanation of the nature of the impropriety and what legal recourse the members have. In content, the auditors’ statement is crucial, since being given discharge means everything is in order, whilst the alternative is often the first step in a civil lawsuit. In form, the statement tends to be identical from year to year, often down to the letter⁹. For the purposes of this study, this part will be ignored, by virtue of universal discharge.

Taken together, this means annual reports tend to look very much alike, and it is easy to get the impression that they all say the same thing. Flipping through them with impatience gives an impression

9 There has been some discussion in the community of auditors as to this development. Some argue that the move towards standardized statements lead to better legibility for prospective readers, while other argue that too much standardization means you only ever have to copy and paste the same template over and over again, without having to make an effort to convey potentially useful information.

of the uniform passage of time, where the movement towards an inevitable present is implacable. It is important to remember, however, that being bound by genre is not the same as being teleologically oriented towards the future we now inhabit. Each annual report is a snapshot of a different present, where the outcome is still contingent. For our purposes, reading these documents allows us to gauge the financial status from year to year, to better understand what occupied the minds of the persons involved, and to figure out when things happened. Even the smallest differences convey information, albeit not always obvious at first glance.

When it comes to minutes, there are two kinds of them. The first is that of annual meetings (and their extraordinary counterparts), where as many members of the association as is logistically possible gather together to discuss the past year, the annual report, who to elect as board members, and what is to be done over the coming year. The annual meeting is the highest source of authority in an association, and all major changes have to be ratified by the meeting before having legal force. As such, the minutes from these meetings provide insight into the events that transpired at the time, the kinds of discussions that took place regarding these events, and the subsequent decisions made regarding the future of the association. Where the annual reports are limited to stating either an ambition or a *fait accompli*, the minutes from the annual meetings give account of the deliberative process that led up to that outcome.

Annual meetings have a very definite structure, where the agenda is laid out in the bylaws, including several non-optional topics, such as electing board members, giving discharge or approving the annual report. As with the aforementioned reports, this has a tendency of causing these documents to resemble each other; the same things are always mentioned in the same order and with the same wording. Again, a keen eye for detail is key; small shifts in how a meeting is reported can indicate that things are changing. Often, the penultimate point, “other”, is the most heavily annotated: this is where members raise issues that are not strictly related to the standing topics, but which nevertheless warrant discussion in plenum. These topics can range from making changes to the building in some way, to changing the booking arrangements for the washroom, to complaining about various things that may or may not have broken. If we are lucky, the minutes from this penultimate point are both numerous and extensive – these discussions are the bread and butter of communicative rationality.

The other kind is the minutes of board meetings. These are less formally constricted (albeit perhaps no less formal) than annual meetings, consist of meetings where the board meets and takes minutes. These meetings take place subsequently over the year, with each meeting having its own agenda. The minutes

serve two purposes: the first to keep track of what was decided and who was put in charge of making it happen, the second to keep a paper trail so as to make the board accountable to auditors, the annual meeting, or subsequent boards¹⁰. The minutes constitute the memory of the association, as it were; if anything were to happen to the individuals making up the board, the minutes are still there as a record of what needs to be done. In case of disputes, they can also be brought to bear as arguments that the board did in fact agree on one course of action rather than another.

There are no definite rules for how board minutes are to be written, or what their agenda should be. This provides retrospective readers with a very tangible sense of when things change. If, for instance, the format shifts from neatly typewritten and concisely worded observations of the discussions taking place, to a computer written bare summation of the topics at hand, then this is an indication that something has changed. It might be the election of a new secretary, the purchase of a new computer or the inspiration of the times, but something is afoot.

For our purposes, the minutes from the annual meeting act as a corollary to the annual reports. Decisions made in the former show up in the latter, and vice versa; by shifting our gaze back and forth between the two, it is possible to garner insights that neither could provide by themselves. The minutes from board meetings can then be used to fill in the gaps, providing insight into the process of getting things done, the setbacks encountered along the way, and the thought processes prompting the chosen course of action. The level of detail is greatly enhanced by the fact that board meetings take place multiple times a year, and can respond to things as they happen, with a greater degree of freedom when it comes to trying out ideas in discussion. At times, the board might discuss an option, find out it does not work, and thus not bring it to the attention of the annual meet. The only record of this is in the minutes.

7.2 The founding of an association

The 15th of October 1943, in a moderately sized town in the middle of Sweden, a meeting was held, regarding the founding of a housing association. After lengthy discussions and a non-zero amount of negotiation, a set of bylaws were adopted and signed by the first board members. The 3rd of November 1943, the county administrative board officially registered the creation of a new housing association. The 17th of November 1943, the association secured the purchase of a small plot of land on the west side, for 16,000 crowns, as well as a contract to construct a three-story multi-apartment building on this

¹⁰ Or, indeed, future historically oriented sociologists.

land, costing 370,700 crowns. The 16th of December 1943 the association received a construction permit for said building. The 7th of January 1944 the land purchase was ratified at the local administrative castle, and the construction was thus officially sanctioned in all respects. To finance all this, the association took a loan totaling 348,700 crowns¹¹. The first resident moved in the 1st of October 1944, which is where our story begins.

Two things can be said of this first year in the history of the association. First, it was a remarkably fast turnaround from founding to completed construction. Second, it was an unequivocal Arendtian act, an intervention into the social that caused substantial change, both for the agents themselves and those who in various ways found themselves intertwined in the association over the coming 77 years. Very little material remains from this initial period, outside of the minutes of the founding meeting, the official registration of the association, the proofs of purchase, and the construction contract with its corresponding permit, but from the dates we can gather that the plans to build a new home did not emerge spontaneously on October 15 1943. The founders had a plan, and they knew who to talk to in order to set things in motion.

The first remaining board minutes date from the 29th of September 1945. It will no doubt amuse the reader that §3 bemoans the fact that previous minutes had, despite numerous attempts to persuade the previous secretary to turn them over after he had moved out, not been recovered, and that the meeting thus could not peruse the minutes from the previous session so as to get everyone up to speed. Later, §5 determined that the board had – under very specific conditions pertaining to ensuring that the building was maintained in good working order – the right to enter an apartment, albeit not as a step to undertake lightly. Under §6, the issue of who was responsible for ensuring that the stairwells and associated areas were kept clean.

The circumstances prompting the discussions under §5 were not elaborated upon, but it is one of many discussions of its kind, where the board – and the annual meetings – get together to figure out the principles upon which they should act. The impression is that no one knew very much about what running a housing association entailed, but that issues kept imposing themselves such that it was imperative to figure it out. This did not always turn out in the association's favor. An exchange between the chair and city architect illustrates the tendency. A neighbor had put up a fence to separate the two plots, and the chair wrote a letter asking if this was legal. The response from the city architect said that

11 All currency values are given as reported in the documents, unadjusted for inflation. The adjusted value of 348,700 crowns for 2021 is 7,379,085 crowns, or approximately \$885,000.

it was not only legal, but that the city ordinances were worded such that the association would have to pay half the cost of erecting the fence if it ever came down to a legal dispute. If the chair ever wrote a reply, it did not remain in the archives.

We see in this a clear example of Machiavellian dynamic of falling into situations where a response is required, where the virtue of those involved is both put to the test and strengthened by the ordeal. The subsequent minutes detail encountering a new problem, discussing it at some length, finding out how to solve it, and then the next time the problem emerges being able to dispatch it with ease. The anxiousness and indignation over the fence is gradually replaced with a cool, calm and collected sense of collective agency. A feeling of competence sets in, both in the sense of knowing how to do something, and in the sense that the board is the proper agent for affecting the world whenever a problem rises. The first encounter is a hectic experience, the second less so, the third is approaching the establishment of a routine. We need to keep in mind Machiavelli's insistence that this is not a mere learning by doing, but a gradual accumulation of a generalized sense of agency; while any given new encounter is new, the experience of getting into new encounters slowly becomes commonplace. Situations arise, some predictable, some unpredictable.

There are relatively few sources on these early years, and since the founding stage in some respects overlap the long 30 years of the next section, I shall not linger on this period for much longer. We should note two things, however. First, that the association took a tertiary loan¹² of 92,825 crowns in 1946. Second, that the question of who was the first chair of the association is unresolved. The founding document from the 15th of October 1943 was not signed by the same person who had such unease about the fence, and the most prominent signatory of that document has faded from view as the minutes pick up. Perhaps he assumed the role of chair, then took his leave before September 1945, just as the secretary took the minutes with him. The years between 1943 and 1947 were formative, and whether the next chair was the second or third in the organization's history, by virtue of his 30 years performing the role he certainly was the most prominent.

7.3 The long 30 years

Upon my first readthrough of the minutes, I went my way backwards from the present, noting the shifting names of the various chairs. Upon arriving at the annual meeting of 1977, the first sentence

¹² A tertiary loan was a special kind of loan directed specifically towards building and maintaining new buildings during the Second World War, so as to prevent the construction industry from grinding to a halt due to economic uncertainties.

that struck me was that the chair of the previous 30 years, by virtue of his old age, wanted to step down from the position. Not only did this speed up the process of documenting each chair significantly, it also indicated that this period of time could not be understood in terms of discrete separate units. While things certainly did change between 1947 and 1977, the tenor of the source material is such that attempting to define shifts in terms other than an Aristotelian beginning, middle and end would only result in arbitrary distinctions at best, and self-contradiction at worst. Beyond the uniformity of the source material, the fact that the association had to face a drawn out long term set of difficulties during this period, which can only be understood as such, contributed to my calling this period the long 30 years.

The beginning of this period was characterized by the end of the second World War, and the uncertain new world that emerged from the peace process. The annual report of 1948 specifically point out the worry that the amassed debt of the association – totaling a principal of 441,525 crowns, with rents swaying between six and eleven percent – would over time come to represent a growing concern; the saving grace being that the tertiary loan would retain its special status for some years to come. In 1949, these concerns expressed themselves twofold during the annual meeting. First, by means of rationing the provision of hot water to the residents to specific times of the week, so as to keep down the costs associated with heating. Second, a motion had been filed to sell the building, thus dissolving the association. The motion was, as you might extrapolate from the fact that there are still 28 years left of the long 30, voted down. It should be noted that many associations of this kind ended their existence this way, both at the time and over the decades to come. In 1950, amortization of the initial loans began. The 1951 annual report describes it as “an especially dire year”, noting a marked increase in the price of coal.

To put the dire economic situation into perspective, I put forth three numbers, two of which will remain a constant over the coming decades. The first is that of interest payments, which hovered around 19,000 crowns annually, fluctuating slightly with interest rates. The second is that of amortization, which hovered at around 2,000 crowns annually, increasing slightly as the former post became smaller. The third is the income generated from renting out the use of a mangle machine hovered around 500 crowns annually until 1956. With yearly results often amounting to a surplus of a single digit amount of crowns, it can not be understated how small the economic margins of the association were during these early years. It is very likely that, in the absence of the mangle machine (which gets its own entry into the annual reports), the association would not have prevailed.

In Arendtian terms, we are now operating squarely in the domains of labor, the ceaseless effort required to keep things moving forward and preventing entropy from overtaking the attempt at self-perpetuation. This can be seen across all three document types, where discussions are focused around how to best ration the few remaining resources that remain (such as hot water), and how to cut costs where possible. In 1952, the association borrowed money from a few of its more affluent members to finance the purchase and installation of an oil heater, to replace the old coal furnace. This was done in the hope that oil would be a cheaper source of heating than coal. Two reasons were given for not borrowing from the bank. First, it was cheaper, with interest rates at a manageable 7%. Second, in discussions with the bank it turned out that additional loans would, given the situation described above, be unlikely at best.

The year 1952 also marks the beginning of a standardization of the format of the annual reports. In previous years, the same overall information had been presented, albeit in different order and with different emphasis. In subsequent years, a distinct template can be identified, where a reader flipping from one year to the next can be certain to find the same phrasing or information at the same place. From 1954 onward, the template was fully in place, such that extraordinary years were visible both in form and in content. The phrasing “The past year has in all major respects been similar to previous years” from the 1955 annual report indicates both that the association had established a genre for writing annual reports, and that it had adapted itself to the labor-intense nature of the financial situation.

From here, we have to read between the lines to determine what transpired. Based on the numbers of the annual reports, the financial situation did not improve significantly, and the annual rent increases were on the whole consumed by equally increasing expenses. In Machiavellian terms, a virtu had been forged from the fortuna such that it was possible to gradually move out of crisis management to longer term planning. This means the various challenges facing the association generated less verbiage in the documentation, since the board and memberships already knew what to expect and how to proceed. For instance, it is not until 1961 that the annual report mentions that the association now provides warm water every day of the week, rather than as previously implied only on some of them (e.g. Fridays, weekends and red letter days). From 1958 onward, it becomes a recurring theme to note when members died, something that will occur with increasing frequency as the membership becomes ever older.

The surviving material from the 1960s can be described in two ways. In one sense, it is comforting that the financial documentation of an organization looks more or less the same from year to year, marking

the steady progression of time as status quo perpetuates itself. This is the ideal for those looking to find an escape from excitement and radical change. In another sense, the increased terseness of the prose of what material remains does not make for interesting reading, and in short only three major events were noted. In 1964, district heating replaced the oil heater; in 1966, an unusually large quantity of snow threatened to flood the basement as it melted, and thus had to be removed; in 1968, the trash chute was expanded to account for the increased size and volume of consumer waste. The economic situation described above remained largely unchanged, but overall the books were kept in good order, bills were paid on time, and reading between the lines a sense of anxiously maintained stability emerges. By no means smooth sailing, but nevertheless steady as she goes.

The 1970s are marked by two things. The first is that, many names that will become prominent appear in the margins, either as new members or as voices during the annual meetings. It would be wrong to call this narrative foreshadowing – reality is not constructed along the lines of narrative, and only appears to be such retroactively – but having a list of future board members and chairs on at the ready whilst reading through the minutes does spark a sense of outlining the trajectory of what is to come. The second characteristic of the 1970s is that it becomes ever clearer that both the chair and the building are coming of age. The number of necessary repairs have steadily increase over the years, yet the necessity to keep within a limited budget has postponed the preemptive measures that would counteract the necessity of further repairs. Meanwhile, the energy with which the board pursues new avenues of activity has gradually decreased, presumably from a lack of energy overall.

As the long thirty years come to a close, we are left with the dialectics of a future coming into its own, and a past that demands to be paid its due. As 1977 rolls around, and the association for the first time in a generation elects a new chair, a genuine sense of loss radiates from the pages. Nevertheless, as Bauman (1992) puts it: death is inevitable, and the next best thing to immortality we can achieve is to leave a lasting legacy. Nothing lasts, but the work continues.

7.4 Discontinuities and decline

The first thing that happened upon the installation of a new chair in 1977 was that a typewriter was acquired to facilitate the faster processing of minutes, and to make it easier to document the activities of the association. The hand-written minutes of past years are replaced by typewritten versions, which in and of itself is a discontinuity of note (the annual reports were always typewritten). A new standing

agenda is introduced for board meetings. The second thing that happened was a gradual process of the new board orienting itself with regards to what need, can and should be done around the house.

The year 1978 was a hectic year. On the 31st of January, the previous chair dies of old age. An inventory of the lighting system in the basement revealed that it in almost every respect was identical the one present upon the construction of the building three decades earlier, and was thus replaced. An extensive set of repairs were conducted to the balconies, a new pair of washing machines were purchased, and a series of smaller improvements, replacements and repairs were implemented. To cover this, the rent was increased by 12%, and the three board members each lent 8000 crowns to the association at a favorable rate. The rationale for lending from private members rather than the bank were identical to the previous time it happened in 1952: lower interest, and the banks being less than eager to extend new loans. The rate of amortization had remained steady since then, meaning the principal had only decreased by some 65,000 crowns.

In 1979, the annual report notes a double-digit percentage increase in all areas of expense except interest. As the groundskeeper retired, the chair personally overtook those duties. In 1980, the treasurer lamented that only 12 members (out of around 30) were present at the annual meeting, and that this presented a dire trend with regards to membership participation in the affairs of the association. Over the coming years, additional reparations and renovations of the kind described in the above paragraph took place, prompting the association to take out a loan for 100,000 crowns at 15.25% interest. In 1983, the chair was presented with a bouquet of flowers upon turning 70.

We can see these years as both a continuation of and a break with the long thirty years. On the one hand, the level of debt and financial pressure remained the same. On the other hand, the time for postponing necessary repairs was over, and if that meant getting into more debt, so be it. On the third hand – bear with me, dear reader – the new chair was in many ways firmly of the same stock as his predecessor, both generationally and in terms of financial frugality. We should not be hasty in reading the sudden flurry of repairwork and investment as a rejection of the old ways. Rather, necessity caught up with the association, and with a new chair in place, the previously established force of habit to postpone one more year was broken. There is an analogy to be made with the basement lightning: the old chair, who also had been there since the founding days, were so used to them that the thought of replacing them never occurred. The new chair, however, brought with him a new perspective, which while similar in many respects, did not adhere to the same particular modes of familiar unseeing.

In 1984, a new chair was elected. Upon assuming office, she too undertook a survey of what needed, could and should be done around the house. A quote from a board minute dating the 15th of February sticks out, and tells us by implication of past conditions:

The board holds the view that it is imperative to increase the salary of the positions of chair, treasurer and secretary. The continued existence of our association is entirely dependent on the willingness of its members to assume these roles and perform their functions.

This prompted the annual meeting to increase the salary of these position from 1,500 crowns each, to 2.500 crowns for chair and secretary respectively, and to 5.000 crowns for the treasurer¹³. Two implications can be drawn from this. First, that previous boards were willing to perform their duties for what even in those days were considered a very minor compensation in relation to the amount of hours required to perform them well. Second, we can read this in conjunction with the lament about dropping levels of member attendance at annual meetings that member participation is diminishing, and that it is by no means clear that a line of succession exists should the current board resign, die of old age or – as is often a risk in housing associations – get a job somewhere else and simply move out of the building.

In 1986, the chair and treasurer resign after having been subjected to what they in their resignation letter describe as “unfounded” and “shameful” criticism. This criticism does not survive among the records, but attached to the annual minutes is a letter signed by 18 members (including the old chair) stating that they still have the fullest of confidences in the current board. The same annual meeting reelect the board without comment. While we can only speculate as to the contents of the criticism that sparked this series of events, but I think it safe to say Jacobs would appreciate this instance of people come together in a moment of crisis.

What follows over the next two decades is a rapid increase in the turnaround rate for chairs and board members. The individual aspects of each new chair is of less importance than the fact that there are ever more of them, and that they are new each time. In 1988, the chair described above resigns. Upon assuming office, the new chair notes that the plumbing has remained the same since 1943, and commences to initiate the process of replumbing. This entails taking a loan of one and a half million crowns, which temporarily had an interest rate of 15% before being refinanced to a more manageable 5%; the annual report sees a temporary spike in expenses labeled interests to 211,888 crowns. She resigns in 1990. The replumbing process is completed in 1991, under the management of a new chair. She resigns in 1992. The new chair brings in a consultant to modernize the association, by updating its

¹³ Adjusted for inflation, this translates into 3,500, 6,000 and 11,900 crowns (\$420, \$720 and \$1,430) respectively.

bylaws and writing a comprehensive maintenance plan. He resigns in 1994. His successor continues this modernization process, only to resign mid-1995, prompting the secretary to assume executive control until the next annual meeting. She resigns 1996. Her successor only sits one term; his successor only two. Between 1999 and 2005 there is a period of stability under one chair, but by this point, there is little to no continuity between the style of writing present in the minutes of 1943 to 1994, and the style of writing emerging thereafter. Every new board has had to figure out how to go about doing what it does from scratch. In terms of institutional memory, the past is no longer an active participant in the present.

7.5 The years without a chair

The year 2005 saw the resignation of the third longest-reigning chair in the organization's history, and thus the election of a new chair. What is remarkable about her is that when she moved out of the building in 2007, she did not resign. The rules are such that a person has to be a member of the association to be elected to the position of chair, but not a member to act out the remainder of a term once elected. Upon ceasing to be a resident, a person also ceases to be a member of the association. They do not, however, cease to be an elected functionary unless they specifically resign from the post. Seeing how she would only move across town, and how the months remaining until the next annual meeting were few enough that it would not be too onerous to simply act out the term, she did so.

The following annual meeting, an insufficient number of members attended to choose a new chair. Rather than calling for an emergency meeting, or accepting that the membership had no interest in perpetuating the association (thus initiating the mandatory process of dismantling the association, which is to take place if and when this happens) a pragmatic sanction was given. The chair would continue to act as chair an additional term, under conditions that a search for members with a minimum of viable enthusiasm took place during the year. Thus it was decided, and so the association could perpetuate itself another year.

The next annual meeting arrived, and the meeting found itself in the very same circumstance. Expressing the sentiment that this would be the very last time, the chair accepted her reelection, but – if the reader will allow me to channel Thucydides for a moment – sternly fixed her gaze on the very soul of the association, letting it know in no uncertain terms that this would in fact be the very last time. No one present could deny the finality of these unspoken words.

Mere months later, however, she resigned, citing very much the same reasons as given in 1986. There were no outcries of confidence this time, however, and through some undefined means the extraordinary annual meeting managed to secure the election of a new board. I need not belabor the implications with regards to institutional memory being a participant of the present.

7.6 Hopeful prospects

The following decade initially saw a return to form to the 1990s, with a rapid turnaround rate for chairs. The year 2009 saw a new chair; she resigned in 2011. Her successor resigned in 2012. His successor resigned in 2013. Her successor held the position until 2018, and he oversaw a number of renovations and investments under his time. His successor resigned in 2019, as did his successor in turn. The current chair, elected in August of 2019, aspires to a long reign that will be remembered both in the context of the history that preceded it, and as something worth mentioning in its own right.

8. Results

I suspect most readers at this point will have in their mind a picture of an association which began with a strong sense of Machiavellian republican virtues, but which gradually, over time, lost them by force of attrition, entropy and the unrelenting march of time. The animating force behind the Arendtian act of 1943 to start a housing association did not carry over by feat of a seamless chain of institutional memory to the present. Instead, by the late 80s and throughout the 90s, we saw a series of boards who, for most intents and purposes, had to restart their efforts from scratch each time. We could liken it to a series of waves crashing upon a beach – each wave is brought forth by a tremendous expenditure of energy, but the accumulated results do not stack, and are forgotten as the next wave approaches.

We can attribute this development to two mutually reinforcing tendencies. The first is that the original wave of founding members started to die off, due to reasons mainly attributable to old age. The second is that the new residents who replaced them were markedly younger. For a time, there were enough members of the old guard left who remembered the established ways and could carry the torch onward. At some point, however, the link was broken, and a new generation found itself suddenly in charge of an association they did not necessarily know how to manage.

This put the association in a perpetual labor mode. Which is to say, the board mainly became a site of crisis management, rather than of long-term planning and careful deliberation. The replumbing of 1990 is an example of this; the years leading up to it were characterized by ever more frequent and severe water leaks, and the cost of repairing those rose accordingly. The decision to replumb, however, was not based on a premeditated maintenance plan which looked years ahead into the future and noted the proper timing of things; it was a decision based on the desperation of having to fix broken pipes every so often. The same goes for many other instances of repairwork of the same decade – someone notes that something is structurally broken, and then the board scrambles to figure out how to deal with this new situation. Every new situation is a new panic, until it either is resolved or a new board takes over.

This is not the kind of situation which fosters either virtue or sustained communicative rationality. It is, however, indicative of the kind of loss of community Jacobs (1961) and Bauman (1999) wrote of. We should be careful in ascribing the long thirty years a nostalgic communal solidarity during which everyone got along in neighborly harmony – as we saw, the discussions during that period revolved around how to make meager means last – but the drastic couple of years which saw the traditions derived from those decades simply melt into air tells us that something was lost. Not merely the

technical knowhow of how to conduct small scale routine repairs of common objects around the building, or who to call when something extraordinary happens, or how to write an annual report that adheres to established praxis. But also the less tangible sense of being in control, being in charge, being the proper subject able to make plans that span over decades and then act them out when the time comes. The scope of action (Arendtian and Aristotelian) is limited to the next twelve months.

This tendency came to a head when the association failed to find a chair among its members, and had to rely on sheer momentum to survive as a legal entity. In terms of autonomy, this is an abject abdication of it – with a common voice, the members expressed individually and in unison the sentiment that someone who is not me should make the decisions. If there ever was an opposite of Machiavellian republican virtue, this is it.

9. Discussion

Autonomy is the capacity to make and enforce laws for oneself – “auto” meaning “self”, “nomos” meaning “laws”. Freedom is the capacity to act on one’s own volition – to exercise the powers under one’s command in any manner that is deemed appropriate. The two terms are both mutually reinforcing and contradictory; autonomy without freedom is a kind of heteronomy, and freedom without autonomy is an aimless existence without the prospect of long-term self-determination. An individual – or an organization – who wishes to make a lasting impact on the world, needs to navigate the tension between these two poles whilst also managing the task of self-perpetuation.

A key aspect of autonomy lies in knowing what needs to be done, and what doing it entails. This consists of more than a mere practical knowledge of how to do things; a keen understanding of the context one finds oneself in is required to successfully negotiate potential pushback from others. Autonomy is not only the setting of goals for oneself – it is also the act of carving out a space within which attaining those goals become a possibility.

For organizations, such as housing associations, this means two things. First, to understand the practical realities of what it means to administrate a building and all that comes with it, be it gardening or bookkeeping. Second, to firmly create the social circumstances under which the practical knowledge can propagate to the membership in such a way that no single member bears the entire burden or responsibility for carrying it out. The responsibility of carrying out the tasks at hand is a matter best suited for communal deliberation, such that the membership have the opportunity to partake of the ongoing practice of communicative rationality. Should the organization choose to delegate too much responsibility to a single person, it runs the risk of becoming a personal project where decisions are up to the whims of said person. Should the organization embark on a project of formulating grandiose documentation outlining the proper proceedings for everything, yet fail to make said documentation relevant to its membership, then it will most likely just gather dust in a binder somewhere. Neither outcome results in either freedom or autonomy for the organization, and thus not for the membership either. Communal self-governance is an activity in the present; the bridging of the gap between structure and agency is also thus.

10. Conclusion

The tension between autonomy and freedom can be expressed on a meso-level in terms of a set of skills and traditions relating to communal decision making, regarding both the task of self-perpetuation and acting upon the present. These skills are not possessed by either the organization or the individual members of it, but are acted out whenever a communal decision has to be made. This means that it is insufficient to create organizational symbols or documents proclaiming the necessary democratic procedures, proficiencies or rituals. It is likewise insufficient to teach these same skills to individual members. Only when organization and members act in accordance for an extended period of time, can the tension between autonomy and freedom be navigated collectively (albeit not necessarily successfully).

Housing associations can be treated as case studies in how this tension has been navigated, both successfully and unsuccessfully. A housing association is an inherently meso-level entity which brings individuals together in an endeavor towards a well-defined goal, albeit without a well-defined path towards said goal. These kinds of associations bring with them the advantage of having to leave a written record of their activities, which can shed light on proceedings that would remain opaque in less formal organizations.

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