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Forms of Knowledge

Developing the History of Knowledge

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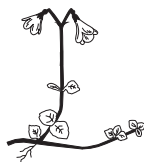
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FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE

Forms of Knowledge

Developing the History of Knowledge

Edited by
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&
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Parallell in time with the publication of this book, the Lund Centre for the History of Knowledge (LUCK) is set up at the Department of History, Lund University, with us undersigned as director and deputy directors. The centre will be an organizational representation of the scholarly activities that are taking place in Lund. *Forms of Knowledge* is the first major publication that emanates from LUCK, but there are hopefully many more to come.

*Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad,
and Anna Nilsson Hammar*

INTRODUCTION

Developing the history of knowledge

Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar

The history of knowledge is under rapid development. In the past few years, the number of scholars working in the field has multiplied. While German and Swiss *Wissensgeschichte* emerged in the early 2000s, it has only been in the late 2010s that the field has become a truly international and multilingual endeavour.¹ Judging by the diversity of conferences, initiatives, and new specialized book series and journals, the future for the history of knowledge looks bright. It promises to be one of the most dynamic fields of historical scholarship in the 2020s.²

Crucial to these developments is the formation of new research clusters and centres. The present volume, *Forms of Knowledge*, highlights the activities at one such hub: Lund University in Sweden. In doing so, we engage in the international discussions on the history of knowledge and demonstrate the field's potential to enrich historical scholarship. We have decided to focus our volume on *forms* of knowledge, which emanates from a joint commitment to a programmatically broad and fundamentally historical conceptualization of knowledge.³ As Sven Dupré and Geert Somsen argue, the history of knowledge should not be seen as 'a mere expansion of the history of science'.⁴ Whereas science and scholarship certainly are of great interest, they do not necessarily reside at the core of our inquiry. For us, the history of knowledge is first and foremost a social, political, and cultural history.

This understanding of the field has been particularly fruitful at the level of social interaction in the Lund hub. The term 'knowledge' serves as an umbrella term, bringing together researchers with different back-

grounds and research interests in a joint conversation. The concept of knowledge has proved to be both suitably vague and sufficiently interesting to unite researchers who are grappling with different periods, sources, and phenomena. However, questions about which the central concepts are, how we should comprehend them, and which methodologies we ought to apply, remain answered in different ways by different researchers.

The rapid growth of the history of knowledge, at Lund University as elsewhere, has sparked a debate about whether the field provides anything substantially new. ‘Do we need a new term for something many of us have already been doing, for years and years?’ Suzanne Marchand asks in a recent assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of *Wissensgeschichte*.⁵ However, in reflecting on the field, Staffan Bergwik points out that new scholarly labels and umbrella terms tend to give a field its epistemological power, enabling collaborations and new undertakings. Moreover, they offer professional opportunities for younger scholars, their supposed novelty catching the eye of funding bodies. The inherent tension between high aspirations and the actual ability to provide new and original perspectives are, as Bergwik stresses, typical of new fields.⁶

Hampus Östh Gustafsson makes a similar argument when he underscores that naming and labelling, while they may seem to be merely rhetorical constructs, nonetheless have real consequences for academic life and scholarly production. Hence, Östh Gustafsson insists, historians of knowledge must reflect on the genesis of their own field and the forms it takes.⁷ In doing so, we must observe the tenet that knowledge is rarely truly original or new, for it is a continuous process that is locally and historically situated. However, what are the implications of this theoretical stance? As historians of knowledge, how can we take stock of the formation of our own field?

One consequence, which we would like to emphasize, is that our work, like that of past scholars, is a collective and communicative practice. It is a temporary and contingent labelling of research interests that makes them relevant points of discussion both in and beyond established scholarly communities. While each individual effort and its scholarly results must meet certain criteria—among which novelty and conceptual

rigour are essential—it is hardly reasonable to hold an entire research field to these standards. The formation of a research area should not be confused with its individual research projects or programmes.

Against this background, we do not see it as a problem that the history of knowledge builds on a variety of research traditions and methodologies. What, though, does the field actually provide? The simple answer is that it is a community of academics who want to explore the historical conditions of the production and circulation of knowledge, not only with their traditional disciplinary peers, but with colleagues in other branches of the humanities and beyond. In an era of increasing specialization, the formation of an integrative cluster such as the history of knowledge serves a purpose.⁸

This volume manifests some of the scholarly consequences of these developments. But how did the history of knowledge become established in Lund? Why did this particular research initiative develop into a hub of collaborative scholarship? And what are its distinguishing features?

The history of knowledge at Lund University

History of knowledge in Lund took shape in the later 2010s. If one is to seek its origin, it is reasonable to begin in Berlin. In 2014, Johan Östling was a visiting researcher at Lorraine Daston's department at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in the German capital. It was a stimulating environment that had attracted many of the world's leading historians of science over the years. Östling's stay happened to overlap with Erling Sandmo's, a professor of history in Oslo, who was also a visiting fellow at the same institute. Both appreciated the intellectual vitality that they encountered, but, being historians by training, they sometimes also felt a sense of estrangement in a milieu that tended to focus strongly on the actors and institutions of the natural sciences. Casting about for alternative approaches, they came across what in German had started to be called *Wissensgeschichte*—‘the history of knowledge’. It had a foothold in Berlin, but was developing more explicitly at the Center ‘History of Knowledge’ in Zurich. Could this serve as inspiration for a history of knowledge that was rooted in historical scholarship but at

the same time open to influences from other disciplines? Sandmo and Östling asked themselves.

Once home, they decided to develop the history of knowledge further. The first step was to invite three postdoctoral researchers to be part of the project: David Larsson Heidenblad and Anna Nilsson Hammar in Lund, and Kari H. Nordberg in Oslo. Between 2014 and 2016, we published articles, applied for research funding, attended conferences, and discussed what the history of knowledge might mean. Although the work was conducted on a small scale and the large research grants failed to materialize, the intellectual and infrastructural foundations for the history of knowledge in the Nordic countries were laid here.

We were keen to widen our circle and make an original contribution to international scholarship, and therefore in August 2016 arranged a workshop on the circulation of knowledge as a theoretical framework and analytical tool. More than twenty researchers participated, and at the workshop we launched a Nordic network devoted to the history of knowledge, and with it a digital platform (newhistoryofknowledge.com). The discussions at the workshop resulted in an edited volume, published in early 2018 as *Circulation of Knowledge*, which met with considerable interest in the form of reviews and invitations to present our research in various parts of the world.⁹

Lund was, together with Oslo, the most important node in the Nordic network at this stage, and would be where the history of knowledge would grow most significantly in the years to come. Lund had a relatively large group of postdoctoral researchers, thanks in part to the National Graduate School in Historical Studies, and several early career scholars were curious about what the history of knowledge could mean and how it could enhance their own research. One of the strengths of the Department of History in Lund has long been cultural history: in the 2000s, much of the research at the department was focussed on representations, discourses, narratives, or experiences, whether the subject was lifeworlds in the early modern period or memories of the Holocaust. This legacy has left its mark on the kind of history of knowledge that has developed at Lund University.¹⁰

Starting in 2017, the history of knowledge initiative at the Department of History was put on a more formal footing, while at the same time expanding in terms of people and projects. At time of writing, the core group consists of a dozen researchers in the discipline of history. Östling has received funding for a five-year programme on the circulation of humanist knowledge in the post-war period, as part of which two postdoctoral researchers have been recruited: Anton Jansson and Ragni Svensson. The group also includes three early modern projects led by Anna Nilsson Hammar, Kajsa Brilkman, and Erik Bodensten, all funded by the Swedish Research Council. David Larsson Heidenblad and Björn Lundberg are working in several projects on post-war environmental history and economic history from the point of view of the history of knowledge. In 2018, Karolina Enquist Källgren was recruited as a postdoctoral fellow in the history of knowledge, and is currently exploring interwar epistemology. In the autumn of 2019, Martin Ericsson received funding from the Swedish Research Council to analyse the production and circulation of racial knowledge in Sweden in the mid-twentieth century. There are three doctoral students—Lise Groesmeyer, Karl Haikola, and Anton Öhman—who are researching various aspects of the history of knowledge in the twentieth century. In addition, several other scholars of history and adjacent disciplines are affiliated with the research cluster, some of whom have contributed to the present book.

In order to foster interest in the history of knowledge, a monthly seminar series was set up in Lund in 2017. Under the leadership of Östling, Larsson Heidenblad, and Nilsson Hammar, invited guests from anthropology, philosophy, the history of science, and the history of education among many disciplines have led discussions about the problems and potential of the history of knowledge. The seminars have become a gathering place where researchers from different historical fields—history, the history of science and ideas, the history of the book, media history etcetera—can meet regularly. In a recent article, Maria Simonsen and Laura Skouvig have underlined the importance of this interdisciplinary forum, and the fruitful discussions and collaborations it has prompted.¹¹ As a way of further developing and consolidating the

history of knowledge at Lund University, moreover, we have offered courses in all three cycles of the university system—the BA, MA, and doctoral levels—in various settings.¹²

The Lund Centre for the History of Knowledge (LUCK) at the Lund University Department of History, founded in March 2020, aims to further inspire and develop this scholarly expertise. LUCK is home to a range of projects, publications, seminar series, a visiting fellowship programme, and Nordic and international networks, bringing together researchers from many disciplines to explore new forms of collaboration.

What are the scholarly consequences of all these developments? What are the ramifications of a new, expansive, interdisciplinary endeavour? Has it changed the conversation and sparked new undertakings? In what follows, we will elaborate on these issues by looking at two distinguishing features of the history of knowledge intervention at the local level: its manifest capacity to *integrate* various strands of existing scholarship into a shared venture; and its emerging capacity to *generate* new and original lines of research.¹³

Developing integrative and generative capacities

The history of knowledge endeavour has attracted growing interest, especially among early career researchers. Over the last five years, it has brought together a growing number of scholars with highly diverse research interests. Early modern theological tracts; crop failures in the eighteenth century; the promotion of racial knowledge by the UNESCO; the internal workings of Wikipedia: whatever the field of study, the history of knowledge has something to offer. Simone Lässig's proposition that knowledge can be regarded as a 'phenomenon that touches on almost every sphere of human life' and therefore can be 'used as a lens' in a wide array of historical scholarship would seem to hold true.¹⁴ Without shifting focus, scholars have been able to draw on and add to ongoing discussions in the history of knowledge.

Moreover, the history of knowledge endeavour has succeeded in bridging the chronological divides between scholars. Scholarly discussions about interdisciplinary and integrative approaches do not typically

focus on epochal divides, yet, in practice, chronological boundaries are often just as divisive, if not more so, than thematic, theoretical, geographic, and subdisciplinary boundaries. Hence, we want to stress the fruitfulness of a deliberately interchronological approach. In our experience, this has been especially important for the development of a dynamic research hub, which challenges chronological parochialism.

Historians of knowledge have been reluctant to impose programmatic definitions of key concepts such as ‘knowledge’, ‘circulation’, and ‘society’. This is, we maintain, a direct consequence of the fields’ integrative and interchronological character. There are no one-size-fits-all definitions that are useful for everyone—historians cannot study the sixteenth century and the 1960s in the same way—and so practitioners apply the analytical concepts in different, and sometimes contradictory, ways. Yet, the scholarly conversation has not broken down. On the contrary, productive disagreements have become a distinguishing feature of the history of knowledge. As Simonsen and Skouvig have argued, rather than try to define knowledge, there is a need for a pragmatic conceptualization. It behoves researchers to sharpen their arguments, be precise, and remain alert to their own particular standpoint and its confines.¹⁵

The core questions cannot be given definite answers—none of a trans-historical character, at any rate—yet they are undoubtedly productive, as they help us explore the many roles that various forms of knowledge have had in past societies. The research group at Lund seeks to enable and foster this larger scholarly conversation. This integrative capacity is demonstrably one of the greatest merits of the field. However, the generative capacity of the history of knowledge is also under development.

Crucial to this emerging quality is a programmatically broad research agenda, with strong roots in social, political, and cultural history. While the discussions in Lund are certainly inspired by recent developments in neighbouring fields, the majority of scholars involved are trained as general historians. Hence, we would argue that it is vital that the history of knowledge strives to invigorate the discipline of history, and build upon its disciplinary tradition. To this end, the present volume is a conscious effort to demonstrate that the history of knowledge is concerned

with many different forms of knowledge, and that it seeks to strengthen our understanding of historical societies and larger processes.

What, then, is the potential of the history of knowledge? While there are few uniting methodologies or theories, there is, as Martin Mulrow has pointed out, a convergence of the different directions on a 'general direction of travel'.¹⁶ It is fundamental to view knowledge as locally situated and to take its historicity and complexity into account, which helps carry the conversation forward. As a consequence, rather than knowledge per se, it is the conditions for knowledge production and circulation that are in the spotlight.

The discussions at Lund University have pinpointed four topics that have the potential to bridge differences in subject and time period. First, definitions. How do we define knowledge analytically and historically, and how does it relate to concepts such as information, news, beliefs, discourse, science, or culture? What kind of definition is useful to the historical inquiry? What conceptualizations do we need to be able to discuss pertinent issues across chronological divides?¹⁷ Second, social relevance. The question of how various forms of knowledge become important, be it in society at large or in people's everyday lives, is central. To some, this implies a shift of focus from academic institutions and towards the public production and circulation of knowledge; to others, the key issue is how knowledge is lived, practised, and routinized in everyday life.¹⁸ Third, infrastructure. What of the arenas for the production and circulation of knowledge? Here, we turn our attention to different media and the role they have played historically, highlighting the material, political, and intellectual conditions under which knowledge was produced and circulated.¹⁹ Fourth, agency. In the question of historical actors and their significance for the processes of production and circulation of knowledge, there exists a joint interest in broadening the range and types of knowledge actors.²⁰ These four strands are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but point to an open-ended inquiry into what the history of knowledge is and what it could become. They provide the basis for our deliberations, and stimulate a fertile discussion of knowledge phenomena in different historical settings.

In the present volume, we address all these issues in various ways. The first part of the book shows how the scope of history of knowledge inquiries can be expanded. The second part highlights vital theoretical and conceptual discussions in the field. The third part engages with the movement of knowledge and knowledge actors. Taken together, the essays demonstrate both the integrative and generative capacities of the history of knowledge.

Expanding the field

The first group of essays shows how the scope of inquiry can be expanded beyond the realms that are traditionally the focus of the history of science, the history of education, and intellectual history. However, it is not only an empirical or thematic extension. By analysing, for instance, religion, everyday practices, and contemporary online cultures as knowledge phenomena, new research questions and perspectives are generated that help the field as a whole to develop. At the same time, the contributors show how established scholarly directions—such as church history, economic history, cultural history, global history, or digital history—can be enriched by interacting with the history of knowledge.

Kajsa Brilkman introduces the concept of ‘confessional knowledge’ for the production, circulation, and practices of knowledge in the specific varieties of Christianity that emerged after the Reformation. Confessional knowledge can contribute to the history of knowledge by widening its scholarly range, and at the same time sharpens our understanding of the role of knowledge in the premodern world. Conversely, the history of knowledge can provide new perspectives on early modern confessions. In particular, Brilkman argues, the analytical concept of circulation fosters a more dynamic understanding of the production and communication of knowledge in early modern Lutheranism.

David Larsson Heidenblad calls for historians of knowledge to move beyond the study of science and scholarship to engage with how other forms of knowledge have permeated everyday life. Looking at how in recent decades an increasing number of people have found financial markets important, Larsson Heidenblad suggests that historians of know-

ledge are well equipped to analyse this phenomenon as a circulation of financial knowledge. To historians of knowledge, this particular form of knowledge is of general interest, as it has had a rather weak connection to formal education and academic institutions, despite its rapidly increasing social importance, and his essay thus raises the question of how credibility, legitimacy, and expertise are determined.

Peter K. Andersson discusses the feasibility of applying the term ‘knowledge’ in studies of microhistory or the history of everyday life. Using his grandmother’s old recipe book as a case in point, he reflects on the role of knowledge in the world of a mid-twentieth-century housewife, and how knowledge relates to other things such as imagination, folklore, media, and information. The essay concludes by asserting the necessity of considering knowledge in conjunction with related factors, and questions the use of the word ‘knowledge’ instead of ‘ideas’ when shifting the focus to a non-academic world.

Joachim Östlund’s essay draws on insights from global history to join the debate on the interaction and circulation of knowledge between ‘the East’ and ‘the West’. Using the example of an Ottoman *sefâretnâme*, a travel and embassy account produced by a member of the imperial court in Istanbul on mission to Sweden in 1733, the essay discusses the complexities of tracing the routes and roots of knowledge in the Age of Tulips. To understand the making of the Ottoman North, Östlund argues that one must consider the part played by greater Swedish–Ottoman diplomatic contacts and the cultural impact of Greek Orthodox intellectuals at the Ottoman court. The Ottoman North should be understood as an imperial order of knowledge, based on cosmopolitanism and diplomacy, but still claiming to be the centre of the world.

Maria Karlsson’s essay discusses how historical knowledge is formed and fares digitally, specifically on English-language Wikipedia. In 2005, the online encyclopaedia’s article on the 1915 Armenian Genocide was temporarily shut down following a so-called edit war. The article and its behind-the-scenes discussion board offer a snapshot of the difficulties of writing controversial history while trying to adhere to Wikipedia’s core characteristics of consensus, collective authorship, and a neutral point of view. The essay also discusses the similarities that connect the

traditional writing of history to its new, digital cousin—and the differences that separate them.

Examining key concepts

The essays in the second part of the book are contributions to the theoretical and conceptual discussions in the field, bringing to the fore the questions raised by integration with adjacent fields by explicitly drawing on the theoretical and methodological approaches found in other disciplines. At the same time, they provide a necessary depth to the discussion, an examination of central questions, and a problematization of knowledge as a historical phenomenon.

Laura Skouvig considers the central issue of defining what knowledge means as a way of defining what the history of knowledge is about. One way of doing this, she suggests, has been to delimit knowledge from the related concept of information. She presents the field of information history and how it is characterized by different understandings of information. Using an example from the Danish police archives, she shows that information history is a history of how a perceived need for information defined the need for certain representations of information such as tables, ledgers, reports, and verdicts. Moreover, Skouvig discusses how such information was formed, shaped, communicated, and circulated in and beyond institutions and systems. She thus argues that even though information history and the history of knowledge should take inspiration from each other, they also address different research areas.

Cecilia Riving's essay explores the concept of knowledge in early Swedish psychotherapy. When it comes to defining mental illness and its treatment, Riving argues, there has never been any consensus. The early twentieth century, however, stands out for its heated debates, when very different ways of conceptualizing mental illness evolved simultaneously. Riving examines how leading psychotherapists defined their method in opposition to other forms of treatment. What kind of knowledge did they consider relevant in the clinical encounter, and how did it differ from other forms of knowledge? Inspired by hermeneutical traditions,

she uses practical knowledge and Aristotelian *phronesis* as the key concepts with which to interpret the psychotherapist's role.

Björn Lundberg examines how the economist John Kenneth Galbraith employed the concept of 'conventional wisdom' in his 1958 publication *The Affluent Society* to justify a specific set of knowledge claims about life in modern industrial society. Galbraith used the term to explain why economists and other intellectuals held on to old truths and outdated beliefs. While he has never been regarded as a key theorist of knowledge, 'conventional wisdom' has become a standard term in everyday language and academic discourse alike. By studying the history of the term, Lundberg illustrates the relevance of bringing overlooked agents into the study of the circulation of knowledge.

Victoria Höög starts with the standpoints that the history of knowledge is a fresh approach and that it is too vague to define. She argues that the renewed theoretical interest in the temporal dimensions to history writing could enrich the history of knowledge. With temporality as her framework, inspired by Reinhart Koselleck, Höög revisits Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1794). Temporality applied as an interpretative, multilayered concept results in a view of Condorcet as a relentless advocate of liberty and justice, concerned with individual diversity, which can support a less mythical, negative account of the Enlightenment.

Karolina Enquist Källgren raises the fundamental question of the grounds on which historians can say they study one object of knowledge, given that the processes of knowledge circulation between contexts and locations are defined as processes of transformation and translation. Arguing against strong medium- and practice-based approaches, she theorizes that knowledge exists as an object of study in the tension between transformation in circulation and locatedness. Drawing on the case of the interaction between theology and quantum physics in the late 1920s, she proposes five concepts—form, origin, synthesis, coherence, and equivalence—as the methodological tools with which to identify objects of knowledge in circulation.

Setting knowledge in motion

The third group of essays engages with knowledge actors and the movement of knowledge—spatially, chronologically, and socially—to show how media forms, infrastructure, and networks render circulation of knowledge possible, and how circulation processes potentially mould knowledge. Special importance is given to the public sphere and the historically shifting means of mass communication, from the pulpit of the eighteenth century to the newspapers and international magazines of the twentieth century. Together, the contributors demonstrate how perspectives and methodologies developed by scholars in the history of knowledge can inform other fields of inquiry, while at the same time contributing to ongoing discussions in the field about such key concepts as circulation.

Erik Bodensten's essay centres on when, how, and why knowledge of a specific crop, the potato, began to circulate in early modern Sweden. He challenges the established chronologies by shifting focus from the introduction of the potato to its widespread adoption in the mid eighteenth century. He shows that the breakthrough was not the result of any linear or cumulative diffusion process; rather, it was the result of a particular knowledge network, which had long promoted the potato, finally gaining influence over important knowledge institutions, enabling them to mass-communicate their knowledge. In addition, these actors were successful in redefining the potato in terms of agriculture, crop failure, and food security.

Martin Ericsson examines how in the early 1950s the UNESCO launched an international project to reshape the public view on human races and racial difference. The goal was to promote racial equality and combat racism by replacing older, 'unscientific' knowledge about 'inferior' and 'superior' races with 'scientific' knowledge about racial differences. This essay analyses the reception and circulation in a Swedish national context of the new knowledge claims embodied by the UNESCO campaign. The analysis shows that important things can happen to knowledge when it crosses borders, and that controversial knowledge can be interpreted and circulated in different ways.

Maria Simonsen delves further by exploring UNESCO's position as one of the most influential knowledge-producing organizations in the post-war period. Only one part of its mission was on the political level, however; the cornerstone of the organization's work to promote peace and democratic values was its ability to communicate its mission with the world outside the usual political circles. One of the first steps in reaching a wider audience was the publication of the popular magazine *UNESCO Courier*, which was intended as its public voice. The essay addresses what happened to the organization's core ideas and ideals when they were set in motion.

Lise Groesmeyer investigates a case of intellectual infrastructure that often resides out of analytical sight: the world of facts in dictionaries and encyclopaedias. In the 1970s and 1980s, *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933/International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Émigrés 1933–1945* played a vital part in the use of the concept of 'acculturation' to reframe research into scholars forced to flee Nazism. The essay shows how sociopolitical concerns debated by German Jewish émigré organizations in the US from the mid-1960s became the driving force of a historical programme that included this *Handbuch*. Special attention is given to works of the co-editor, historian, and German émigré, Herbert A. Strauss, to establish acculturation as the appropriate category of analysis.

Karl Haikola engages with the concept public knowledge by discussing a recent work on public social science by the sociologists Tim Hallett, Orla Stapleton, and Michael Sauder. Their point is that, to the extent that social science findings circulate in the media, it tends to be either as *objects* or *interpretants*—either as news per se or as a means of making sense of other events or phenomena. The essay applies these two categories to the media reception of *Sverige i världen* (1978), a study of a future Sweden specifically designed to inform public debate. Haikola demonstrates that the report featured in the Swedish media in both forms: while predominantly being presented as news, it was also cited in discussions of global peace, democracy, and the shortcomings of centralized societies.

Where next?

The fifteen essays in this volume together add to the history of knowledge and give a flavour of the ongoing research activities at Lund University. However, the product of one research group always runs the risk of being narrow-minded, even self-gratulatory. In order to widen the perspective and avoid parochialism, we have invited two scholars with a background in the history of science and ideas at Stockholm University, Staffan Bergwik and Linn Holmberg, to critically comment on the volume in a reflection at the end of the book. The conversation continues.

Notes

- 1 For the emergence of the field, see Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, Erling Sandmo, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg, 'The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge: An Introduction', in Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018); Martin Mulrow & Lorraine Daston, 'History of Knowledge', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Suzanne Marchand, 'How Much Knowledge is Worth Knowing? An American Intellectual Historian's Thoughts on the *Geschichte des Wissens*', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42/2–3 (2019); Sven Dupré & Geert Somsen, 'The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42/2–3 (2019); Johan Östling, 'Circulation and Public Arenas of Knowledge', *History and Theory* (forthcoming).
- 2 Recently organized conferences include 'Learning by the Book: Manuals and Handbooks in the History of Knowledge', Princeton University, June 2018; 'Political Culture and the History of Knowledge: Actors, Institutions, Practices', German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., June 2019; '8th Gewina Woudschoten Meeting: Towards a History of Knowledge', Zeist, June 2019; 'The Future of the History of Knowledge', Härkeberga Castle, November 2019, and 'New Paradigms of History of Knowledge', Ca' Foscari University of Venice, December 2019. Two new academic book series dedicated to the history of knowledge were launched in 2019: 'Knowledge Societies in History' with Routledge (edited by Sven Dupré and Wijnand Mijnhardt) and 'Global Epistemics' with Rowman & Littlefield International (edited by Inanna Hamati-Ataya). *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge*, whose first issue was published in 2017,

has Shadi Bartsch-Zimmer as its lead editor and is the flagship publication of the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge at the University of Chicago. The *Journal for the History of Knowledge* (editors-in-chief: Sven Dupré and Geert Somsen) is affiliated with Gewina, the Belgian–Dutch Society for History of Science and Universities, and its first issue will appear in 2020. In addition, several other journals have decided to devote special issues or forum sections to various aspects of the history of knowledge, including *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, *Kulturstudier*, and forthcoming issues of *History and Theory*, *History of Humanities* and *Slagmark*.

- 3 The present volume is thus not an attempt in a systematic way to chart all possible forms of knowledge. As a notion, ‘forms of knowledge’ exists in anthropological, historical, pedagogical, philosophical and sociological scholarship with different meanings. For recent examples, see Nico Stehr & Reiner Grundmann (eds.), *Knowledge: Critical Concepts*, ii: *Knowledge and Society: Forms of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2005) and Sheldon I. Pollock (ed.), *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 4 Dupré & Somsen, ‘The History of Knowledge’: 1.
- 5 Lorraine Daston, ‘The History of Science and the History of Knowledge’, *KNOW* 1/1 (2017); Marchand, ‘How Much Knowledge’: 11; Dupré & Somsen, ‘The History of Knowledge’.
- 6 Staffan Bergwik, ‘Kunskapshistoria: Nya insikter?’, *Scandia* 84/2 (2018).
- 7 Hampus Östh Gustafsson, ‘Kunskapshistoriens samtidsrelevans’, *Historisk tidskrift* 138/4 (2018).
- 8 For recent examples of empirical studies that have taken advantage of the history of knowledge, see Stephanie Zloch, Lars Müller & Simone Lässig (eds.), *Wissen in Bewegung: Migration und globale Verflechtungen in der Zeitgeschichte seit 1945* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018); Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Johan Kärnfelt, Karl Grandin & Solveig Jülich (eds.), *Knowledge in Motion: The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and the Making of Modern Society* (Gothenburg: Makadam, 2018); Bert De Munck & Antonella Romano (eds.), *Knowledge and the Early Modern City: A History of Entanglements* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).
- 9 For examples from the Nordic discussion, see Bergwik, ‘Kunskapshistoria’, Östh Gustafsson, ‘Kunskapshistoriens samtidsrelevans’ and the reviews by Karolina Enquist Källgren, *Lychnos* (2018), Julia Dahlberg in *Historisk tidskrift för Finland* 103/4 (2018); Sharon Rider in *Historisk tidskrift* 139/2 (2019), and Christoffer Basse Eriksen in *H-Soz-Kult*, 29 October 2019, <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/page>.
- 10 For cultural history at the Department of History, Lund, see Birgitta Odén,

- ‘Gurevitjs undran’, in Johan Dietsch et al. (eds.), *Historia mot strömmen: Kultur och konflikt i det moderna Europa* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2007); Eva Österberg, ‘Kultur, kvinnor och historia: Mitt liv som forskare’, in Kirsti Niskanen & Christina Florin (eds.), *Föregångarna: Kvinnliga professorer om liv, makt och vetenskap* (Stockholm: SNS förlag, 2010); Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘From Cultural History to the History of Knowledge’, *History of Knowledge*, 1 September 2019, <https://historyofknowledge.net/2017/06/08/from-cultural-history-to-the-history-of-knowledge/>.
- 11 Maria Simonsen & Laura Skouvig, ‘Videnshistorie: Nye veje i historieviden-skaberne’, *temp* 10/19 (2019).
- 12 Andrés Brink Pinto & David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘Vad vill vi att studenterna ska kunna göra? Avtäckningsmodellen i praktiken’, in Hege Markussen & Katarina Mårtensson (eds.), *Proceedings från Humanistiska och teologiska fakulteternas pedagogiska inspirationskonferens 2018* (Lund: Mediatryck, 2020).
- 13 For a similar argument see Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘Fulfilling the Promise of the History of Knowledge: Key Approaches for the 2020s’, *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1/1 (forthcoming, 2020).
- 14 Simone Lässig, ‘The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda’, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016): 44.
- 15 Simonsen & Skouvig, ‘Videnshistorie’: 24.
- 16 Mulsow, ‘History of Knowledge’: 159.
- 17 See, for instance, the essays in the section ‘Examining key concepts’ in this volume.
- 18 Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘Cirkulation—ett kunskapshistoriskt nyckelbegrepp’, *Historisk tidskrift* 137/2 (2017); Anna Nilsson Hammar, ‘Theoria, Praxis and Poiesis: Theoretical Considerations on the Circulation of Knowledge in Everyday Life’, in Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge*.
- 19 See, for example, Kajsa Brillman, ‘The Circulation of Knowledge in Translations and Compilations: A Sixteenth-Century Example’, in Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge*; Erik Bodensten, ‘Political Knowledge in Public Circulation: The Case of Subsidies in Eighteenth-Century Sweden’, in Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge*; Johan Östling, ‘En kunskapsarena och dess aktörer: Under strecket och kunskapscirkulation i 1960-talets offentlighet’, *Historisk tidskrift* 140/1 (2020); Östling, ‘Circulation and Public Arenas of Knowledge’; Ragni Svensson, ‘Scandinavian Book Cafes as Knowledge Arenas of the New Left’, in Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen & David Larsson Heidenblad (eds.), *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas, and Aspirations* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, forthcoming 2020); Anton Jansson, ‘The City, the Church, and the 1960s: On Secularization Theory and the Swedish Translation of Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City*’, in Östling, Olsen & Larsson Heidenblad (eds.), *Histories of Knowledge*.

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- 20 See, for example, David Larsson Heidenblad, 'Mapping a New History of the Ecological Turn: The Circulation of Environmental Knowledge in Sweden 1967', *Environment and History* 24/2 (2018); David Larsson Heidenblad, 'Överlevnadsdebattörerna: Hans Palmstierna, Karl-Erik Fichtelius och miljöfrågornas genombrott i 1960-talets Sverige', in Fredrik Norén & Emil Stjernholm (eds.), *Efterkrigstidens samhällskontakter* (Lund: Mediehistoriskt arkiv, 2019); Björn Lundberg, 'The Galbraithian Moment: Affluence and Critique of Growth in Scandinavia 1958–72', in Östling, Olsen & Larsson Heidenblad (eds.), *Histories of Knowledge*.

I

EXPANDING THE FIELD

Confessional knowledge

How might the history of knowledge and the history of confessional Europe influence each other?

Kajsa Brilkman

The history of knowledge understands knowledge more broadly than being equivalent to modern science.¹ Some have argued that such a wider concept of knowledge could also include religion.² In given historical contexts, what we speak of today as ‘religion’ was so structuring for people’s actions and their understanding of their surroundings it assumed the same role as science in modern society. Some scholars in recent years have shown how the history of knowledge and the concept of ‘religious knowledge’ can breathe new life into the study of the relationship between science and religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³ Thus, the potential of the history of knowledge is found to be cross-disciplinary, transcending the boundary between the study of religious conceptions and of rational ideas.⁴

Despite the notion that religious conceptions can be an object of study in the history of knowledge, however, early modern religion has been generally overlooked. I think one reason for this is that the term ‘religion’ is an imprecise concept for the forms of religious conceptions current in Europe in the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In this paper, therefore, I reflect on the concept of confessional knowledge as a tool for analysing the context-specific variants of Christianity that appeared in early modern Europe, and combine it with a history of knowledge perspective. I discuss what research on early modern confessions can

bring to the history of knowledge, and how the history of knowledge can contribute to research on Christian confessions.

Confessional knowledge

Western Christianity underwent a transformation in the sixteenth century, when it split into three main confessions (the Catholic, the Lutheran, and the Reformed). These confessions were what structured religious conceptions after the Reformation. The process was roughly as follows.⁵ The purpose of questioning papal indulgences, as Martin Luther did, was to prompt a discussion within the Church. His criticism, however, led not to a discussion; rather, Luther was labelled a heretic. The question of indulgences, which had arisen within the framework of the new doctrine of grace, which several Wittenberg professors had helped develop, soon became a matter of the Pope's authority. As such, the conflict between the various camps could never be resolved. A very successful self-advertiser, Luther gained strong support and became increasingly radical in his views. Although two camps formed very soon, they were not defined by dogma, and they regarded themselves to be the universal Church. After a military confrontation, the conflict was temporarily resolved in the Holy Roman Empire by the Imperial Diet in Augsburg in 1555, where the followers of *Confessio Augustana* were granted the right to exercise their faith. This recognition had an impact on the Protestants' position in the rest of Europe.

In the mid century the conflict entered a new phase. The starting point was now that the different churches were a fact: the battle was no longer about how the universal church should be designed, but about the power relationship between competing confessions. To define one another, it became increasingly important to define (based on standardized, written confessions) which theological positions were true and which could not be accepted.⁶ In the later sixteenth century, three major confessions crystallized: the Roman Catholic, the Lutheran, and the Reformed. They each maintained an absolute claim of truth and created documents where this was maintained: for the Catholic Church, the Council of Trent was crucial; for the Lutheran Church, the Formula

concordiae; and for the Reformed churches, the *Confessio Helvetica*, among others.⁷ These in turn generated texts, practices, and concepts that together constituted a cluster, often called confessional culture.

Any history of knowledge that seeks to examine religious concepts in early modern Europe has to take into account these context-specific variants of Christianity, with parallel and competing absolute truth claims made by representatives of the various confessions. A concept such as ‘religious knowledge’ may not be sufficiently sensitive to this context-specific variant, while ‘confessional knowledge’ may capture knowledge production for the specific variant of Christianity that occurred after Reformation.⁸

The distinction between religious knowledge and confessional knowledge also fuels the discussion about how the concept of knowledge should be understood. Most scholars seem to endorse a definition of knowledge as ‘what at some point is understood as knowledge.’⁹ Without rejecting this definition outright, Lorraine Daston writes that it is unsatisfactory, because it tries to grasp too much. She points out that in all cultures there are:

implicit systematics of knowledge, starting with an epistemological hierarchy (often intertwined with a social hierarchy) of which kinds of knowledge are more or less valued, by whom, and why. These hierarchies also rank knowledge and the epistemic virtues they are expected to display.¹⁰

She sees knowledge as systematized knowing in a historical context, given that different historical contexts hold different knowledge to be important, and that this knowledge should be systematized. She thus makes the systematization (and not the subjective understanding of historical agents) the crucial criterion when defining knowledge. The question then becomes how best to elaborate on the context in which a certain type of knowing is systematized and shaped into knowledge. The distinction between religious knowledge and confessional knowledge in the early modern period serves as an example of Daston’s definition of the object of history of knowledge: confessions were a specifically early modern way of systematizing the Christian faith. Religion was systematized and

became confessional. Confessional knowledge is the systematic knowledge of creation and salvation that was developed in the framework of the early modern confessions. That salvation was only offered as a gift from God was one example of Lutheran confessional knowledge, as was the statement that the Reformers had antecedents in the Late Middle Ages who, like Martin Luther and subsequent reformers, had preached the gospel but were persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church.

Any definition of confessional knowledge necessarily begs the question of what the concept can contribute to the history of knowledge, and indeed to research on confessional Europe. I see the concept of confessional knowledge as an adaptation of the concept of knowledge to a particular historical context, and therefore a tool in the history of knowledge. One can imagine a plethora of attributes, such as ‘sexual knowledge’ or ‘political knowledge of subsidies’;¹¹ however, the point here is not to define separate research fields, but to make the concept of knowledge useful in a specific context.

What research on confessional Europe can offer a history of knowledge

The competing confessions generated texts, practices, and concepts that together constituted a cluster that is often referred to as confessional culture.¹² Primarily, it is the Lutheran confessional culture that has been studied.¹³ In that sense, it bears clear similarities to the issues facing the history of knowledge: how did certain forms of knowing come to be regarded as knowledge (even if one does not term it knowledge, and instead speaks of it as Lutheran theology)? Which agents, institutions, and practitioners collaborated in the process? In what follows, I will look at the answers given in the research on early modern Lutheranism, at how researchers have addressed the creation of confessional norms, and which agents and institutions were involved in making those truth claims, and in the process I will chart how Lutheran confessional culture can be studied as an example of religious concepts that had the status of systematic confessional knowledge in early modern society. Thus,

Daston's definition of the subject matter of the history of knowledge is found to extend far beyond modern scientific knowledge.

The early modern confessions emerged after a long process in which certain doctrinal standards were given the status of truth—as doctrine. Examples of confessional documents have already been discussed in the text. However, attempts to standardize the various belief systems in writing, and thus fix them, never fully succeeded. For example, the Formula of Concord of 1577, the statement of faith drawn up in order to achieve Lutheran unity, was a source of bitter and prolonged strife.¹⁴

Lutheranism was realized in territorial churches that were unrelated to one another, and thus lacked uniform dogmatics and any real institutional centre (unlike Catholicism). The absence of central agents and shared institutions that had at least the appearance of being norm-regulated meant local agents and institutions were the more important. Above all, this was true for the professors of theology at the Lutheran territorial universities, who took on the role of chief interpreters of scripture as well as correctors, advisers, and educators.¹⁵ The main task of this cluster of local agents and institutions was to maintain, manage, and disseminate the true doctrine. Except the professors these clusters included village schools, superintendents, and parish priests. The universities had a central role in training parish priests, who in turn were responsible for teaching parishioners about Christianity, through preaching, worship, and the catechism.

In relation to the defined confession, a canon of texts emerged that was considered to be better communicators of the confessional knowledge than others. The catechism has already been mentioned as such a text. In Lutheran territories, the canonization of text became an important instrument in preserving and disseminating confessional knowledge. Since the Protestants recognized the authority of scripture alone, and not of the Pope and the councils, in matters of doctrine, they were bereft of such norm-regulating institutions. Scripture proved intractable as a norm. Luther and the professors at the University of Wittenberg and other nearby Lutheran universities took it upon themselves to establish the norms, but Luther's death meant that this norm-regulating function halted, leaving the Lutheran leadership to rancorous division. Instead of

Luther in person, the Lutherans turned to his texts as the norm-giving authority. What followed was an intense effort to preserve, disseminate, and protect Luther's texts. This resulted in a series of florilegia, and the first editions of Luther's collected works, which were published in one edition in Wittenberg and one in Jena.¹⁶

This confessional knowledge was far from merely theoretical, rather it permeated society, politics, and everyday life. Systematized knowledge was made into a lived practice. In preaching and catechesis, Lutheran dogmatics became social norms and an integral part of people's lifeworlds. Doctrine and life existed in close relation to each other:¹⁷ confessional knowledge characterized the practices of marriage, household, and princely power.

The maintenance of confessional knowledge was linked to various mechanisms designed to counteract distortion or the questioning of the truth, and which included censorship and residence laws to exclude other confessions.¹⁸ Here again the professors of theology played an important role, as they were often called in as experts to investigate whether or not certain documents were compatible with true doctrine.

These various expressions of knowledge formation and institutionalization constituted a first draft of what could be subsumed into the concept of confessional knowledge—a concept that thus clarifies how a particular form of knowledge in early modern Europe was systematized and institutionalized to have the maximum impact on society. Seen in this way, the study of confessional knowledge feeds into the history of knowledge. If the history of knowledge is more than the modern concept of knowledge, free of religious belief, and instead stretches far beyond, the concept of confessional knowledge is a way of capturing knowledge's role in the religious divisions of early modern Europe.¹⁹ An early modern history of knowledge can thus be more than the early modern history of science.²⁰ Research on confessional Europe can contribute to the history of knowledge, making good on the promise that the history of knowledge is more than history of science in new clothing.

What history of knowledge can offer research on confessional Europe

Having established what the study of confessional Europe can offer the history of knowledge, the opposite remains: what is the influence of the history of knowledge on research on confessional Europe? Although the history of knowledge can draw impetus from research on confessional Europe, the concepts of confessional culture and confessional knowledge seem to be interchangeable, and thus a history of knowledge approach would not have much to give the study of early modern confessions, since what is studied as the history of knowledge has already been studied, just by a different name. The concept of confessional knowledge trains the spotlight on the status of religious confessions as knowledge, but, one might think, offers no new perspective for the study of confessional Europe. It is not that simple, though.

In answering, however, my ambition is not to develop a new, alternative model for the study of confessional Europe, but rather to contribute to the debate in which scholars together seek new ways to solve set problems. Birgit Emich and Matthias Pohlig have recently pointed out that the concept of confessional culture is in need of further theorizing.²¹ I draw inspiration from this debate, and use some of the tools from the history of knowledge to contribute to it. First, however, an overview of the concept of confessional culture, and something about its criticism.

The concept of confessional culture was developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s by Thomas Kaufmann, and, while not always explicit, has clear links to ‘the cultural turn’ in history. It was formulated as a criticism of the starting point of the concept of confessionalization that the different confessions had structural similarities, which made it difficult to study the specifics of the different confessions. Kaufmann used his concept to study the interpretive frameworks, symbolic worlds, worldviews, self-understandings, enemy images, and lifeworlds that were the specifics of early Lutheranism, seeking to bridge the tension implied by previous research between the theology produced by the elite and the lived world. Confessional culture arises when the written confession meets and adapts to different lifeworlds, Kaufmann writes.²² This

means that the written confession to some extent stands as a producer of culture in Kaufmann's concept, although he emphasizes that culture is not equivalent to the confession, but takes different forms in different contexts. Confession and lifeworld are not identical, but in the lifeworld, the expression of the confession is transformed to fit the specific context.²³ The concept of confessional culture intended to capture both the specificity of Lutheranism and the plurality of expressions that this unity gave rise to. To explain the connection between the two, he uses a model of concentric circles, where the Lutheran identity is at its strongest in the centre, becoming weaker the further away from the centre one is.²⁴ When Pohlig summarizes this, he writes that research on confessional culture explores 'Diffusion—including the transformation—of official confessional requirements into social and cultural contexts'.²⁵

Closely linked to this are Kaufmann's thoughts on central and peripheral relations in different geographical territories. He formulated a dissemination model of Lutheran confessional culture that had the Lutheran territories of the Holy Roman Empire as the centre of cultural production, and Scandinavia, among others, as the recipients.²⁶ Steffie Schmidt counters by pointing to some examples when the reverse was true, theologians in Scandinavia were producers of 'culture' for their German colleagues. However, as she shows, this was rather the exception than the norm.²⁷

In the debate about confessional culture, Pohlig and Emich note the difficulties with the concept of confessional culture used thus far: that it is poor at analysing processes; that it is based on an essentialist understanding of confessions of faith, which means that it does not permit an analysis of how confessions were situated; and that it cannot wholly resolve the inherent tension between Lutheran unity and Lutheran plurality.²⁸ One way of tackling these problems—especially the question of unity or plurality—is to draw inspiration from the history of knowledge, a field where analyses of movement and changes in knowledge are central, and the starting point is that knowledge is not produced and then communicated, but rather that the relationship between production and communication is circular.²⁹ This can be linked to the

fact that movement and circulation have been mentioned increasingly frequently in historical investigations in the 2000s.³⁰

A circular understanding of the confessional knowledge transfer processes could provide tools that could resolve some of this. Possibly, the concept of confessional knowledge could serve as a bridge between research on confessional Europe and on the history of knowledge. If confession is seen as the essence of a culture, as Kaufmann has formulated the concept, the culture is to some extent based on the confession. The unity of confessional culture is then seen as something that can be found in a core that then diffuses. By extension, this means that the production of meaning in confessional culture is seen as a contextual interpretation of the normed confession. However, the concept of circulation points to the fact that knowledge is not produced and then communicated, but that there is constant feedback which sees knowledge reinforced, clarified, or gone. Hence, the meaning-creating function does not accrue to the content as much as to the circular relationship between production and communication.

I would argue that such a circular understanding of meaning-making is difficult to reconcile with the notion that Lutheran confessional culture has certain elements that are at its core or that form a common ground and create unity. If the meaning-creating function is a circular relationship between production and communication, confessional culture cannot be understood as something that arises when that confession, which exists as the written word, operates in a lifeworld; instead, it must be studied as a constantly changing product of the circular production and communication process that was integral to early modern Lutheranism. By studying this process rather than 'culture', the history of knowledge is partially freed from the framework of cultural history.

The value of such an approach will be determined by empirical studies. I would argue it can be useful for understanding the relationship between learned theologians and the local communities. It can also be used to shed new light on the connections between different Lutheran territories. My own research on translations of Lutheran literature from German to Swedish and Danish around 1600 gives examples of the latter.³¹ The translations—which accounted for a significant proportion of the

Swedish- and Danish-language publications in print at this point—have largely been seen as examples of the spread of Lutheranism from the centre of the Holy Roman Empire to the periphery of Scandinavia.³² A closer analysis, however, problematizes this sort of linear distribution. Studies of book production show that confessional knowledge, meaning normed and systematic confessional Lutheranism, is not disseminated in straight lines. In Lutheranism, the communication of confessional knowledge is better understood as agenda setting, as certain texts or sections of text became and remained important (or were dropped) according to whether agents chose to reproduce them (or not). At the same time, each reproduction of that knowledge always meant a change, sometimes linked to the communication opportunities offered by the chosen medium.

A few examples will suffice to illustrate this. Martin Luther left behind a tremendous amount of writing in print.³³ The translations of Luther's works in the second half of the sixteenth century did not reflect the full range of his textual production, however. Some texts were the subject of translations, compilations, and new editions; the majority were not. It should be no surprise that Luther's *Small Catechism* belonged to this group of frequent reproductions, but there were others.³⁴ If one studies the publication of Luther's texts in Northern Europe in this period, it was common for one such print to be accompanied by another of the same text. It seems that the deciding factor in whether a text was reproduced in one territory was that it had already been printed in another.³⁵ This circulation of texts in the Lutheran sphere, whether in translation or as new editions, is only partially known today. Older bibliographic research tends to be national, listing works published in a defined language area, and only occasionally with notes on editions in other languages. This is compounded by the fact that the bibliographic works do not always list which texts were included in compilations, largely because the compilers had not specified which works they had excerpted.

Luther's *Ob man für dem sterben fliehen muge* can serve as an example. The Weimar edition of Luther's collected works lists nine editions in German in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, after it was first printed in 1527.³⁶ As early as 1534, the text was published in Danish in

Malmö, in 1577 it was included in a Danish compilation, in 1588 it was translated into Swedish, in 1619 subject to a new Danish translation, in 1623 another Swedish translation, and in 1658 it was part of a Danish compilation.³⁷ Luther's text was frequently referred to in texts on the medical arts.³⁸ The point here is that central elements of what is usually called Lutheran confessional culture—in this case, the content of a text or Luther's role as an authority—only became central because of a circular relationship between production and communication.

Consider too the many editions and translations of Girolamo Savonarola's *Miserere mei Deus*. He wrote the text shortly before his execution in Florence in 1498, and it was published soon after. In the early sixteenth century, it was published repeatedly in Latin, Italian, and German—including an edition in Latin, printed in Wittenberg in 1523, with a Latin preface by Luther.³⁹ In the preface, Luther emphasized that Savonarola had not put his trust in his own good deeds for his salvation, but only in the grace of God. Luther went on that Savonarola had spread the gospel among the people, but that he had been thwarted by the Pope, who had him executed.⁴⁰

Luther's foreword and praise of Savonarola led to his inclusion in the Lutheran canon. He was portrayed in Lutheran texts as Luther's predecessor, as a martyr who died for pure doctrine, and an example of how the Pope killed those who preached the truth. Savonarola was incorporated into Lutheran historiography and subsequently made into an advocate of the Reformation. One step in this process was the translation and dissemination of Savonarola's texts, and especially *Miserere mei Deus*—duly provided with forewords that placed him in the context of the Lutheran historical writing described above. Between 1522 and 1580, 46 editions were published, mostly in Latin, followed by German and English, along with Italian, Flemish, and Spanish. It was not only Lutheran Europe that read Savonarola, then, but it was there that the translations were accompanied by the presentation of him as Luther's predecessor. However, the most successful version of Savonarola's text was not Luther's edition, but the translation into German published by Johann Spangenberg in 1542 (and published without Luther's foreword). It was also this text that was the source for the Danish translation of

1551, the Swedish translation of 1591, and probably the Dutch publication of 1548.⁴¹

The many editions and translations of Savonarola are by no means unknown to scholars, but in this context they confirm the importance of translations, editions, and paratexts in establishing Savonarola as an important reference point. The interpretation of Savonarola's work was decisive *per se*, but the same was also true of the practice of reproduction and recontextualization, and thus the circulation of his texts in Lutheranism. The idea that Savonarola was Luther's forerunner was launched by Luther himself in his foreword of 1523, and continued in successive editions, publications, and translations throughout the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth—but without Luther's own foreword.

By analysing such patterns of circulation (or partially interrupted circulation), where production and communication were intertwined, early modern Lutheranism not only appears as the sum of its cultural, confessional variants, but as a product of lasting practices. The tension between unity and plurality could possibly be resolved, to be replaced by a situated understanding of the confessions. These examples are by no means exhaustive, but indicate a possible direction for research to take.

Final reflections

I have reflected on what two different fields can learn from each other in solving the challenges both fields are facing. It is not my intention to argue that the two fields should merge, only that both can find new impulses by studying each other. The history of knowledge could fulfil its promise of being more than the history of science, for example by incorporating the study of early modern confessional knowledge. Research on early Lutheran confessional culture has largely been based on diffusion models, with a centre that is meaning-producing, which then spreads it to the periphery, transforming the meaning in the process and adapting it to the context of the periphery. The concept of circulation, which sees the production and communication of meaning as mutually dependent, offers an opportunity to think outside such a diffusion model. I have therefore drawn on examples of what a circular

understanding of meaning-making in the early modern confessions can be. It is possible that the tension between unity and plurality, which has been recently discussed and which is embedded in the concept of culture, can be resolved.

I also introduce a new concept: confessional knowledge. I would argue that as a concept it is more useful than religious knowledge when analysing the systematization of knowledge on which the early modern confessions were based, and which resulted in competing truth claims. It is for future research to determine the extent to which these reflections can be used empirically.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Lorraine Daston, 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', *KNOW* 1/1 (2017).
- 2 Philipp Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?', *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der Deutschen Literatur* 36 (2011), 165; Simone Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda', *Bulletin of the GHI* 59 (2016), 47; Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, 'Cirkulation—ett kunskapshistoriskt nyckelbegrepp', *Historisk tidskrift* 137/2 (2017), 269; see also many examples in Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).
- 3 See, for instance, Kerstin von der Krone, 'The Duty to Know: Nineteenth-Century Jewish Catechisms and Manuals and the Making of Jewish Religious Knowledge', *History of Knowledge*, 1 September 2019, <https://historyofknowledge.net/2018/06/03/the-duty-to-know/>; Simone Lässig, 'Religious Knowledge and Social Adaptability in the Face of Modernity', *History of Knowledge*, 1 September 2019, <https://historyofknowledge.net/2017/07/21/religious-knowledge-and-social-adaptability-in-the-face-of-modernity/>.
- 4 Problems that this division between religion and rational ideas create have recently been noticed in a Swedish context by Anton Jansson & Hjalmar Falk, 'Religion i det svenska idéhistorieämnet: Översikt och reflektion', *Lychnos* (2017).
- 5 Newer works depicting this process are Thomas Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Reformation* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2009); and Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther: Rebell in einer Zeit des Umbruchs* (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2012).
- 6 Confessionalization has been much studied in recent decades. Key works include Heinz Schilling, 'Die Konfessionalisierung im Reich: Religiöser und gesellschaft-

- licher Wandel in Deutschland zwischen 1555 und 1620', *Historische Zeitschrift* 246/1 (1988); Wolfgang Reinhardt, 'Was ist katholische Konfessionalisierung?', in Wolfgang Reinhardt & Heinz Schilling (eds.), *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung: Wissenschaftliches Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1993* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995). A critical discussion of the concept is Anton Schindling, 'Konfessionalisierung und Grenzen von Konfessionalisierbarkeit', in Anton Schindling & Walter Ziegler (eds.), *Die Territorien des Reichs im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Land und Konfession 1500–1650*, vii: *Bilanz – Forschungsperspektiven – Register* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1997). In English see Ute Lotz-Heumann, 'Confessionalization', in David M. Whitford (ed.), *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research* (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2007); Heinz Schilling, 'Confessional Europe', in Thomas A. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman & James D. Tracy (eds.), *Handbook of European History. 1400–1600*, ii: *Visions, Programs and Outcomes* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).
- 7 For a more in-depth discussion of Lutheranism in this context, see Irene Dingel, 'The Culture of Conflict in the Controversies Leading to the Formula of Concord (1548–1580)', in Robert Kolb (ed.), *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture: 1550–1675* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Irene Dingel, *Concordia controversa: Die öffentlichen Diskussionen um das lutherische Konkordienwerk am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996).
 - 8 Renate Dürr, Annette Gerok-Reiter, Andreas Holzem & Steffen Patzold (eds.), *Religiöses Wissen im vormodernen Europa: Schöpfung – Mutterschaft – Passion* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2019), which uses 'religious knowledge' as a tool to analyse knowledge production, consumption and practices in the premodern world. They argue that this religious knowledge was a basis for modernity. For a specific use in the early modern era I still think that 'confessional knowledge' better highlights the tensions between the confessions.
 - 9 Martin Mulsow, 'History of Knowledge', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 160–161; Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge', 33.
 - 10 Lorraine Daston, 'History of Knowledge: Comment', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 176; see also Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge*, 11.
 - 11 Kari Hernæs Nordberg, 'The Circulation and Commercialization of Sexual Knowledge: The Celebrity Sexologists Inge and Sten Hegeler', in Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari Nordberg (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018); Erik Bodensten, 'Political Knowledge in Public

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- Circulation: The Case of Subsidies in Eighteenth-Century Sweden', in Östling et al. *Circulation of Knowledge*.
- 12 Michael Maurer, *Konfessionskulturen: Die Europäer als Protestanten und Katholiken* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019).
 - 13 Thomas Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur: Lutherischer Protestantismus in der zweiten Hälfte des Reformationsjahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Thomas Kaufmann, 'What is Lutheran Confessional Culture?', in Per Ingesman (ed.), *Religion as an Agent of Change: Crusades—Reformation—Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); see also the articles in 'Themenschwerpunkt/Focal Point: Frühneuzeitliche Konfessionskultur', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 109 (2018).
 - 14 Dingel, *Concordia controversa*.
 - 15 Kenneth G. Appold, 'Academic Life and Teaching in Post-Reformation Lutheranism', in Robert Kolb (ed.), *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Thomas Kaufmann, *Universität und lutherische Konfessionalisierung: die Rostocker Theologieprofessoren und ihr Beitrag zur theologischen Bildung und kirchlichen Gestaltung im Herzogtum Mecklenburg zwischen 1550 und 1675* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1997).
 - 16 Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999); Stefan Michel, *Die Kanonisierung der Werke Martin Luthers im 16. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016); Ernst Koch, 'Lutherflorilegien zwischen 1550 und 1600: Zum Lutherbild der ersten nachreformatorischen Generation', *Theologische Versuche* 16 (1986).
 - 17 For early modern Lutheranism, see Sabine Holtz, *Theologie und Alltag: Leben und Lehre in den Predigten der Tübinger Theologen 1550–1750* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993); Norbert von Haag, Sabine Holtz & Wolfgang Zimmermann (eds.), *Ländliche Frömmigkeit: Konfessionskulturen und Lebenswelten 1500–1850* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2002); Kolb, *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture*.
 - 18 Hans-Peter Hasse, *Zensur theologischer Bücher in Kursachsen im konfessionellen Zeitalter: Studien zur kursächsischen Literatur- und Religionspolitik in den Jahren 1569 bis 1575* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000).
 - 19 Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge* gives many examples of confessionally divided Europe, but the perspective can be deepened.
 - 20 The concept of knowledge has been used in the field of early modern science history. This research is in no way blind to the confessional, but the perspective could be deepened. See, for example, Arndt Brendecke, *Imperium und Empirie: Funktionen des Wissens in der spanischen Kolonialherrschaft* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009).
 - 21 Birgit Emich & Matthias Pohlig, 'Frühneuzeitliche Konfessionskultur(en): Stand und Zukunft eines Konzepts', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 109 (2018), 373–374.
 - 22 The most commonly used definition of the concept confessional culture is found

- in Thomas Kaufmann, *Dreißigjähriger Krieg und Westfälischer Friede: Kirchengeschichtliche Studien zur lutherischen Konfessionskultur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 7: 'Formungsprozeß einer bestimmten, bekenntnisgebundenen Auslegungsgestalt des christlichen Glaubens in die vielfältigen lebensweltlichen Ausprägungen und Kontexte hinein.' See also Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur*, 3–26.
- 23 Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur*, 10–12; Matthias Pohlig, 'Luthertum und Lebensführung: Konfessionelle 'Prägungen' und das Konzept der Konfessionskultur', in Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Andreas Holzem & Volker Leppin (eds.), *Vielfältiges Christentum: Dogmatische Spaltung – kulturelle Formierung – ökumenische Überwindung?* (Leipzig: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 76, 77.
- 24 Kaufmann, 'What is Lutheran Confessional Culture', 132.
- 25 Pohlig, 'Luthertum und Lebensführung', 75. (German original: 'Diffusion—also auch der Transformation—obrigkeitlicher Konfessionalisierungsvorgaben in soziale und kulturelle Kontexte hinein.')
- 26 Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur*, 24.
- 27 Steffie Schmidt, *Professoren im Norden: Lutherische Gelehrsamkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit am Beispiel der theologischen Fakultäten in Kopenhagen und Uppsala* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).
- 28 Birgit Emich, 'Konfession und Kultur, Konfession als Kultur? Vorschläge für eine kulturalistische Konfessionskultur-Forschung', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 109 (2018), 379; Matthias Pohlig, 'Harter Kern und longue durée: Überlegungen zum Begriff der (lutherischen) Konfessionskultur', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 109 (2018), 397–399.
- 29 Östling et al., *Circulation of Knowledge*; David Larsson Heidenblad, 'Framtidskunskap i circulation: Gösta Ehrensvarlds diagnos och den svenska framtidsdebatten, 1971–1972', *Historisk tidskrift* 135/4 (2015), 618; Andreas B. Kilcher & Philipp Sarasin, 'Editorial', *Nach Feierabend: Züricher Jahrbuch für Wissensgeschichte Zirkulationen* 7 (2011), 9–10.
- 30 See, for example, James Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit' *Isis* 95/4 (2004).
- 31 The project 'Mare Lutheranicum: The Book Market and Lutheran Confessional Culture around the Baltic Sea 1570–1620' is funded by the Swedish Research Council (2016–2019).
- 32 Stina Hansson, 'Afsatt på swensko': 1600-talets tryckta översättningslitteratur (Gothenburg: Litteraturvetenskapliga institutionen, 1982); Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur*, 24.
- 33 *Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883–2009) (Weimarer Ausgabe, henceforth WA).
- 34 Nina Javette Koefoed, 'Emotions, Obligations and Identities within the Lutheran Household: From Luther's Small Catechism to Cultural and Social Responsibilities in the 18th Century Household in Denmark', in H. Assel, J.A. Steiger &

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- A. Walter (eds.), *Reformatio Baltica: Kulturwirkungen der Reformation in den Metropolen des Ostseeraums* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); Stig Lindholm, *Catechismi förfremielse: Studier till catechismus-undervisningen i Svenska kyrkan 1593–1646* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1949).
- 35 There is currently no comprehensive overview. Such research is based on bibliographical information available through national library databases and bibliographies.
- 36 WA 23, 327–329.
- 37 *Om mand maa fly for døden oc Pestilentze: En Christelig underwisning* (Malmö, 1534); Hieronymus Weller, *En Aandelig Recept, Præservativa oc Lægedom, huorledis it christet Menniske skal skicke sig imod Døden, Oc besynderlige naar Pestilentze regerer* (Copenhagen, 1577); for the Danish editions, see Henrik Horstbøll, *Menigmands medie: Det folkelige bogtryk i Danmark, 1500–1840: En kulturhistorisk undersøgelse* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Bibliotek, 1999), 394; Petrus Benedicti, *Om man må fly för Dödhen eller Pestilenzien: Doctor Mårthen Luthers Berättelse eller Vnderwijsning* (Stockholm, 1588), for the Swedish editions, see Isak Collijn, *Sveriges bibliografi 1481–1600*, iii (Uppsala: Svenska litteratursällskapet, 1932–1933), 72–4; Niels Mikkelsen Aalborg, *En christelig Betænckning om mand maa flye for Døden Stillet ved Martin Luther Nu nylig paa Danske udsat aff Tydsken, den menige mand til Gaffn aff N. M. A.* (Copenhagen, 1619); Laurentius Paulinus Gothus, *L. Paulini Gothi Loimoscopia, eller Pestilentz speghel: Thet är: andeligh och naturligh vnderwijsning, om pestilentzies beskriffwelse, orsaker, præserwati-jff, läkedomar och befrijelser: stält och sammanfattadt ...; widh ändan är tilsadt, D. D. Mart. Lutheri grundrijke vnderwijsning, om pestilentziske förwarningar ...* (Stockholm, 1623); Jens Sørensen Nørnissom, *En liden Tractat, hvorledis en ret christen Soldat bør at krige imod aandelige oc legemlige Fiender, Item om nogle fornemme Aarsager til Krig; disligste om U-gudelige Tyranners Straff oc Endelig ...* (Copenhagen, 1658).
- 38 Examples in E. A. Oftestad, “Slå ihjel denne syndige kropp, men bevar dog min fattige sjel”: Lidelsens religiøse funksjon i Niels Palladius’ dødsforberedelse (1558) og i samtidige likprekener’, *Teologisk Tidsskrift* (2015), 14.
- 39 Tobias Daniels, ‘Vom Humanismus zur Reformation: Girolamo Savonarolas Frührezeption im Deutschland des beginnenden 16. Jahrhunderts’, *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 106 (2015), 8; WA 12, 245–246; Bruce Gordon, “‘This Worthy Witness of Christ’: Protestant Uses of Savonarola in the Sixteenth Century”, in Bruce Gordon (ed.), *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Scolar: Aldershot, 1996).
- 40 Gordon, “This worthy witness of Christ”, 100.
- 41 On these translations see Kajsa Brillkman, ‘Savonarola i Norden: Reception av luthersk konfessionskultur i Sverige och Danmark under andra hälften av 1500-talet’, in Erik Bodensten, Kajsa Brillkman, David Larsson Heidenblad & Hanne

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Sanders (eds.), *Nordens historiker: En vänbok till Harald Gustafsson* (Lund: Lund University, 2018); Gerardus Johannes Jaspers, *Savonarola (1452–1498) in de Nederlanden: een bibliografie van zijn gedrukte werken met inleidende notities omtrent zijn leven, zijn plaats in de geschiedenis en de drukkers/uitgevers van zijn werken* (Amsterdam: Buitenkant, 1998).

Financial knowledge

A rich new venture for historians of knowledge

David Larsson Heidenblad

The history of knowledge ostensibly encompasses much more than science and scholarship. Yet, most empirical studies to date, including my own, have been preoccupied with learned spheres. Simone Lässig has described the situation in terms of a ‘noticeable gap’ between a programmatically broad research agenda and a considerably narrower research practice.¹ Hence, to some observers, the history of knowledge seems to be little more than the rebranding of intellectual history and the history of science.² In my view, however, such an understanding underestimates the impulses from social and cultural history, which have been instrumental for the field’s formation.³ To me, the distinguishing mark of the history of knowledge is a decisive commitment to explore the social reach and relevance of various forms of knowledge in specific historical contexts—a perspective which neighbouring fields have been prone to neglect.⁴

This take on the history of knowledge has manifest consequences for empirical research. It implies a deliberate shift in analytical focus towards processes and phenomena, which touch on the lives of the many, not just the select few. When historians of knowledge study environmentalism in the late 1960s or crop failures in the eighteenth century, they pursue a research agenda that differs from the conventional lines of inquiry in their respective fields.⁵ This reduces many topics and actors of legitimate interest to historians of science and intellectual historians—the daily routines in a laboratory, the global travels of the elite, scholarly lineages and connections—to the level of peripheral interest to historians

of knowledge committed to studying forms of knowledge with decisive societal relevance. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate how this take on the history of knowledge can be highly beneficial when finding and framing important new research themes.

My chosen topic is the ‘financial arts’ or ‘financial knowledge’—that is, ‘how people teach, learn, and think about a variety of financial behaviours, from saving and investing to borrowing and spending’.⁶ These activities have a profound impact in people’s lives in capitalist societies. Yet, as a field of knowledge, finance has had a weak connection to formal education and academic institutions. Most people in the modern era have not acquired their financial knowledge from teachers or textbooks, but rather from a plethora of other actors, ranging from friends and relatives to bankers, financial advisers, and journalists. In addition, financial knowledge permeates everyday life. Hence, the topic promises to answer Anna Nilsson Hammar’s call for historians of knowledge to move beyond the study of ‘knowledge claims’ and towards the study of lifeworlds and practices.⁷

Financialization

My own research interests are late modernity and the so-called ‘financialization of everyday life’. The term refers to the way in which financial markets have become ever more important for an increasing number of people in recent decades.⁸ Savings and investment cultures all over the world have undergone a sea change as a result.⁹ Financialization has given rise to new forms of engagement between citizens and financial markets. The changes comprise the rise of ‘mass investment cultures’ and the emergence of ‘popular finance’.¹⁰ Central to this historical process is that financial knowledge has started to circulate more strongly in society.

Swedish developments provide a particularly good example of the financialization of society. Until the late 1970s, financial securities were of limited concern to the public. Sceptical attitudes towards capitalism, trade, and industry were prevalent. A minority of the population owned stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. Today the situation is reversed. Reformed public pension schemes have turned almost every adult citizen

into an investor; digitalization and new financial actors have made the practice of investing in securities nearly effortless and very affordable; the rates of tax on assets and capital have been lowered and simplified. So when, where, and how did all this happen? Social scientists provide us with some answers and guidance, but as a historian, I have found the discussion of financialization hitherto somewhat lacking in historical specificity and empirical depth. I am inclined to believe that historians of knowledge could make important contributions.

In fact, scholarly engagement with the topic is already underway. Financial knowledge has recently garnered attention among historians of knowledge at the German Historical Institute in Washington. In March 2019, Nicholas Osborne and Atiba Pertilla arranged a workshop on ‘The Transmission of Financial Knowledge in Historical Perspective, 1840–1940’. The two are researching the emergence of American investment culture in the nineteenth century, and especially how it intersected with major social transformations such as immigration. They define financial knowledge as that which historical actors themselves understood, managed, and used as knowledge in a variety of financial activities. Whether that knowledge was accurate, false, or questionable is not the point; rather, it is its historically specific social significance that takes centre stage.¹¹ This theoretical underpinning is useful for studies of other societies and periods. For my part, it has helped in the design of a new research project on financialization in Sweden from the late 1970s and up to the present.

Financialization in Sweden

My current project is inspired by the pioneering work by Orsi Husz, who has studied the early phases of financialization in Sweden, chiefly in the 1950s and 1960s. Her research demonstrates how the wider population became bank customers and how commercial banks promoted new financial identities, and highlights the gender and class aspects of these processes.¹² Husz’s work makes evident that new relationships were forged between banks and households in the 1960s; however, financial markets and investments in securities seem to have been marginal.

My own impression, formed by surveying contemporary sources and a range of literature (including bankers and business memoirs), is that it was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s that we can first see the contours of popular finance and mass investment culture in Sweden.¹³

This was when the Swedish government introduced new forms of favourably taxed savings and investment accounts. Initially called *skattsparkonto* and *skattefondkonto*, in the mid-1980s they were succeeded by the considerably more popular *allemansspar* and *allemansfond*. By then the stock market had started to surge, after going sideways in the 1970s, and this paved the way for new forms of business journalism, such as the magazine *Privata affärer* (1978) and the remaking of *Dagens Industri* into a daily business newspaper (1983).¹⁴ Membership of Aktiespararnas riksförbund (the Swedish shareholders' association, founded in 1966), began to grow rapidly; the business magazine *Veckans affärer* launched the popular competition, Aktie-SM (the Swedish Investment Championship), where prospective investors could try their hands at investing without actually putting real money in the stock market; an independent foundation, Aktiefremjandet (1976), was founded to promote stocks and shares as a savings form. To be sure, the late 1970s and early 1980s was a formative moment in the history of financialization in Sweden. Yet hitherto it has received scant attention in the empirical literature.¹⁵

Another crucial moment in the history of financialization was the late 1990s and early 2000s. These were the years of major pension reform, the public offering of Telia the state-owned phone company, and dramatic surges and plunges on the stock market.¹⁶ It was in this period that the ethnologists Mats Lindqvist and Fredrik Nilsson took an interest in the growing public engagement in financial markets. They combined an analysis of financial communication in the mass media with ethnographic fieldwork at financial fairs, educational courses, and the meetings of a local savings club.¹⁷ Yet, despite doing their research during the first dot-com bubble and its aftermath, the Internet was marginal to their studies. This indirectly confirms the profound effect that digitalization has had on the most recent history of financialization. Social media, today one of the key arenas for the circulation of financial knowledge, was of marginal relevance in 2000. For investors, bank offices were still

more important than online services, and there was no such thing as a user-friendly investor app on a mobile phone. It all points to the fact that the first two decades of the twenty-first century have witnessed yet another transformative phase in the history of financialization.

For historians, the very recent past is not typically a subject of empirical research. As a profession, for good reasons, we like to maintain a distance. However, in the case of financialization in Sweden, I think historians of knowledge are well equipped to make important contributions by subjecting events in the twenty-first century to empirical scrutiny. The methods we have developed to study the circulation of knowledge—paying close attention to how media forms mould knowledge, examining a broad range of knowledge actors and arenas, putting a premium on chronological sequencing—is a natural starting point. Moreover, by employing a longer historical perspective, it is possible for us to distinguish the things that are truly new in the twenty-first century from those that are not.

I will consider one such example of a historical phenomenon, which, at least in the Swedish context, is of very recent date: private individuals' pronounced, publicly documented quest for financial independence. Yes, this is anything but a mass phenomenon; however, the practical implications for the lives of those involved are profound. This is financial knowledge that is truly practised, preached, and lived. Neither is it an elite phenomenon: it is lay capitalism. I thus present the quest for financial independence in the twenty-first century as a prism through which to study active engagement in the stock market, holding it to be an illustrative and thought-provoking example of what the financialization of everyday life can entail.

In the mid-2010s, the Swedish press began publishing stories about ordinary people in their thirties and forties who had achieved financial independence (FI) by living frugally and investing in the stock market. Internationally, this is known as FIRE, short for financial independence, retire early. The definition of FI in this context differs from conventional measures of wealth in absolute terms, such as annual salary or net worth. Rather, the definition is personal and relative: you are FI when your passive income (that is, your capital income) exceeds your

every expenditure. Hence, you do not necessarily need a high income to become FI. What you do need is to spend much less than you earn over a prolonged period. Among its adherents, this is known as maintaining a high savings ratio. Once you attain FI, you no longer have to work for a living. The dividends on your stock portfolio are all you need to get by.

The basic ideas and practices underpinning FI are not novel. What is new, however, is their wide popular appeal and global reach. The digitalization of society has been a prerequisite, both for how it has simplified the investing process, and for providing the social media platforms, which are instrumental to how this kind of financial knowledge circulates. One salient feature of FI is personal finance blogs, so-called FIRE blogs, where individuals and families document and discuss their FI journey. Popular American blogs such as ‘Early Retirement Extreme’ (2007–) and ‘Mr Money Moustache’ (2011–) attract large followings and function as virtual communities of likeminded individuals. In Sweden, one of the oldest and most popular FIRE blogs is ‘Miljonär innan 30’ (2006–) which chronicles the anonymous blogger’s journey from humble beginnings to early retirement in 2017, when he was still in his late thirties. For historians interested in how financialization has been lived, practised, staged, and developed, blogs are a rich body of source material.

Yet, the social media is not the only arena where this type of financial knowledge circulates. Traditional media, not least books, are still highly relevant. Some Swedish bloggers with a large following, for example the aforementioned ‘Miljonär innan 30’ and the twitter profile Arne Talving, have recently published bestselling financial advice books about how to achieve FI.¹⁸ However, it is the case that the major publishing houses have been outmanoeuvred by small, niche publishers specializing in self-help and business literature.¹⁹ And while financial advice literature is not a new genre—many of the actors studied by Orsi Husz, such as Gunnel Petre and Frideborg Cronsioe, published financial advice books in the 1960s, and were followed by new authors in subsequent decades—I have nevertheless not been able to find any Swedish financial advice literature from the second half of the twentieth century that promoted FI. In fact, the first titles on FI appeared in 2003, when American bestsellers, notably Robert Kiyosaki’s *Rich Dad, Poor Dad: What the Rich Teach*

their Kids about Money—That the Poor and Middle Class Do Not (1997), were published in Swedish translation.

Kiyosaki has a devoted following all over the world. He originally wrote his book to promote a didactic board game of his own design called *Cash Flow*, intended to teach people the financial knowledge necessary to become FI. His basic premise is that people, based on how they spend their money, belong to one of three different categories. Poor people buy stuff—things that decrease in monetary value after the initial transaction. The middle class buy liabilities, for example houses and cars, which continuously cost them money. Rich people, on the other hand, buy assets that generate cash flow, such as stocks, bonds, and property that generates rents. Subsequently, the rich use the money generated by their assets to buy stuff and liabilities, as well as more assets. Hence, they are not dependent on generating a steady stream of income through their payroll. They have, in Kiyosaki's words, 'escaped the rat race', stopped being 'a wage slave', and entered 'the fast lane'.²⁰

The sociologist Daniel Fridman has done the most detailed study of FI in general and of Kiyosaki's teachings and followers in particular. He has conducted fascinating comparative fieldwork in New York and Buenos Aires in order to understand how people actively engage with these ideas and practices. His study demonstrates that the globalization of financial markets has opened up new venues for American financial gurus such as Kiyosaki to circulate financial knowledge. While such teachings are distinctly situated in an American context (as regarding legislation, taxation, and the relative stability of financial markets) his followers creatively adapt them to an Argentinian context in order for them to make sense in their lives. At the heart of Fridman's study is the way the quest for FI creates new 'neoliberal subjects', a term common in the Foucauldian tradition of social science that is central to the study of financialization. Kiyosaki's work fits this understanding neatly, as he explicitly states that people have to transform their thinking in order to become FI: they have to let go of deeply rooted ideas and strive for independence from their boss, their workplace, their family, the state, and society. True freedom is achieved through self-control, or in Fou-

cauldian terms, self-government. This is the prerequisite for acting like the rich and mastering financial markets.²¹

Fridman's study provides highly interesting points of comparison for my research project, and by extension poses the question of what is specific to the Swedish case I intend to analyse. How has financial knowledge been actively adapted to the Swedish national context, and how has that context changed historically? Moreover, what distinguishes digital arenas, such as blogs and Twitter, from the social events studied by Fridman? And what can we learn by comparing Swedish and American FIRE bloggers? Questions abound, and there is certainly no lack of intriguing possibilities for empirical research.

It seems clear to me that the perspectives, methodologies, and analytical concepts developed in the history of knowledge have a great potential to enrich the history of financialization. To date, the main methods employed have been discourse analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. Hence, historical perspectives on 'everyday life' are largely synonymous with changes in, or the perseverance of, certain financial discourses. While this is certainly important, insights from ethnographic fieldwork, as well as statistical analysis of actual financial behaviour, indicate that 'financial discourses may not be as powerful as they are prevalent'.²² Hence, there is a distinct need for historical research that goes beyond the discursive level to study actors, organizations, actions, and events. Historians of knowledge are well equipped to engage in such a venture.

Epilogue: From debating to doing

In the autumn of 2017, Johan Östling, Anna Nilsson Hammar, and I launched the history of knowledge seminar series in Lund. For the occasion, we had invited the Swedish historian of science Staffan Bergwik to discuss the relationship between the history of science and the history of knowledge. Towards the end of his talk he paraphrased the opening sentence of Steven Shapin's landmark essay, 'History of Science and its Sociological Reconstructions': 'One can either debate the possibilities of the history of knowledge, or one can just do it.'²³ For me, this quote resonates profoundly. I have been active in the field since the autumn of

2014, and over time have become convinced that general discussions of what the history of knowledge is and encompasses are starting to have diminishing returns.²⁴ I would argue that what the history of knowledge needs is innovative, original, empirical research that demonstrates the field's potential. It needs its own Martin Guerre, Montaigne, or Great Cat Massacre.

My argument in this essay is that historians of knowledge would do well to direct their attention to the social reach and relevance of various forms of knowledge. For me, this understanding paves the way for original lines of research, such as the study of financial knowledge and its many histories. My current venture opens up numerous possibilities to do research grounded in a broad conception of knowledge, an interest in societal circulation, and a scholarly engagement with lifeworlds and practices. Such histories of financial knowledge would certainly be of great interest to social scientists and economic historians. Moreover, it is plain that this is an area where historians of knowledge could use their research to spur important public conversations.

Financial knowledge is by no means the only way to develop the history of knowledge, of course. I do not suggest that the broadly conceived research agenda should be abandoned. However, I do believe that there is a growing need for research clusters around certain periods and problems. Ideally, these research clusters would address issues that are not currently being studied in neighbouring fields, or at the least, not studied in the same ways. If we were to succeed in this endeavour, it would not only distinguish the history of knowledge from other branches of scholarly inquiry, it would also provide us with strong arguments for the field's potential to invigorate historical scholarship at large.²⁵

Notes

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- 4 Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, 'Cirkulation—ett kunskapshistoriskt nyckelbegrepp', *Historisk tidskrift* 137/2 (2017): 279–280; Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018): 17–24.
- 5 David Larsson Heidenblad, 'Mapping a New History of the Ecological Turn: The Circulation of Environmental Knowledge in Sweden 1967', *Environment and History* 24/2 (2018); see also Erik Bodensten's essay in this book.
- 6 Lendol Calder, 'Saving and Spending', in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: OUP, 2012): 349–350; Nicholas Osborn & Atiba Pertilla, 'The Transmission of Financial Knowledge in Historical Perspective, 1840–1940', *German Historical Institute*, 1 September 2019, <https://www.ghi-dc.org/events-conferences/event-history/2019/conferences/financial-knowledge/>.
- 7 Anna Nilsson Hammar, 'Theoria, Praxis, and Poiesis. Theoretical Considerations on the Circulation of Knowledge in Everyday Life', in Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge. Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018): 112–113.
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- 12 Orsi Husz, 'From Wage Earners to Financial Consumers: Cheque Account

- Salaries in Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s', *Critique Internationale*, 69/4 (2015); Orsi Husz, 'Golden Everyday: Housewifely Consumerism and the Domestication of Banks in 1960s Sweden', *Le Mouvement Social* 250/1 (2015); Orsi Husz, 'Bank Identity: Banks, ID Cards, and the Emergence of Financial Identification Society in Sweden', *Enterprise & Society*, 19/2 (2018).
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 - 22 Van der Zwan, 'Making Sense of Financialization', 113.
 - 23 Steven Shapin, 'History of Science and Its Sociological Reconstructions', *History of Science* 20 (1982): 157.
 - 24 For the most recent example, see Martin Mulrow & Lorraine Daston, 'The History

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of Knowledge', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019): 159–187.

- 25 This essay reports findings of the project 'Financial Independence in a Digital World', supported by the Erik Philip-Sørensen Foundation, Wahlgrenska Foundation, and Åke Wiberg Foundation.

My grandmother's recipe book and the history of knowledge

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The study of knowledge can be difficult to define. It easily transcends the borders of the study of information, intelligence, ideas, or science. This tendency is enough to encourage the student of knowledge as a historical phenomenon to question the validity of the term. Yet it is strange that the history of knowledge is so often related to the history of ideas or of science. Although the word knowledge has numerous definitions, to me the most specific, the most used, is that of knowledge as something shaped in the mind of the individual—the sum of a person's received information. Mediated knowledge is information, whether it is written or transmitted orally. Looking through the definitions of 'knowledge' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, they frequently start from the individual: 'the state of knowing', 'a person's range of mental perception', 'the possession of information about something', 'the apprehension of fact'. All of these presume a subject.

If we are to start from this understanding of knowledge, topics such as science or the news seem to me rather peripheral compared to, for example, worldviews, dexterity, everyday skills, or a sufficient sense of direction to find one's way home. Such mental and practical proficiencies can be studied in all their variety, but an apposite form for the historian must be that which some scholars have termed 'folk knowledge'. According to one definition, this constitutes 'non-professional, experimental, uncodified, ad hoc, often orally transmitted' knowledge.¹ The term seems to have been most frequently used by anthropologists to refer to indigenous peoples' knowledge of medicinal plants or natural

resources, recently more specifically in environmental studies.² The use of the prefix ‘folk’ nowadays seems to be supplanted by words such as ‘vernacular’, especially among early modern historians such as Mary Fissell and Elaine Leong who seek to uncover the interactions between codified and uncoded knowledge.³

But where in this personal definition of knowledge might we draw the line between fact and imagination? Without assuming that the realm of folk knowledge should be in any way more susceptible to the powers of the imagination than, say, an academic dissertation or a political party programme, it is nevertheless highly relevant to trace the encounters between local, vernacular lifeworlds and external, mediatized knowledge circulation. What have these encounters looked like and to what extent are they shaped by the social and media context in different cultures? Perhaps more crucially, what roles do things that cannot be defined as ‘knowledge’ play in the creation of an individual’s knowledge? Does knowledge always consist of only ‘knowledge’?

Knowing how to bake

My grandmother was very good at baking. The biscuits she made around Christmas were an essential part of my family’s holiday celebrations. Some of the biscuits I have never encountered anywhere else. I am sure many who come from the same region in the south of Sweden and who grew up in the late twentieth century ate the same or similar biscuits, but tastes have now changed and many of these older types of biscuits are disappearing. My grandmother died in 2012. When clearing out her flat, one of my father’s main concerns was to locate ‘The Recipes’. If we could not keep our beloved grandmother then at least we could try to recreate the biscuits she baked, as if nothing had changed. After a long search, my father found what seemed to be the only source of his mother’s baking skills—a very small, battered notebook full of scribbled recipes for cakes, biscuits, and other food. We were inevitably quite disappointed. Many of the recipes were only a few lines listing the ingredients. Hardly any information on what to do with them or how much of each was needed. It was apparent that much of it had been in

her head, and her skill had died with her. The recipe book was only a memory aid at best. And yet, there it was, full of the most varied recipes, and judging from its state and the stains on each and every page, it had been used frequently.

An area of knowledge production and circulation that ought to be a key ingredient in the historiography of knowledge is the practice of cooking and recipe circulation. This topic has recently become a focus for a small group of historians working with cooking as a knowledge practice among housewives. In an article on the cookbook collections of Australian housewives, Sian Supski describes cooking, using Lisa Heldke's theoretical framework, as a 'thoughtful practice' in which theory and practice merge. Heldke observes that theory and practice have been seen as separate and that theory, connected to mental activity, has been seen as more sophisticated than practice, connected to manual activity, leading to a misleading distance between 'knowing' and 'doing'.⁴ 'Further,' adds Supski, 'knowing and doing are gendered because men are generally regarded as the "knowers", and women as the "doers".'⁵ This is correct only to a limited degree, however, and one might readily add to this the dimensions of class hierarchy, educational divisions, or urban-rural divides. What is certain, though, is the general dismissal of practice as separate from more worthwhile intellectual pursuits. Mid-twentieth-century housewives and their practices have therefore never been studied from perspectives pertaining to knowledge circulation. Instead, they belong to the historical categories that have been studied either by ethnologists or by labour historians attempting to use them as illustrations of economic and social inequality.

Perhaps the most apposite study of home cooking comes from the Canadian ethnologist Diane Tye, whose *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes* (2010) draws a picture of the author's mother through an in-depth study of the large collection of recipes that she left behind. Using the recipes, Tye seeks to draw a picture of her mother's cultural background and socioeconomic position and the relations she fostered with family members and members of the local community.⁶ Looking more specifically at their circulation, Irina Mihalache's article about recipes sent in to one of Canada's most widely read women's magazines

in the post-war period appropriates the term ‘information behaviour’ from information studies to describe the way ‘human beings interact with information.’ Here the circulation of recipes becomes a way of studying knowledge circulation, albeit with a different theoretical toolbox. In line with many of the other recent studies of post-war housewives, Mihalache stresses how they were not ‘static receivers of their social duties’, and that a study of recipes reveals how ‘women not only spoke back to media messages but actively contributed to the shaping of their own identities through the ingredients they selected to feature in recipes.’⁷ This stance has emerged as a polemic against the older standard view, originally propagated by Betty Friedan, that housewives were helpless victims of an oppressive patriarchal structure.⁸ Diane Tye similarly views some of her mother’s cooking in terms of subversive resistance. It has become fashionable to emphasize the agency and relative independence of people who were seen as slaves to social systems by earlier Marxist-influenced research, and this new trend readily lends itself to the Michel de Certeau-influenced school of research that some knowledge circulation studies are part of. Although I sympathize with this position, there have been some, perhaps accurate, remarks that this new turn might be guilty of overstating the case. How ‘subversive’ can housewives in the kitchen be said to have been? The ideas of Certeau have become somewhat embellished in the effort to distance the new observations from the old ones, and make them appear more novel than they perhaps are.

By bringing to the fore the aspect of knowledge circulation, the agency and role of such neglected and subjugated social categories as the housewife might be shown in a more balanced light. Apart from broadening the scope of knowledge history to incorporate what we may call ‘vernacular knowledge circulation’ or ‘non-elite knowledge cultures’, this topic might serve to add new dimensions to the question of how knowledge changes as it circulates through different contexts and is communicated beyond its place of origin. But what do handwritten recipes tell us other than that they were disseminated and sometimes altered according to the individual cook’s tastes? If we were to follow in the footsteps of Harald Fischer-Tiné, whose concept of ‘pidgin

knowledge' has been influential on Östling's and Larsson Heidenblad's knowledge circulation studies, we should ask where the recipes came from and how they were appropriated by the housewives such as my grandmother, who incorporated them into their household repertoire.⁹ Did the recipes come from the rural culture that my grandmother grew up in, or did she only get them from magazines and cookbooks? And if she wrote them down from books or magazines, did she alter them to suit her own preferences, thus producing 'pidgin knowledge'?

Piecing together the circulation and interpretation of knowledge among people who lived away from literary, urban circles is challenging and requires a degree of speculation. I have previously studied the life of a woman named Cilla Banck, who lived in a small nineteenth-century Swedish fishing village, and wrote a curious commonplace book in which she copied out various newspaper items and wrote down accounts of local events. She assembled the information that reached her into a catalogue of summarized knowledge, heavily coloured by her own provincial perspective and the religious and folkloric worldview of the village.¹⁰ The commonplace book constitutes a clear example of how foreign knowledge was received and processed by someone who lived far from the mentalities and cultural life of the city. In this essay, I continue with a similar but briefer case study of how external information was received and played a role in an individual's lifeworld, this time using my grandmother's recipe book as a starting point. I mean to use this short examination to evaluate the potential of the subject of knowledge and knowledge circulation to studies of the individual and the local in history.

Mediation and adaptation

My grandmother was born in the village of Slimminge, in southern Sweden in 1925. Her parents were smallholders and she grew up on a farm, spending some time as a young adult working as a seamstress in a coat-making factory in the city of Malmö. She met my grandfather, the son of a machine-minder at the engineering works in Skurup, whom she married in 1948, after which she became a full-time housewife. They

first lived in Skurup and after a few years moved to Ystad, a town on the south coast. Their two sons were born in 1951 and 1955.

The recipes in my grandmother's notebook are brief and say very little about where they have come from or when she wrote them down. It is difficult to tell how old the book itself is, possibly as old as the 1950s, but probably a bit younger. One imagines that these are the recipes that she wanted to save without having to keep a large collection of cookbooks or magazines, instead extracting the ones that had proved successful. The phrasing of some of the recipes suggests that they were copied out word for word from books or magazines. Detailed instructions on how to go about things and comments such as 'Feel free to adjust the flavour with a few drops of bitter almond essence' were certainly not phrased by my grandmother. Other recipes, though, are brief and do not have a method, which might indicate that they have been taken directly from friends. A recipe for 'Augusta's mussels' lists only the ingredients, and was probably taken down from a friend's verbal account or handwritten note.

One of the recipes in the book is of the classic fried pastry known in Sweden as *klenäter*. Grandmother always called them *klenor*, which, as the ethnologist Nils-Arvid Bringéus notes and most people of southern Sweden know, is their name in Skåne (and Denmark). So why did she not call them that in her notebook when jotting down the recipe? Because she copied it from a cookbook or a recipe in a magazine that used the standardized name. Not being accustomed to writing, it would probably have been far from her mind to make changes to what she copied out. According to Bringéus, *klenor* are most common in Denmark and the south of Sweden. Attempting to trace the pastry's origins, he finds early recipes in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century cookbooks, and folklore indicates that they only started to be disseminated among farming households in the early twentieth century, being primarily a middle-class luxury before that. The same pastries are found in France and Italy, where they date back centuries.¹¹

One of Bringéus' folklore sources states that calling these pastries by the northern name of *klenäter* would be seen by people in the south as conceited city talk. Clearly, my grandmother separated what she wrote in her notebook from what she called them in life, taking down

verbatim what she read in the printed recipe. It suggests a sort of reverence—momentary but instinctive—for the form of the printed recipe. She would not presume to interfere with the cookery writer's phrasings and choice of words. By this I do not mean to say that she was in any way oppressed or subjugated in relation to the printed media, but simply that what she read was separate from her oral world. One might even ask whether she actually did follow these recipes slavishly, or whether trial and error led her to vary what she did, but that these variations were not written down in the notebook—there are virtually no alterations or corrections in it. Information that came to her from the outside world could not be completely integrated into her own mentality or worldview. The 'reverence' (rather than scepticism, I would say) for mediated recipes made it impossible to merge them with whatever cooking skills or *Spitzgefühl* she acquired through practice or social interaction. Could this reverence also be the reason why she copied out the recipes by hand rather than cut them out and paste them into a scrapbook?¹²

Where did my grandmother learn to cook? If *klenor* were widespread in rural households in southern Sweden by the early twentieth century, why would she need to copy the recipe from a printed original? Could she not take it down from her mother or any other relative or acquaintance? Was she too uncertain of her writing skills? Her mother came from a farming background just like her father, and she had worked as a farm girl in her youth. My father believes that grandmother acquired much of her cooking skill from her. Her sister worked for a time in a bakery in Slimminge that specialized in the local Skåne delicacy *spettekaka* (lit. spit cake), similar to the German *Baumkuchen*. It is possible she was a source of recipes and ideas too. Although never a bookish person, my grandmother was an avid reader. I remember from my childhood that she frequently read romance novels by the incredibly popular Swedish novelist Sigge Stark (Signe Björnberg's pen name).¹³ My father remembers that she subscribed to the weekly woman's magazine *Hela Världen* ('The Whole World') during his childhood. *Hela Världen* was a full-colour weekly that began publication in 1928 as a general interest magazine, but which increasingly concentrated on a young female readership. Looking through copies from the 1950s and

1960s, it is plain that its target audience was young women in their late teens up to their first years of marriage. Recurring features include letters from readers asking for help with various problems concerning relations with men—generally answered by the magazine’s agony aunt with stern admonitions and moralizing lectures—recipes and advice on household chores, etiquette, cosmetics, and fashions (including tips on how to make one’s own designer clothes cheaply at home). The domestic aspect is only one side of the magazine’s contents, however, and each issue also contains lengthy illustrated features about famous film stars and the world of glamour, and serialized novels and short stories, often of a romantic or escapist type. Sigge Stark was a regular contributor.

The readers’ questions sent in to the advice columnists were ostensibly from women asking about their first experiences of love and courtship, and of becoming accustomed to life as a housewife. Given the wealth of information and advice that fills the magazine, the recipes are at first sight quite inconspicuous, tucked away among short articles on cleaning, make-up, celebrities’ favourite records, and instructions on how to dress to make the most of one’s figure. But in every issue there are at least two or three recipes, some integrated into advertisements for food products. One weekly feature, included on a page with a number of other short items, is entitled ‘My best baking recipe’, which encouraged readers to send in their best recipes for pastries. Clearly, the magazine received many contributions, and the names are often given of the person who sent in the recipe, always a ‘Mrs So-and-so’ from some provincial town. Very often, the correspondent was from the southernmost county, Skåne, and from small places such as Smedstorp, Tomelilla, and Köpingebro, all of which are quite close to my grandparents’ hometown of Ystad.¹⁴ This feature provides a glimpse of the way recipes circulated among young housewives of the period. Another regular feature was dinner suggestions written by a famous chef, but it is perhaps telling that of all the types of recipes it was the readers’ baking that was requested—a form of cooking often subject to regional variations and connected to local pride. The ability to bake a good sponge cake or a batch of biscuits came to be seen as a distinguishing trait of this generation of women

among the generations that were to follow, who had different notions of housekeeping and gender roles.

Without delving deeper into the circulation and mediation of recipes in this period, which must be the topic for a future study, the scant sources of my grandmother's notebook and the magazine she read suggest a world of recipe circulation where the art of becoming a fully fledged housewife was dependent on access to the media. Thanks to my father's testimony, I also know that grandmother frequently went to daytime screenings of so-called 'housewives' films' at the local cinema together with other housewives. The changes in the lifeworlds of the Swedes who grew up in the early years of the century and their children who grew up in the post-war era were vast, and the young women embarking on life as housewives in the 1940s and 1950s could not turn to their mothers for advice and assistance in all things—in many areas, living conditions had changed to such an extent that new knowledge had to be formulated and spread. This may have contributed to the feeling of distance or reverence for this new knowledge that my grandmother's way of copying recipes might indicate. Printed knowledge constituted a 'closed' corpus that did not interlace with the orally transmitted knowledge of their immediate lifeworlds. This can be compared to Cilla Banck, who occasionally inserted or adapted the foreign knowledge she absorbed from her reading into her own worldview. For a provincial woman in the nineteenth century such reverence would be impractical, as it would not allow her to comprehend anything of what she encountered; she had to change what she read into something more familiar in order to make head or tail of it. A mid-twentieth-century woman like my grandmother, being more used to circulating information and a developed media landscape, has not needed to adapt the knowledge she consumes to her local worldview because it does not appear strange to her, but at the same time that means that external information remains unadapted and unaltered. It is never combined with the notions and mentalities from her upbringing. We have here entered a time of conformity, when the modernity that is disseminated is no longer appropriated as before, simply because the information reaching people is not as fragmented or foreign as it was. The potential for pidgin knowledge is in steady decline.

The limits of knowledge

Putting the spotlight on people like my grandmother who are not usually the subject of historical research (and who would definitely be surprised—and probably a bit embarrassed—to find that she was the protagonist of this essay) is a way, then, of incorporating people living away from the obvious nodes of media and learning into the historiography of knowledge.¹⁵ Groups such as post-war housewives have been the focus of some historical research, but there is a tendency to study such groups and their mental worlds apart from past worlds of science or literary culture. It is a shame, perhaps, that the history of ideas had to change its name to history of knowledge in order to deem such people worthy of attention. As if ‘ideas’ are something only certain people are capable of. But when highlighting knowledge in such a sphere as the one considered here, one sees how bound up it is in other things. And it might be correct to ask whether a microhistorical approach moves too close for a term such as ‘knowledge’ to be applicable.

The question that the historian of knowledge might be encouraged to ask herself is whether historical studies of ordinary people and everyday life are helped by foregrounding knowledge. So far, most studies of knowledge circulation have centred on the circulation of academic knowledge. This reveals, perhaps, the roots of the history of knowledge in the history of science, illustrating that it has not been able to shed its previous perspectives. Many who subscribe to the doctrine of the new history of knowledge seem to equate knowledge with ‘findings’, new observations, or conclusions drawn by figures of authority and learning. Thus, the circulation they study always has a point of origin, and the hierarchy they seem so eager to undermine is only reproduced.¹⁶ But would a history of knowledge dealing with non-academic knowledge provide us with conclusions not already served up by previous proponents of microhistory, media history, or book history? The answer to these questions depends on the study and its results. In my book about Cilla Banck, her knowledge of the outside world played a key role in charting her worldview, but then again so did her religious views, folklore beliefs, and local living conditions. What she did with the knowledge

that reached her and how she interpreted it says something about how knowledge was changed when moving through different spheres, but my interest was not in the knowledge per se, but in her and her outlook. In that way, knowledge becomes just one of an array of factors that make up a person's mental world, jostling with prejudice, religious belief, fantasy, dreams, plans, and practicalities—things that could hardly be termed knowledge. In the case of my grandmother, however, the knowledge that reached her was not adapted in the same way. She did not live as cut off from the media world as Miss Banck, and in a way one might say that she was more exposed to mediation or knowledge circulation.

The world of the post-war housewife was one of societal knowledge circulation if ever there was one.¹⁷ Much of the housewife's role depended on the information she needed to acquire from 'colleagues', female relatives, and the media. This knowledge may not always have been necessary to be able to carry out the work, but it is a characteristic of the phenomenon of circulation, perhaps, that it generates new areas of knowledge which become seen as necessary but which previously were not. I am, however, ambivalent to the very end about the word 'knowledge', partly because of its definition and partly because of what it encompasses. My own spontaneous reading of the word 'knowledge' is that it denotes something that arises within an individual when they have absorbed information. I am reached by the information that the US has elected a new president, and now I know it. So, information circulates. News circulate. Research results circulate. But how can my own knowledge circulate? When we speak of knowledge circulation, is it really knowledge we mean? Is it not only a desire to emphasize the role of communication, collaboratively shaped notions and ideas, and to break free from the old tendency to study a topic in one context and instead follow its traces from one context to another?

Is it necessary to put the stress on knowledge to do this, though? What my little study of my grandmother's recipes has shown is, I think, that a microhistorical study of a person's everyday mental world invariably deviates from the topic of knowledge to take account of other things that were just as important. In the end, I am constantly reminded of the seemingly large role played by romantic fiction in the life of a woman

who, from my point of view, was all about delicious baking, housework, and cosiness. And even when it comes to the advice that someone like her might have read in magazines, substantial and helpful information such as how to make a good casserole is mixed with more dubious, tendentious information about how to avoid getting a double chin or whether you have the right bust size in proportion to your body. Is this knowledge? Perhaps, but it is more helpful to view it in other terms, and in relation to the other things circulating around the individual. For the historian interested in people rather than politics, media debates, or other scholars, the choice of one theme over others is bound to be temporary.

Knowledge is only one of many ingredients necessary to make the recipe complete. Perhaps a better word for the finished dish would be ‘ideas’?

Notes

- 1 Roy Ellen, Peter Parkes & Alan Bicker (eds.), *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and Its Transformations: Critical Anthropological Perspectives* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 6.
- 2 Cf. Andrew C. Isenberg (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 38–9, 574–7.
- 3 Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 6; Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 13, 149.
- 4 Lisa Heldke, ‘Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice’, in Dean Curtin & Lisa Heldke (eds.), *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
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- 7 Irina D. Mihalache, ‘Tuna Noodle Casserole is Tasty? The Information Network of Recipes’, *Library Trends* 66/4 (2018).
- 8 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).
- 9 See Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘Cirkulation—ett kunskaps-historiskt nyckelbegrepp’, *Historisk tidskrift* 137/2 (2017).

- 10 Peter K. Andersson, *Vad Cilla Banck visste: En 1800-talsmänniskas världsbild* (Lund: Ellerströms, 2017).
- 11 Nils-Arvid Bringéus, *Den skånska smaken* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2009), 155–161.
- 12 The aforementioned Cilla Banck's diary is by definition a scrapbook, only she has copied articles instead of cut them out of the magazines. Either the magazines were not hers, or it is the same reverence taking place.
- 13 For a long time an enemy of the serious critics, Sigge Stark has, rather predictably, recently been reevaluated by scholars, and a number of studies of her works have been published. See primarily Yvonne Leffler, *Sigge Stark: Sveriges mest produktiva, utskällda och lästa författare* (Gothenburg: Göteborgs universitet, 2015).
- 14 The feature vanished from the magazine in the early 1960s, only to be reinstated in 1963 under a new title. This time it was called 'Veckans kaffemoster' ('Coffee enthusiast of the week') and the contributor received a prize of a jar of coffee besides having her photograph printed.
- 15 Cf the recent suggestion of Icelandic historian Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon to focus on what he ironically refers to as 'minor knowledge'. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory: Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 4–6.
- 16 One might also argue that the word 'circulation' in itself suggests that the knowledge remains unaltered, circulating rather than, say, metamorphosing.
- 17 A recent article examines the contents of one of Sweden's most widespread wartime housewives' magazines, *ICA-Kuriren*, to show how housewives at the time became important agents in a process of changing practices of housekeeping. The article is, however, narrowly focused on the pedagogical training of the housewife and thereby disregards the interrelatedness of various aspects of the housewife's lifeworld that I have tried to stress here. Åsa Broberg & Birgitta Sandström, 'Hushållningens pedagogiska innehåll—en analys av *ICA-Kuriren* 1942', *Historisk tidskrift* 138/2 (2018).

An Ottoman imperial North

The routes and roots of knowledge in the Age of Tulips

Joachim Östlund

This essay is a contribution to the debate about the interactions and circulation of knowledge between ‘the East’ and ‘the West’, using the example of an Ottoman *sefâretnâme*, a travel and embassy account, produced by the member of the Ottoman court in Istanbul, Mehmed Said, from his mission to Sweden in 1733.¹ The purpose is to discuss Ottoman *sefâretnâme* as a form of world-making and as an expression of an imperial order of knowledge.² How was knowledge shaped into textual forms, and how did those forms encode the relationships between Ottomans and Swedes, centre and periphery? The term ‘world-making’ describes a process of reshaping and renegotiating the understanding of the world, often in the face of global and political change.³ *Sefâret-nâme* are of interest because they are considered works that played a significant role in information gathering and sharing knowledge about Western technology and society.⁴

The *sefâretnâme* that is the subject of this study was the first to describe Sweden. The question is how we are to understand Said’s world-making in this case. As a member of the Ottoman Imperial elite, his knowledge of the world was shaped by cultural and religious traditions that differed from Africa, Asia, and Europe. As the author of the *sefâretnâme*, Said had to navigate between traditions—Arabic, Persian or Ottoman Turkish, Christian (Orthodox and Armenian), and Jewish—which together were integral to Ottoman imperial culture. What were the ramifications of this cultural background when he envisaged Sweden? Knowledge also

took its shape from the early eighteenth-century interactions—trade, war, diplomacy—which saw ideas travel along different routes. Said was already an experienced traveller and was fluent in French after his stay in France. As a member of an elite, representing a powerful Empire, Said’s use of narrative traditions and cultural geographies to construct Sweden also carried a political message. Did Mehmed Said imagine a world based on ideas of binary oppositions, between “the East” and “the West”, or a class of civilizations or religions? How did Said shape his view of the North and what power relations does his story of the North and Sweden reveal?

Worlds made in the past and the present

The question of knowledge in global history and in the study of the interaction between Europe and the Ottoman Empire has for a long time been a topic among scholars. An often-mentioned starting point is the debate prompted by Bernard Lewis’s book *The Muslim discovery of Europe* (1982). Lewis assumes there are two fixed, opposed forces, or blocs, in the history of the Mediterranean world: Western civilization, otherwise known as the Judeo-Christian bloc; and a hostile Islamic world. Even though Lewis’s view is challenged by works inspired by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in the 1980s and 1990s, his understanding of the Muslim world has undergone a political revival.⁵ In global history, the Ottomans are often described in terms familiar from Jürgen Osterhammel’s recent discussion of travel literature: ‘This intellectual curiosity about the outside world was specific to Europeans in the early modern period...Although a few Ottomans reported on their journeys, Muslims generally had little interest in “infidel” lands.’⁶ In this essay these contemporary representations of the Ottoman world envisioned by modern historians will be tested against Mehmed Said’s own world-making.

Mehmed Said’s mission to Sweden in 1733 took place in the so-called Age of Tulips in Ottoman history. Spanning the first three decades of the eighteenth century, the Tulip period was associated with a series of reforms—the first Ottoman printing press, the rise of a transnational,

consumer culture—and a cultural dynamic and cosmopolitanism assumed to have been the result of the westernization of Ottoman interests. Diplomats such as Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi and Mehmed Said have been held up as examples of individuals who imported and strengthened these Western ideals after visiting Paris. The centrality of Paris has in turn been challenged by scholars such as Shirine Hamadeh and Can Erimtan, who have put forward examples of knowledge transfers from Isfahan, the capital of Persia.⁷ In much the same way, one has to contextualize the roots and routes that were available for Mehmed Said when constructing his image of Sweden.

The routes of Ottoman–Swedish knowledge exchanges

Ottoman–Swedish contacts intensified because of Charles XII's (Karl XII) four-year stay in Bender, having sought refuge in Ottoman territory following his defeat by the Russians in 1709. Bender would prove to be an important hub for Ottoman–Swedish cross-cultural encounters. From a Swedish perspective, Charles XII's life in Bender was the starting point for the gathering of information about Islam and the Ottomans, which evolved into an ambition shared by the Swedish elite. At the time, three oriental expeditions were organized by his entourage of 'Caroliners', which continued in a number of attempts in the eighteenth century to produce a large-scale, descriptive analysis of the Ottoman Empire. Generations of Swedes tried to produce the definitive work that covered everything a Christian king needed to know in order to conduct relations with the leading Muslim sultan, but the greatest monument of this cultural production was finalized by the Ottoman Mouradgea d'Ohsson (1740–1807), a dragoman in Swedish service in Istanbul, and his *Tableau général de l'Empire Ottoman*, making it the Enlightenment era's richest source on Islam and the Ottomans.⁸

A similar search for knowledge took place among the Ottomans when envoys visited Stockholm to extract repayment of the huge loans taken by Charles XII.⁹ The Ottomans were introduced to the symbols and narratives of Swedish dynastic ideology only after Charles XII's stay in Bender, whereupon their letters to the Swedish Crown began to use

‘Goths’ and ‘Vandals’ when addressing Ulrika Eleonora and Fredrik I.¹⁰ By including the terms, one could argue that the Ottomans were approving of the Swedes’ identification with the Gothic legend. The use of the narratives and symbols found in Gothic legend is of interest when examining Said’s views on Sweden.

If Bender was one important hub for the exchange of knowledge between Ottomans and Swedes, another was the Phanariot (Fener) district in Istanbul with its powerful and influential Greek Orthodox community. It was within the Phanariot networks that an Ottoman–Orthodox culture took shape.¹¹ Throughout the eighteenth century, university-trained Phanariot Greeks occupied the position of chief dragomans for the Porte. In reality their role was closer to Ottoman secretary of state than interpreter and translator. As they spoke Italian, Latin, and French as well as Turkish, they could easily mediate between the sultan and the European missions. The European ambassadors likewise tended to employ Ottoman Greeks as interpreters since they required similar services, so much of the diplomatic activity in Istanbul at this time was a dialogue between Greeks and other Greeks speaking on behalf of different monarchs.¹² Hence the significance of Mehmed Said being joined on his mission to Sweden by a dragoman named Scarlat Caradja (1695–1780), a member of a prominent Greek Phanariot family established for hundreds of years in Constantinople. Caradja, a doctor, had been a dragoman for the Dutch Embassy in 1720–1764, and had served under various Ottoman viziers. Later he would be appointed Honorary Prince of Moldo-Wallachia (Moldavia) by Sultan Abdul Hamid I on 26 September 1774.¹³

Thus Bender was a key locus for the sharing of knowledge about Swedish cultural symbols, while Caradja was the embodiment of both the Orthodox and the Greco-Roman worlds, and both of these ‘other worlds’ were at hand for Mehmed Said. Who then was Mehmed Said? Yirmisekizzade Mehmed Said Pasha (c.1695–1761) was the son of Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi, the Ottoman ambassador to France in 1720–21. Mehmed Çelebi was of Georgian descent and probably a Christian given his membership in the 28th *orta* (battalion) of the Janissaries early in life. Said’s epithet Yirmisekizzade, meaning ‘son of twenty-eight’ in Turk-

ish, is a reference to his father's own epithet *Yirmisekiz* ('twenty-eight') from the name of the battalion.¹⁴ Mehmed Said was about 25 when he accompanied his father as his personal secretary for the embassy to Paris. Thanks to his age and status he could interact relatively freely in French society. By his return to Istanbul he was fluent in French.¹⁵

When Mehmed Said visited Sweden he used the title *Defterdâr*—as a member of *Hacegân-ı Divân-ı Hümayûn*, he was a senior clerk of the Imperial Divan, more specifically *te Defterdâr of şikk-ı sâlis*, the third financial division of the Empire.¹⁶ After his stay in Sweden, he continued on to Poland, and later, in 1742, he was also dispatched to Paris, but it was his mission to Sweden that was the most significant, and led to his writing of a *sefâretnâme*, like his father before him. Mehmed Said ended his career as a Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire (prime minister of the sultan), holding the title from 25 October 1755 to 1 April 1756.¹⁷

Said's journey to Sweden

Said's *sefâretnâme* falls into several distinct modes of writing. The report begins with Said the traveller, describing his journey to Sweden—all 159 days of it. On his arrival in Sweden, he becomes Said the envoy and negotiator, representing Ottoman power. When the negotiations end he turns into a scholar, an ethnographer intent on reporting on Swedish culture and society. The *sefâretnâme* ends with Said the traveller, describing his journey back and his diplomatic visit to Poland, where he gives advice on the future politics of the Ottoman Empire. In what follows I focus on the journey to Sweden, starting at the point when he crossed the Baltic, and his descriptions of the Swedes.

Said begins his travel narrative with his departure from the Ottoman Empire, probably Istanbul, on 6 November 1732: 'In 18 *djumazi'ü l-evvel* 1145 we left the Supreme Empire for a journey to Sweden.' Said informs his reader that the weather was fine, but when the company reached the mountain region 'Djenge-Balkan' winter suddenly arrived. From then on the weather steadily worsened. In the narrative, the number three returns in a variety of contexts: the company had to wait three days and three nights in a peasant cottage, for example, and there were also three

incidents on their way through Wallachia, Moldavia, and Poland. Said dated the company's arrival in Danzig (Gdańsk) on the Baltic coast to early June or thereabouts.

In Danzig, Said noted that the Baltic Sea was only recently free from ice, making it possible to continue their journey. The company found their endless problems with the cold and snow were now replaced by adverse winds. Said explains that the Baltic is a very stormy sea, and it lived up to its reputation. With a prayer to God they set sail. Everything went well until the eighth day, when they were off the Swedish coast. Said writes that the situation became similar to the verse 'tūdji r-rijāhu bi-mā lā tesjtehî [-s-süfünü]—'See, the wind does not blow to where they want'.¹⁸ The poem probably originated in the lines by the celebrated Arabic poet Al-Mutanabbi (915–965) in his poem *bi-mā at-ta 'allul*:

A man can never gain everything he hopes for:
The winds blow contrary to what ships wish¹⁹

By including the poem, Said was sending a clear message, not only about the climate of the Baltic, but also of his cultural competence, the emotional trials of his journey, and the cultural values he shared with his audience—the subject of the poem was exile and the memory of the supposedly lost traveller. For Ottoman administrators, a command of philosophy was considered an essential part of a vizier's identity. It has even been argued that it was because of Mehmed Said's skills in natural philosophy that he was inducted into the bureaucratic corps.²⁰ The choice of poem also helped conjure up the image of a border, made of storm winds, preventing him from reaching his destination far away in the North. The existence of the border was even more evident after his reference to the poem, when he returned to the drama at sea. Said informs his audience that they had to struggle against 'incredibly strong winds':

There was a headwind, so we had to go out into the open sea again, and as we approached the coast for the second time and were just about to sail in, we were driven back again. A total of three times we approached the coast, and had to turn around again; and the third time, the wind was so strong that it was impossible, no matter what we tried.

The land beyond the wind is effectively denied them, even on their third try. Said then says that they sailed towards ‘Norway’ and the island Gotland (probably forgetting to mention the first country in the kingdom of Denmark–Norway). They succeed and arrive on Gotland. After four and a half days there, and new trials when they ran out of provisions and the only food the inhabitants of Gotland could spare was dried fish, they set sail for their destination, and after two days finally managed to reach the Swedish coastline, the strait of ‘Landsort’ (lit. province). The trip through the strait is described as confusing since the ship is forced to go tack to and fro between the many small islands. After five days of zigzagging they are finally about to reach their destination, the Swedish capital Stockholm, at which point Said breaks off to give a short account of Baltic weather conditions, which he described as a

particularly cold and an extremely stormy sea. At night the sails on our ship froze so that it was possible to handle them only in the afternoon the next day. By the morning the ice covered the cables and blocks on the ship, forcing the sailors to chop ice with axes for hours and then throw the ice into the sea. The weather is extremely cold, only 1½ month each year can be called temperate.²¹

Said continues by saying that the period from sowing to harvest in Sweden was limited to forty days. The extreme cold also meant that there was no chance to dry the harvest in the fields, and instead every village in Sweden has special ‘drying ovens’—probably referring to barns. To make the ‘otherness’ even more obvious, Said retells a final chilly incident from his journey across the sea:

As late as the 11th of June there was a sudden, heavy snowfall that within half an hour was thick as a handbreadth, but melted away as soon as the weather was clear. To conclude: we were often told: ‘Now comes the summer’, but even though your poor servant stayed here until the end of July, we did not experience a single day during our stay when the weather deserved to be called summer; I don’t know if the summer arrived later—after our departure—only God knows.²²

This is the first time a Swede, as the Other, speaks in Said's story. His first sentence is: 'Now comes the summer', which fits perfectly with the scenery of the Far North. Said turns to the sultan with the wording 'servant', but also adds that he is in an exposed position. The 'poor servant' voices his concern that the summer never arrives in the North, and in the end only God knows.

From these examples, the audience of the *sefâretnâme* would have a clear impression of the land where Said had arrived: a land of probably eternal winter. Said then resumes his account with the final stage of the journey, recounting their three failures to gain entrance to the strait of Landsort. At this moment the drama takes another turn. Said writes that the Swedes had begun to worry about them, and prepared to send out boats to look for them: apparently the Swedes do really care about him, this envoy from the city of splendour at the centre of the world. However, Said's ship suddenly reaches its goal. When entering in the harbour of Stockholm there is an outburst of joy:

when we suddenly arrived at the harbour, they behaved like a Moroccan catching a prize at sea. Immediately they organized a parade at the dock—and the royal Sloop was sent out to pick me up from the Galleon.²³

Again Said is creating a scene that of course did not occur. To communicate with his Ottoman audience, he is using a well-known Mediterranean phenomenon for describing the joy expressed by the Swedes—the culture of corsairing and the celebration when the booty arrived. For the Ottomans, Morocco was a competing empire at the far end of the Mediterranean, and to 'behave like a Moroccan' signalled a mood of great joy.

From now on the temperature rises to a very warm welcome. At the landing and his first step on Swedish soil, Said praises God and the prophet Mohammed. He is then honourably welcomed by the highest-ranking government officials. A parade was organized where Said rode in the royal carriage pulled by six horses. All around the Swedes joined in the celebrations of his arrival. Soldiers and citizens threw their hats in the air and cheered the Ottoman sultan in unison in their

language: ‘Praise to the supreme God and give the Ottoman *padisjah* [sultan] long life!’

Said writes that people were standing everywhere: along the road, on the roof tops, even up in ships’ rigging like so many ‘clusters of grapes’. After the warm welcome at the harbour by citizens of Stockholm, the celebrations then continued with a more official reception organized by Swedish authorities in the Reenstierna Palace in the south of the city, the location chosen for Said and his retinue. That night their hosts gave a dinner for the Ottomans. Said writes that the Swedish minister (*kehaja*) had explained that the dinner had been prepared according to Islamic ceremonies, in ‘special and clean pots’. They ate candied fruit and drank coffee. After dinner, Said thanked them for their hospitality and expressed his wish to meet the king soon. But he then adds:

According to what was said—although your poor servant himself did not notice anything and consequently did not want to take responsibility for the information—the king himself was present in disguise on the same occasion; truth to say, that must have probably been the case since the reception was so pleasant.

This was a clearly a creative way for Said to record the honour paid him by the Swedish government. Tales of a king in disguise date back to antiquity, and were just as popular in Islamic legend. In the early modern era the tradition flourished in Europe, and in Sweden lived on in the adventures of Gustav I.²⁴ The hospitality of the Swedes, the honours, and the curiosity they showed towards Ottomans were again visualized effectively.

From the description above it seems Said managed to construct an image of Swedish geography. The question is whether the cold climate also affected the inhabitants: were they as harsh as the climate? From the warm reception when Said entered Stockholm, one would guess not. The hospitality of the Swedes is again underlined by Said when he turns his attention to describe ordinary life in Stockholm and what characterizes the Swedes:

The Swedish people—both high and low, women and children alike—harbour a natural spontaneous animosity towards the Muscovites—and this to the extent that if someone else allowed themselves to say something nice about the Muscovites, the Swedes would without hesitation also consider him an enemy. On the other hand they are very keen to be friends of the High Empire, and as soon as the smallest boy, the ordinary labourer, saw us, he greeted us politely by taking off his hat. Among the other Christian peoples, the Swedes are renowned for their bravery; when they want to emphasize that trait to someone, they usually, according to what is alleged, say about him: ‘That man has a Swedish heart.’

From the descriptions of the Swedes, their traits also reflect contemporary Swedish–Ottoman political interests, namely the common ambition to withstand the expanding Russian Empire. No explanation is given for the Swedes’ hatred of the Russians, but this should have been rather obvious for his audience given the defeat at Poltava in 1709 and Charles XII’s subsequent retreat to Bender, which meant that Sweden became a known player in Ottoman policy towards Europe.

In the ethnographic part of the *sefâretnâme*, Said returns to the climate with some new Ottoman signifiers of the North. The Swedish winter is said to last nine months, the summer only about one month. Most of Sweden is stony and therefore the country is not especially fertile. However, the country has a very healthy climate, and diseases and epidemics are rare occurrences. The inhabitants are also generally physically strong, tall, and attractive. It is also very common for Swedes to live to the age of 80.

An Ottoman imperial order of knowledge

The examples from Said’s *sefâretnâme* exemplify what Ottoman world-making in the Age of Tulips could look like. They clearly show the impact of stories and fictional elements in Ottoman embassy reports, a phenomenon that has gone unnoticed by historians. One could even argue that much of Said’s crossing of the Baltic in the summer of 1733 actually took place in a hyperreality, where glimpses of reality are seen

in the place names—Danzig, Gotland, Landsort, Stockholm—but otherwise it is another country.

The North as an ideological space has received growing attention from scholars interested in colonialism, imperialism, and environmental change in a European context, but the ways the North was imagined in non-European early modern sources are largely uncharted.²⁵ The Ottoman North, as imagined by Said, can be compared with the better-known medieval Arabic visions of the North. Scholars in both Eastern Europe and the Islamic world wrote extensively about the North, mainly accounts of settled Vikings in Russia. Like their Greek and Roman counterparts, Arabs envisaged the North as a land of eternal cold, snow, darkness, and desolation. But they also told of lands rich in culture, gold, and ingenuity. Most of the writers agreed that the cold climate and the harsh conditions also left their mark on the people of the North, making them brutal, unfriendly, and uncivilized, even to the point of cannibalism. Some authors said that there were some friendly Rus.²⁶ Said keeps the cold in his story, but the Rus are not there.

The cold was also a central trait in the Greco-Roman versions of the North, as well as the many accounts celebrating the bravery, physical strength, and civilized manner of the German tribes like the Goths. Said's North resembles them fairly closely, and even has its share of Swedish dynastic ideology, although without calling the contemporary Swedes Vandals or Goths. Compared to the Nordic climate, the representations of Swedes balance between fiction and contemporaneous realities and political interests. Sweden is called *Isveç* (the Ottoman term) and Swedes are identified as Christians, their mentality confirming their ideological interests in contemporary politics: their hatred of Muscovites and loyalty to the Sublime Porte. By including Arabic poetry, Said expresses the cultural values celebrated in the Age of Tulips, and when he points to the Swedes in their emotional outburst of joy as being similar to the Moroccans he is using a well-known Mediterranean symbol.

The impact of the Greco-Roman world can be seen in narratives and symbols originating from such authors as Jordanes and Strabo. Said's description of the weather is familiar from both Jordanes' and Strabo's narratives of Thule, the island found beyond a vast icy sea. There is an

even more explicit resemblance between Said and the Greek Strabo when citing Pytheas on the harvest in Thule. Strabo writes that:

As for the grain, he says, since they have no pure sunshine, they pound it out in large storehouses, after first gathering in the ears thither; for the threshing floors become useless because of this lack of sunshine and because of the rains.²⁷

These stories circulated widely and were still current thanks to the revival of both Greek and Latin literature at the Ottoman court, so Said could have picked them up in Istanbul. Like other Ottoman officials, Said was probably aware of the Swedish dynastic concepts such as the Goths and Vandals used in the official correspondence. His dragoman, Scarlat Caradja, could also have been a source of information on Greco-Roman geographical knowledge. Then there was Paris, and Voltaire's book on Charles XII published 1731 warrants a mention, if only for its informants in Sweden. One could reasonably conclude that there were many roots and routes of knowledge in Said's *sefâretnâme*.

Said built his world from an Ottoman imperial perspective. The North had a certain role to play in this order of knowledge. In the North, cultural borders were challenged by borders imposed by the climate. Said's Sweden was also a rather secular world where religion was a question of individuals, not governments or geographies. He did not use the concept of infidels, neither the so-called Gazi narrative with its geographical concepts such as the 'House of War' symbolizing the territory of enemies and infidels. In the Age of Tulips this made perfect sense. Said would probably not have felt at home in the Muslim world as pictured by Lewis. Instead, there are a number of similarities in the ideological use of the North and the Gothic legacy. In early modern Sweden, as in Europe, the Gothic narrative was concerned with the antiquity of the Goths and their legacy. Different regions and rulers wanted to claim for themselves the strength, prestige, and antiquity of the tribe that ended the Roman Empire. The centrality of the Roman Empire was effectively challenged.²⁸ When Said told his story of the North, and of Swedes as Goths, one could say that he was reclaiming the South and Istanbul as the centre of the world, while the Goths had returned to the North.

Notes

- 1 The *sefâretnâme* by Mehmed Said Efendi has been of interest in a couple of studies by historians working on the political aspects of the diplomatic mission. See: Johannes Kolmodin, 'Said Mehmed Efendi's berättelse om sin beskickning till Sverige år 1733: Inledning och översättning', *Karolinska förbundets årsbok 1920* (1920); Evren Küçük, 'İsveç'te Bir Osmanlı Elçisi: Mehmed Said Efendi', *Bilge Strateji, Cilt 10, Sayı 19* (Güz. 2018); Hasan Korkut, 'Osmanlı Sefaretnâmeleri Hakkında Yapılan Araştırmalar' in *Türkiye Araştırmalar*, *Literatür Dergisi Cilt, 1/2* (2003), 491–511.
- 2 This essay is a part of an individual research project financed by Birgit och Gad Rausing's Stiftelse för Humanistisk forskning and Åke Wibergs stiftelse. I wish to give a special thanks to the following scholars for sharing their valuable knowledge and comments on this text: Lisa Hellman, Olof Heilo, Zeki Kavanoz, and Adnen el Ghali.
- 3 Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), 6; Vera Nünning, Ansgar Nünning & Birgit Neumann (eds.), *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking: Media and Narratives* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).
- 4 From 1730 to 1754 there are six known *sefâretnâmes*. Hatice Demir, 'The Structure of The Ottoman Diplomacy During The Reign Of Mahmud-I', *International Journal of Turcologia* 9/17 (2014), 83.
- 5 This debate is covered by William Dalrymple in Gerald MacLean (ed.), *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); see also John-Paul A. Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2013).
- 6 Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: PUP, 2014), 817.
- 7 Shirine Hamadeh, 'Ottoman Expressions of Early Modernity and the 'Inevitable' Question of Westernization', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 63/1 (2004), 39–40; Dana Sajdi (ed.), *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2014), 48.
- 8 Carter Vaughn Findley, *Enlightening Europe on Islam and the Ottomans: Mouradgea d'Ohsson and His Masterpiece* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 18.
- 9 Kolmodin, 'Said Mehmed Efendi's', 256–303; Joachim Östlund, 'Kunskap och tillit: Tolken i svensk-osmansk diplomati under 1700-talet', *Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia* 56 (Uppsala, 2019), 51–66.
- 10 Karl Vilhelm Zetterstéen, *Svenska riksarkivets orientaliska urkunder* (Stockholm: Riksarkivet, 1936), No. 56, 7 and 8.
- 11 Michał Wasiucioneck, 'Greek as Ottoman? Language, Identity and Mediation of

- Ottoman Culture in the Early Modern Period', *Cromohs-Cyber Review of Modern Historiography* 21 (2018), 70–89.
- 12 Harun B. Küçük, 'Natural Philosophy and Politics in the Eighteenth Century: Esad of Ioannina and Greek Aristotelianism at the Ottoman Court', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 41/41 (2013), 148.
- 13 Geert Jan Van Gelder & Ed De Moor (eds.), *Eastward Bound: Dutch Ventures and Adventures in the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 34.
- 14 İsmail Hâmi Danişmend, *Osmanlı devlet erkânı* (Istanbul: Türkiye yayınevi, 1971), 60.
- 15 Göçek Fatma Müge, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1987), 69–70.
- 16 Thanks to Zeki Kavanoz for help with the Ottoman titles.
- 17 Danişmend, *Osmanlı devlet erkânı*, 60
- 18 In Swedish: 'Se, vinden blåser dit ej de vilja hän.' The original is Arabic: *tüdji r-rijāhu bi-mā lā tesjtehî [-s-süfünü]*. The verse is *basît*, which is rare in Turkish (and Persian) poetry. From Kolmodin, 'Said Mehmed Efendi's'.
- 19 Thanks to Adnen el Ghali for pointing out the resemblance between Said's poem and Al-Mutanabbi's. On the poem by Al-Mutanabbi's, see the lecture by Adam Talib on 10 September 2014: http://www.adamtalib.com/blog/mutanabbi?fbclid=IwARoG-CvDzY8Dwp3J6kIPC5FiHZiTfG4511ZtcVIN_ozdl47Jrle7cjxgiq8
- 20 Küçük, 'Natural Philosophy', 146.
- 21 Kolmodin, 'Said Mehmed Efendi's', 280.
- 22 Kolmodin, 'Said Mehmed Efendi's', 281.
- 23 Kolmodin, 'Said Mehmed Efendi's', 281–282.
- 24 Linda Hutjens, 'The Disguised King in Early English Ballads', in Matthew Dimmock & Andrew Hadfield (eds.), *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 75.
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‘Is there no one moderating Wikipedia?????’

Impartiality, revisionism, and knowledge about the Armenian Genocide on Wikipedia

Maria Karlsson

On 31 March 2005, the English-language Wikipedia entry for the Armenian Genocide was ‘protected’ for the first time since its creation in 2002.¹ Setting aside the Wikipedian terminology, the digital encyclopaedia article was in other words paused and made unavailable to its contributors and editors. In hindsight, it is a snapshot of digital history in the making. The site’s so-called protection logs, openly available to anyone, say the action was ‘On request from an editor due to edit warring’, and the archived discussions leading up to the temporary shutdown are many, long-winded, and emotionally charged.² They encompass historical detail as well as overarching historical narratives, discussions about Wikipedia etiquette and policy, opinions on the proper writing of history—and personal attacks. Nine days later, the protection ban was lifted, only to be reimposed sixteen additional times over the following three years.³ Today, the entry remains under semi-protection, so-called discretionary sanctions, and a one-revert rule. In other words, you need a registered Wikipedia account in order to write and edit the article in question, you are under special observance to make sure Wikipedia’s rules of conduct are adhered to, and you may only make one change to the article every 24 hours.

Using an analysis of the temporary shutdown of March 2005, this essay offers a glimpse of how history and historical writing fares in a

digital space, and, more specifically, one of the ways that knowledge about controversial historical events is handled in the twenty-first century. I look at the state of historical knowledge outside the places traditionally associated with it—academia, educational curricula, museums, or archives—but the protected article on the Armenian Genocide and the discussions it prompted are merely a case in point, because, in essence, studying the formation of historical knowledge on various digital platforms is about studying new ways of creating, narrating, and disseminating the past. What I would like to emphasize, therefore, is the dual nature of historical knowledge. It is not merely about how, when, and what knowledge is *in* history, but also about how knowledge *about* history is gained and used in a contemporary—and in this case digital—setting.

Of the many ways that historical knowledge appears online, Wikipedia is both familiar and strange. Familiar, because the end product—the article—shares many of the characteristics of a traditional encyclopaedia, and strange because the creation process behind the said article represents something new. New, but not necessarily hidden or incomprehensible. As is examined below, one of Wikipedia's core principles is transparency, and it allows any reader to peel away layers of narrative and explore how entries have changed over time. Wikipedia therefore offers us a new way of studying how history is debated and written. Previously, we have had to settle for the finished product: an article, a book, a film, an encyclopaedia. If we are lucky, there may be different editions for us to compare, or marginal notes to assess. On Wikipedia, however, we may study the assembly and presentation of historical narratives in real time. It is possible to juxtapose revisions, additions, and deletions for comparison, or, as in this essay, to follow the behind-the-scenes discussions of the individuals involved. What does the writing of history, and the formation of historical knowledge, look like on Wikipedia? And how does Wikipedia's form of history writing relate to the one traditionally promoted by the academia?

Wikipedia and the fragmentation of knowledge

It has been suggested that the time is ripe for the study of knowledge. And that behind the current enthusiasm for the long and broad history of knowledge—of which this book is an example—lies not only a scholarly interest in new perspectives and fields of study, but also a current social and political landscape in which facts, information and ultimately knowledge have become central areas of contention. The editors of this book, for example, have argued elsewhere that while our own time mirrors the past in that politics, economics, and knowledge-bearing institutions are closely connected, it also sets itself apart from the modernity we knew when ‘leading politicians question scientific truths, and the new media landscape is awash with so-called alternative facts’.⁴

Others have been even more specific in their analyses of the current state of affairs and our interest in, and need for, a history of knowledge. Take the Trump presidency, which seems to have revealed the impact of what, to most Western observers, had appeared as subterranean, and certainly peripheral, streams of information ‘cooked’—to use Peter Burke’s terminology—into various forms of knowledge about the West, the Other, the future, and the past.⁵ The fact that groups of voters received their information mainly or exclusively from new digital sources suddenly made household concepts out of terms such as confirmation bias or knowledge resistance. Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and election became hard evidence of the existence of several disconnected, insulated, and often digital arenas for sharing facts, both alternative and conventional.⁶ Concerns were raised both about the content of the information (so-called fake news), its origins, and the routes it took—often via clusters of like-minded people on some form of social media—from ‘raw’ fact to ‘digestible’ knowledge.⁷ The notion of so-called post-truth politics was born, and with it a society to match.⁸

In the wake of knowledge’s increasingly fragmented role, two contemporary processes stand out as important: digitalization and globalization. In this essay, both developments will be addressed, as Wikipedia is wholly dependent on the one and embodies the other. Peter Burke, in his two-volume history of knowledge, describes the development of

knowledge dissemination throughout history, from the invention of the printing press to Google and Wikipedia. For him, knowledge has been increasingly globalized, or denationalized, in combination with greater access to information through new digital platforms.⁹ Wikipedia is, at least theoretically, one example of such a globalization of knowledge. It is accessible to anyone with a web browser and an Internet connection, and therefore it is less bound by national frontiers. Furthermore, as opposed to earlier types of print encyclopaedia, Wikipedia is not a national-territorial project but simply separated into different language editions. In theory—as Christian Pentzold has argued—access to Wikipedia does not depend on nationality, but on the necessary language skills. The English-language version of Wikipedia, because of its language’s status as the digital *lingua franca*, is therefore the largest and, arguably, most globalized edition.¹⁰ The infrastructure of a globalized platform for disseminating knowledge is hence in place courtesy of Jimmy Wales’s encyclopaedia, yet, as this essay will discuss, content free from the intricacies and conflicts of clashing national history cultures is a tall order.

Wikipedia, historical knowledge, and consensus

Beyond the globalizing aspects of Wikipedia, it has also been lauded (and criticized) for ‘democratizing’ knowledge. The fact that Wikipedia can be written and edited by anyone makes it the flagship of citizen science, as Burke puts it.¹¹ As long as Wikipedia’s key guidelines—verifiability, no original research, and ‘neutral point of view’ (NPOV)—are adhered to, everyone is invited to take part in defining historical events and periods, writing the biographies of famous individuals, formulating historical narratives, finding appropriate reference literature, and much more. All things that have traditionally fallen to professional, trained historians. Part of what Burke characterizes as citizen science—and a return to the amateur scholars of yesteryear—in other words is doing what the historian has always done. Not least if he or she had been invited to write entries for a traditional encyclopaedia. True, Wikipedia and other digital knowledge platforms do not share their analogous

cousins’ concerns about length and allotted space, nor do they suffer from the dreaded lag, which can leave encyclopaedia entries on especially contentious subjects outdated before the final text even reaches the printers. Aside from these practical aspects, however, much of the ‘talk page’ discussions about Wikipedia history entries are questions that professional encyclopaedists might ask themselves. Is this correct? Is this significant? Does this belong here?

In addition, the final product—the article you find when searching for a date, a name, a definition—sometimes closely resembles what you may find in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Brockhaus*, or the Swedish *Nationalencyklopedin*. The language and style used, especially in articles featuring a large number of collaborators, can sound like the standardized, formal tone of print encyclopaedias.¹² Equally, most entries include introductions that summarize the topic, notes on etymology, lists of names and dates, photographs, figures, maps, and so on. None of these features serve to separate the digital article from its print cousin.

However, many of Wikipedia’s defining features also set it apart from traditional encyclopaedias and professional, academic historiography. Roy Rosenzweig says as much in an article aptly entitled ‘Can history be open source?’ He establishes that the researching and writing of history is traditionally an individual craft with an identifiable author.¹³ Though there may be exceptions, he does not seem to be wrong. Even when historians and scholars of the humanities collaborate, we tend to do so through the co-presentation of individual texts—the present volume is an excellent example of this—and the writing of encyclopaedia entries is rarely any different, as there too individual scholars are generally responsible for writing and revising their own texts. On Wikipedia, however, the past is narrated, debated, and written as a collective endeavour by multiple anonymous voices. The result is a text without owners, locked in a continuous draft mode, which causes it to be constantly revised and ever changing. It is also a text that, as noted, is completely transparent in terms of its creation. Since Wikipedia is not dependent on the practicalities and regulations surrounding printing and publishing, each change log can track every recorded revision and rewrite, and each talk page—or archive of discussions—is comparable

in function, if not in form or extent, to the historian's use of footnotes. Anthony Grafton described the scholarly footnote as an anthill, 'swarming with constructive and combative activity'; he might as well have been describing a Wikipedia talk page.¹⁴

Armenian Genocide, The

The resemblances and differences between the professional, scholarly writing of history and Wikipedia's article about the Armenian Genocide are a case in point. Wikipedia—which every year ranks among the world's top ten most visited websites, potentially reaching an audience most traditional history books, magazines, and encyclopaedias can only dream of—is often held up as an example of the digitalization, globalization, and democratization of knowledge, and that the type of history created online enjoys a complex relationship with academic scholarship.¹⁵ I will consider that relationship in terms of the wider field known as the history of knowledge, discussing the notion of a 'neutral point of view' and impartial historiography, as well as the clash between the consensus that Wikipedia demands and the conflict inherent in what have been referred to as borderline events.¹⁶

When the Wikipedia entry on the Armenian Genocide was first created in 2002, it was the tip of a post-genocide iceberg. Ever since the Armenian minority of the Ottoman Empire had been massacred, deported, and exiled in the midst of the First World War—at the hands of the ruling party, the Committee of Union and Progress, also known as the Young Turks—the Armenian Genocide had by turns met with concern, silence, renewed interest, and persistent denial.¹⁷ Despite the fact that the crime in question was almost a century old when it reached the pages of Wikipedia, and the Ottoman Empire, like its last rulers, was long gone, the genocide remained a matter of ideological and geopolitical strife.

Most importantly, Turkey, the nation-state that replaced the fallen empire, has over the course of the century engaged in various forms of state-sponsored denial of the genocide.¹⁸ Its denialist policies have been directed at both international and domestic audiences: foreign countries

and organizations that recognize the genocide have been severely criticized by the Turkish government and met with diplomatic reprimands; at home, as high-profile cases have borne out, to refer to the Armenian Genocide in public is punishable under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code.¹⁹ Neither has it stopped at political attempts to suppress free speech and open debate, for the Turkish state has propagated a nationalist historical narrative of the Muslim Turkish majority and its relationship to a grand Ottoman past. The Turkish historian Taner Akçam has described this version of the early twentieth century as one where ‘Muslim Turks came to believe that they founded their republic after a life-or-death struggle against the Great powers and their treacherous collaborators, the Ottoman Christians, whose sole aim was to wipe the Ottoman state and Muslim Turks from the face of the earth.’²⁰ The Ottoman Christians in general, and the Armenian minority in particular, were characterized as prone to terrorism and violence, and as a threat to national security. According to official Turkish historiography, the deportations and massacre of some one million Armenians were thus justified in order to maintain national security. ‘Thereafter’, as Akçam explains, ‘an open and frank discussion on history would be perceived as a subversive act aimed at partitioning the state.’²¹

Outside Turkey, meanwhile, awareness of the genocide has grown, arguably reaching its peak in the centennial commemorations. The centenary of the genocide, marked on 24 April 2015, saw dignitaries from over sixty countries meet in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, and the list of countries that officially recognize the genocide is now long. Scholarly research on the genocide and its background is today a wide and diverse field, with a bibliography that stretches from oral and micro history to diplomacy and foreign policy.²²

In the Wikipedia article that was put under protection in March 2005 these tensions are apparent even to the casual observer.²³ The entire entry is heavily coloured by division and a fixation on post-genocide conflict rather than on the historical event itself. Aside from an introductory sentence describing the victims (Armenians), the perpetrators (the Young Turks), the events (‘deportations and related deaths’), and the time period (1915–1917), the remaining two paragraphs of the preamble

address scholarly interpretations of the historical event as divided between ‘Most Armenian, many Western and some Turkish scholars’ on the one hand, and ‘Most Turkish and many Western scholars’ on the other. ‘There is an agreement about the occurrence of the tragedy’, the entry states, yet it notes the disagreement over whether it was planned, whether it was one-sided, how many perished, and why. The article continues in a similar vein. It briefly touches upon the history of Armenians in Anatolia and the actual relocations (dealt with swiftly in one paragraph), and focuses instead on specifically controversial details. For example, there are separate sections on so-called Ottoman concentration camps—in which it is suggested that gassing installations existed—and the Special Organization, the Ottoman government’s special forces and responsible for much of the genocidal killing. Both are naturally controversial as they allude to the subsequent Nazi equivalents. In some ways, they also show what Rosenzweig has described as Wikipedia’s fondness for surprising or quirky details—a characteristic that it shares with popular history rather than with its professional counterpart.²⁴

The second half of the article deals with the present-day political conflict in an inconsistent manner that speaks of the text’s collaborative roots. While there is no timeline of the genocide, a ‘Recent History’ timeline is included that deals with a random number of post-genocide events. It begins in 1975 with the brief introduction of ASALA, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, a militant (or in the words of the Wikipedia article, terrorist) organization behind several attacks on Turkish diplomats in the 1970s and 1980s—and a defining feature of the official Turkish historiography of the events.²⁵ Simultaneously, the time line charts the failure of multiple US politicians to follow up on campaign promises to recognize the genocide, as well as music and films commemorating events. In addition, the second part of the article also lists a select number of official recognitions of genocide, and a few Turkish scholars ‘who support the theses of genocide’—the aforementioned Taner Akçam, Halil Berktaş, and the Nobel Prize laureate Orhan Pamuk. At the very end of the entry, a section of external links has been divided into ‘Websites supporting the genocide theses’ and ‘Websites opposing the genocide theses’.

The protected article thus effectively showcased the conflicted historiographical background to the Armenian genocide—and, perhaps, some of the limits to the concept of a neutral point of view. The Wikipedia article is, however, only the front page. Open it and you will find the talk page, which is essentially an open forum where ‘Wikipedians’ debate, challenge, and confirm every sentence, word, or reference. The question, therefore, is how the article about the Armenian Genocide was discussed in the weeks leading up to the decision to lock it?

NPOV—objectivity, impartiality, or anything goes?

Of the knowledge formed and disseminated on Wikipedia, its key quality has to be how it advertises itself as impartial, anonymous, and collectively generated. As a result, it is easy to imagine the genesis of a Wikipedia entry as a frictionless consensus generated by many anonymous editors. Yet many topics and their corresponding Wikipedia articles—the Armenian Genocide being no exception—are generated through conflict, not consensus. If anything, discussions about the Armenian Genocide entry exemplify not cooperation but petty squabbling, name calling, and rehashes of similar, and sometimes the same, arguments.

Despite, or perhaps as a result of, the underlying conflicts, one of the most repeated topics on the talk page considered here is the notion of the neutral point of view, or NPOV. Foremost among Wikipedia’s core content policies, it is defined as ‘representing fairly, proportionately, and, as far as possible, without editorial bias, all of the significant views that have been published by reliable sources on a topic.’²⁶ The policy is popular among Wikipedians—the people who write and edit Wikipedia entries—and the relatively few scholars who have studied the online platform from a qualitative perspective. Rosenzweig, for example, notes approvingly that ‘Wikipedia editors shy away from sensationalist interpretations (although not from discussion of controversies about such interpretations).’²⁷ Others have chosen to compare Wikipedia’s NPOV to the traditional concept of objectivity in historiography. Murray Philips notes, for example, that the version of objectivity articulated in Peter Novick’s authoritative *That Noble Dream* has a lot in common with a

NPOV policy. ‘In this version of objectivity’, he writes, ‘there are clear distinctions between known and knower, fact and value, history and fiction that enable historians to identify and describe patterns and features of the past.’²⁸ The main difference between the two, according to Philips, is that ‘While NPOV is a central feature of Wikipedia, neutrality has been shunned by historians and replaced by other philosophical positions about history-making.’²⁹

Yet Wikipedia’s NPOV policy does not really sit well with traditional scholarly objectivity, with its adherence to Leopold von Ranke’s dictate to describe the past ‘as it really happened’. As is described on Wikipedia itself, a neutral point of view is not necessarily about describing the past, even a conflicted part of it, in an objective manner. It is about impartiality more than displaying *one* or *no* point of view. As the entry on NPOV states in bold, ‘Wikipedia aims to describe disputes, but not engage in them.’³⁰ By way of explanation, several sub-principles of NPOV have been defined as well, with editors told to avoid stating opinions as facts, to avoid stating seriously contested assertions as facts, to avoid stating facts as opinions, to prefer non-judgemental language, and to indicate the relative prominence of opposing views. NPOV, in other words, is a central and well-defined feature of Wikipedia’s history writing. It calls for the description of debates and conflicts, but does not ask its editors to resolve them.

The NPOV policy is an especially prominent feature of those articles that are inherently controversial, the Armenian Genocide among them. In such conflicted territory, however, NPOV is used mainly as a rhetorical weapon. For example, discussing the content of the article, a handful of editors either call for ‘NPOV’, ask fellow editors to ‘Please make [sections of the article] neutral’, commend themselves for having ‘made several sections neutral for you’, or criticize others because ‘You are not following Wikipedia policy...you are not neutralising the article, you are injecting in it claims you make yourself.’³¹

In their efforts to question the neutrality and impartiality of their fellow editors, Wikipedia’s other key policies take a backseat. The encyclopaedia is built on the principles of anonymity and good faith, yet editors regularly speak of others involved as ‘Armenians’, ‘Kurds’, or

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‘Turks’.³² There is speculation as to the nationality of various editors on the basis of spelling mistakes, and one editor attacks another for failing to adhere to the NPOV policy, adding that ‘The next time you would want to pass as a neutral individual, don’t use the word “Armanian” repeatedly exposing that it is not only a mistake, but rather the Semitic (Arab/Hebrew) or Turkish pronunciation as “Ermen” or “Arman”.’³³ It is difficult here to argue that Wikipedia’s historiography is globalizing, when national history cultures and ethnic tension are at the fore in entries about conflicted parts of the past.

A few days prior to the protection ban, one frequent editor of the Armenian Genocide article, ‘Cool Cat’, wrote on the corresponding talk page:

Story has 3 sides actualy,
Turkish Propoganda (anti-genocide extreme with made up stories),
Armenian propoganda (pro-genocide extreme with made up stories), and
the NPOV which is based on how to describe events on both sides
perspective.³⁴

Another editor quickly answered him:

I am responding to the points Coolcat raises above.
He says this ‘Story has 3 sides actualy,’
Actually, this is not a ‘story’, this is history. Perhaps history can be told
in different ways, but only one thing actually happened. This is what you
seem to fail to accept. You seem to think that if two sides (or three) have
different versions, they are all equal.³⁵

Much of the talk page discussion prior to the first shutdown seems to centre on the difficulties of adhering to a neutral point of view in the face of denial and genocide revisionism. At some point, one contributor wrote about ‘specialists POV’ and ‘an individual POV’ *and* a ‘Neutral Point of view’, while another exclaimed ‘Now you claim that I am not neutral. Duh!!! Who told you I am? I am convinced a genocide happened’.³⁶

From revisions to revisionism

An oft-voiced sentiment among the Wikipedians who discussed the Armenian Genocide was to allow ‘Every party have its representation’ and to make sure that the ‘views of both parties...be voiced EQUALLY.’³⁷ The Armenian Genocide was said to be a diplomatic dispute and not a matter of history. Until the diplomatic dispute (between which parties was never stated) is resolved ‘there are two parties [that] should be adressed 50/50 regarding this matter.’³⁸ In other words, some interpreted the NPOV policy in a way that might explain at least some of the divisions visible in the article. ‘Both sides’—the ‘pro-genocide’ and ‘anti-genocide’ remarked on by Cool Cat—were to be displayed in the finished article, leaving it to the reader to decide what and who to believe. In a number of cases, however, comments on the talk page go far beyond misconstruing Wikipedia’s neutrality policy. Some are outright denialist, and repeat many of the accusations made by the Turkish state against ‘the Armenians’, albeit often crudely. One contributor in particular uses a rhetoric ripe with both denial and conspiracy theories, writing:

Of course; if there has been a century-long propaganda campaign to present this hoax unilaterally in a world where anti-Turkish prejudice has been imbedded since the Crusades and the Turks are a proud people who don’t want to stoop to hysterics, basically keeping quiet... NATU-RALLY if a lie is repeated often enough, people are going to believe it. That’s what Nazi Propaganda Minister Goebbels built his career on.³⁹

The hoax in question was the Armenian Genocide, the contributor states, and the Turks are its true victims. Otherwise, the denialist narrative on the talk page is that the Armenians rebelled and sided with the Ottoman Empire’s enemies, and the Ottoman government acted accordingly to move the Armenians away from critical areas, while sparing some Armenians—clear evidence of the government’s benevolence and a refutation of the accusations of genocide. Clearly, the Ottoman government did not intend the destruction of the Armenian and other Christian minorities. Besides, moving groups of the population was not uncommon at that time or in that part of the world.⁴⁰ Having suggested

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this narrative, one contributor goes on to note the futility of trying to get the facts straight. ‘[There are no] international court rulings’, he writes, adding that ‘Historic facts are only established through such courts.’⁴¹

Other editors suggest an even more conspiratorial take on the events, arguing that the reason that the majority of the world’s scholars subscribe to the notion of a genocide is because:

(A) Armenian propaganda arrived in torrents during WWI, coupled with the same in the previous quarter-century, cementing with the anti-Turkish prejudice in the West for centuries since the Crusades (B) Nobody wants to go against ‘genocide’; everyone knows ‘genocide’ is bad, and it’s easy to accept the ‘avalanche’ of Armenian propaganda ‘evidence’ that has had the advantage of gaining such a clear foothold (C) Those who have tried to speak the truth have been ruthlessly attacked, in ways ranging from horrendous smear campaigns to bombings of their homes. Who would want to enter this fray and be subjected to the madness of fanatics like Fanadix [a Wikipedian called ‘Fadix’], whose existence depends on maligning and discrediting those whose views are contrary?⁴²

The same editor suggests elsewhere on the talk page that his opponents should read the American attorney Samuel Weems’s denialist book *Armenia* (2002), and the former Turkish diplomat Kamuran Gürün’s *The Armenian File* (1985).⁴³ The former is the first (and only) volume in Weems’s ‘Armenian Great Deception Series’, and a most unpolished and hardline type of genocide denial in which Armenians are terrorists and conspirators, and anyone who dares to ‘speak out’ against them is a hero.⁴⁴ The latter remains one of the most determined attempts to bring the Turkish official historiography of the ‘massacres’ to an English-speaking audience.

Very little of this brazen denialism and xenophobia makes it to the Wikipedia article’s front page, yet softer denials and the official Turkish trivialization of the genocide has certainly coloured the construction of the finished article, and speaks of the inherent difficulties of writing conflicted history on Wikipedia.

Concluding remarks

How, then, does historical knowledge fare on Wikipedia? How does this particular digital platform narrate, debate, and disseminate history? And what, at the end of all of this, is the type of historical knowledge that we meet when we turn to Wikipedia for some quick information and guidance? Though mine is a small and limited study of a vast, and thus far unexamined, type of source material, there are some general observations to be made.

The first is the issue of how knowledge is formed on Wikipedia as opposed to in academia. I would argue that this is a mixed bag. Some aspects of Wikipedia's history writing seem to the trained eye to be if not the same, then similar, and there are certainly resemblances between Wikipedia's NPOV policy and traditional historiography's notions of objectivity, given that the NPOV calls for transparency and impartiality, asking Wikipedians to describe controversies rather than taking a stand. Similarly, the individual authorship of traditional historiography has become the anonymous contribution of its digital cousin, editors—the gatekeepers of traditional encyclopaedias—have become Wikipedia administrators, extensive endnotes have become talk pages of limitless length, and new editions have become a constant stream of revisions.

In other ways, however, history on Wikipedia is nothing like its older relative. It represents knowledge about the past organized and defined by a new collective, and according to new rules. The fact that Wikipedia requires a collective, anonymous consensus on every article, subsection, and phrasing is difficult to adhere to in practice. As the article on the Armenian Genocide shows, some events, being controversial, have a tendency to resist the globalizing aspirations of both the Internet and Wikipedia. The contributors to the Wikipedia article and talk page considered in this essay seemed to know one another by nickname, and did not hesitate to speculate about one another's identities and nationalities or to accuse supposed opponents of siding with the 'wrong' regimes and ideologies. The result, naturally, was an article that was neither anonymously written nor born from consensus.

The idea, and indeed the ideal, of NPOV was often repeated, but

as a matter of rhetoric rather than policy. A number of contributors plainly thought it gave them carte blanche to include any and all the interpretations of what happened in 1915—refusing to omit interpretations that trivialized the genocide, doubted the witnesses, and forgave the perpetrators. In the state in which it was protected on the last day of March 2005, the Wikipedia article on the Armenian Genocide effectively showcased the rocky road on which historical knowledge can be formed and shared online.

Notes

- 1 The research for this essay received generous support from the Wahlgrenska Foundation. The quote of this essay’s title can be found at: Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘Coolcat STOP IT’, Fadix, 20:44, 14 March 2005. In this essay, the grammatical errors, misspellings and exaggerated use of punctuation will be left, uncommented, as it is found in the archives of the webpage.
- 2 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Protection log, 17:15, 31 March 2005.
- 3 Not an unusual fate for a history article on Wikipedia it seems. A quick search shows that the entry on the Holocaust has, as of April 2019, been protected 15 times, the Crusades: 12 times, the French Revolution: 19 times, Holodomor: 15 times, and so on.
- 4 Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, Erling Sandmo, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg, ‘The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge’, in Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, Erling Sandmo, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018), 10.
- 5 Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); id., *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 47.
- 6 And prompted studies of both the spread of misinformation during the presidential campaign and its eventual reception. See, for example, Hunt Allcott & Matthew Gentzkow, ‘Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31/2 (2017).
- 7 The editorials and articles on these themes seemed, in fact, endless and often grouped together the US presidential campaign and the UK Brexit-vote. See, for example, Jonathan Rose, ‘Brexit, Trump, and Post-Truth Politics’, *Public Integrity* 19 (2017), or Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen & Tina Besley (eds.), *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity & Higher Education* (Puchong,

- Selangor D.E.: Springer, 2018). The close and often fruitful relationship between politics and lies is, however, naturally not newly discovered and, in the case of US history in particular, Hannah Arendt's text on the so-called Pentagon Papers springs to mind. Hannah Arendt, 'Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers', *New York Review of Books*, 18 November 1971.
- 8 To the point of 'post-truth' being appointed the 2016 'word of the year' by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Incidentally, the dictionary Merriam-Webster's 2016 word of the year was 'surreal'.
 - 9 Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia*, 211–217.
 - 10 Christian Pentzold, 'Fixing the Floating Gap: The Online Encyclopaedia Wikipedia as a Global Memory Space', *Memory Studies* 2/2 (2009), 264.
 - 11 Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia*, 273.
 - 12 On the language and communication of online encyclopaedias see William Emigh & Susan C. Herring, 'Collaborative Authoring on the Web: A Genre Analysis of Online Encyclopedias', *Proceedings of the 38th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 4 (2005); Céline Poudat, Laurent Vanni & Natalia Grabar, 'How to Explore Conflicts in French Wikipedia Talk Pages?', *Statistics Analysis of Textual Data* (2016).
 - 13 Roy Rosenzweig, 'Can History Be Open Source? *Wikipedia* and the Future of the Past', *The Journal of American History*, 93/1 (2006), 117.
 - 14 Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 9.
 - 15 For rankings, see www.alexa.com/siteinfo/wikipedia.org, 7 April 2019.
 - 16 Jörn Rüsen, 'Holocaust Memory and Identity Building: Metahistorical Considerations in the Case of (West) Germany', in Michael S. Roth & Charles G. Salas (eds.), *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001), 252.
 - 17 Richard Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999); Vahagn Avedian, *Knowledge and Acknowledgement in the Politics of Memory of the Armenian Genocide* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019).
 - 18 Doğan Gürpınar, 'The Manufacturing of Denial: The Making of the Turkish 'Official Thesis' on the Armenian Genocide Between 1974 and 1990', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 18/3 (2016); Ömer Turan & Güven Gürkan Öztan, *Devlet Akli ve 1915: Türkiye'de 'Ermeni Meselesi' Anlatısının İnşası* ('Raison d'Etat and 1915: The Construction of the 'Armenian Question' Narrative in Turkey') (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018).
 - 19 According to which it was a crime to 'insult Turkishness'. In 2008, however, the article was amended to read 'insult the Turkish nation' instead. Among the most

- high-profile cases, the authors Orhan Pamuk and Elif Şafak were prosecuted, and the Armenian–Turkish journalist Hrant Dink was prosecuted and sentenced.
- 20 Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 2012), x.
- 21 Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity*, xi.
- 22 As examples of the now diverse field of study, see, for example, Donald E. Miller & Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).
- 23 The protected version of the article can be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Armenian_Genocide&diff=next&oldid=11728778, 2 April 2019.
- 24 Rosenzweig, ‘Can History be Open Source’, 141–142.
- 25 In English, the notion of Armenian terrorism as an innate ‘racial’ trait is best exemplified in Erich Feigl’s denialist exposé *A Myth of Terror: Armenian Extremism. Its Causes and its Historical Context* (Salzburg: Edition Zeitgeschichte, 1986).
- 26 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view, 3 April 2019.
- 27 Rosenzweig, ‘Can History be Open Source?’, 131.
- 28 Murray G. Philips, ‘Wikipedia and History: A Worthwhile Partnership in the Digital Era?’, *Rethinking History* 20/4 (2016), 533.
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- 31 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘FYI’, Cool Cat, 16:16, 17 March 2005; Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘FYI’, Fadix, 22:44, 17 March 2005.
- 32 See, for example, Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘Here is the deal’, Torque, no time stamp, 22 March 2005.
- 33 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘FYI’, Fadix, 22:44, 17 March 2005.
- 34 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘Guideline’, Cool Cat, 08:19, 29 March 2005.
- 35 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘Guideline’, RaffiKojian, 15:52, 29 March 2005.
- 36 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘FYI’, Fadix, 15:52, 18 March 2005; Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘Coolcat, stop contradicting yourself’, Fadix, 17:03, 20 March 2005.
- 37 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘Here is the deal’, Cool Cat, 18:42, 18 March 2005; Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, ‘United States’, Cool Cat, 23:28, 19 March 2005.

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- 38 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, 'United States', Cool Cat, 23:28, 19 March, 2005.
- 39 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, 'FYI', Torque, no timestamp, 22 March 2005.
- 40 See, for example, Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, 'FYI', Torque, no timestamps, 17–22 March 2005; Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, 'Message to Mediator', Torque, no timestamps, 1 March 2005.
- 41 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, 'What I learnt so far:;', Cool Cat, 16:31, 20 March 2005.
- 42 Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, '4 suggestions, 2 comment for now', Torque, no timestamp, 22 March 2005.
- 43 See, for example, Wikipedia, The Armenian Genocide: Archive 2, 'RE. Comparing the propagandistic factor of Raffi vs. Fadix', no signature, no timestamp, 22 March 2005.
- 44 On Weems and denialism see Maria Karlsson, *Cultures of Denial: Comparing Holocaust and Armenian Genocide Denial*, diss. (Lund: Department of History 2015), 103–104; 111–115; 154.

II

EXAMINING KEY CONCEPTS

The raw and the cooked

Information and knowledge in history

Laura Skouvig

In recent years the history of knowledge has emerged as a new and promising field. A factor in this has been a consistent questioning from many sides—particularly from the history of science, the history of ideas, and intellectual history. One criticism concerns how historians in the field of history of knowledge understand, define, conceptualize, and deploy knowledge. The critics seem to be asking how knowledge helps in defining and delimiting the history of knowledge.¹ Consequently, a major theme of many introductions to the history of knowledge has been the various definitions and conceptualizations of knowledge as a historical phenomenon. One way of determining what knowledge is has been to delimit it from the adjacent concept of information, and consequently from the neighbouring field of information history.² Information and knowledge are said to be different by Burke, Lässig, and Mulsow, but at the same time there is a tendency to simply incorporate information into the realm of the history of knowledge. For that matter it makes sense to incorporate information, since information is also a part of knowledge-producing praxis. However, I would argue that even though information history and the history of knowledge should take inspiration from each other, they also address different areas of research.

In this essay, I consider information history as a historical field in its own right. I address two principal issues: the differences between the *history* of the history of knowledge and the *history* of information history, both of which are equally recent, and both of which face criticism for conceptual ambiguities, methodologies, and differences from adja-

cent fields; and the manner in which historians of information history understand and conceptualize information in diverse ways—in my case, for example, I understand and apply information as an analytical prism with which to investigate past practices. I then go on to examine how the history of knowledge conceptualizes information, and subordinates it as a part of history of knowledge. Finally, I briefly touch on the mutual benefits to information history and the history of knowledge, drawing on an ongoing empirical study of the police department in Copenhagen in the early nineteenth century, and conclude that both fields have much to gain from a continued discussion of their own primary concerns—and their blind spots.

A history of everything?

Much of the criticism of the history of knowledge concerns the concept of knowledge itself. In its broadest sense it is not particularly excluding. A frequent objection is thus that it is often difficult to see what it is *not* about.³ If knowledge is conceptually ambiguous, so is information.⁴ As a historical phenomenon, information seems to include just about everything.

Information history has close ties to the field of information studies. One major impetus stems from a critique of the common trend in library history of being merely descriptive, and focused on single institutions and pioneers producing a discourse of constant progress.⁵ A key figure in information history is the British historian, Alistair Black, who has led the way in the modernization of library history by arguing that it needs a clear theoretical approach and that it should be positioned in social history.⁶ The initial need for a scholarly reshuffle in library history not only reflected new theoretical impulses drawn from history, but also the changes in information studies, where libraries as institutions have lost out to information systems in the very broadest sense.⁷ Over the years, information studies has seen numerous inconclusive discussions about the concept and definition of information itself.⁸ However slippery the concept of information was in the academic discipline of information studies, Black still proposed the transfer of historical studies of libraries

to the broader field of historical studies of information.⁹ Consequently, the ambiguities inherent in the concept of information as current in information studies affected how to conceive of its history.¹⁰

One of the challenges of information history stems from working with a concept charged with ideological meaning, derived from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' experiences of information technology. The media historian, John Durham Peters, encapsulates the challenges by referring to information as a term that does not like history.¹¹ He illustrates how information altered its conceptual meaning several times, including in the immediate post-war period. It was that shift which embedded information in the technological and scientific discourse that continues today, and is seen as constitutive of modern information society.¹² The historian Toni Weller, meanwhile, has argued for seeing information as a cultural and social phenomenon, and not solely as a technological phenomenon. In her studies of Victorian information perceptions, she prises information from its present ideological embeddedness in technology. This approach seems to dilute the concept of information further, however. Weller reaches for Ludwig Wittgenstein and his concept of language games—that a word's meaning relies on the practices and activities of everyday life—in order to ground historical studies in everyday life practices; fairly well-known territory for historians. In Weller's opinion, a uniform and singular definition of information is neither possible nor desirable. To understand information as a historical phenomenon is to see it as being different from what it is today.¹³ This understanding, argues Weller, is central to the field of information history, and renders an overarching, all-encompassing definition of information superfluous.¹⁴ Information becomes a prism through which to view past practices, and so gain new insights into past societies.

Weller's holistic approach to information is inspiring and invites further theoretical elaboration. Though my line of thinking owes less to Wittgenstein, language games, and lifeworlds, I do work in a post-structuralist tradition informed by the works of Michel Foucault, and I hold information to be a construct. More particularly, I see information as a human construct that is always dependent on a specific purpose.¹⁵ My

own research has combined information history with rhetorical genre theory to explore how information has been created in specific settings with specific purposes, and how this reflects underlying cultures of information.¹⁶ Rhetorical genre theory stresses that information is produced and used in specific (rhetorical) contexts with the aim of influencing others.¹⁷ This is an understanding that resonates with what Neil Postman conceives of as the rhetorical function of information, and with the definition of data posited by Daniel Rosenberg.¹⁸ Information does not exist per se, but emerges in communicative actions.¹⁹ From this position, the question of what information is must be answered according to the given historical period and context: when and how does information appear as information?²⁰ Information is always about something.²¹

To some extent it might seem frustrating not to have a common definition of the subject under scrutiny. The American historian, James Cortada, has called for at least a common set of defined methodologies for studying information: a common methodology could unify a dispersed field, which is why he suggests the idea of ‘information ecosystems’ as one such methodology.²² Simonsen and Skouvig briefly note that Cortada’s ecosystems share some of the same characteristics as the concept of circulation in the history of knowledge, since both models seek to understand and question how information and knowledge respectively circulate in communities or societies at large.²³ Cortada’s suggestion of the information ecosystem as a unifying methodology rests upon a specific notion of information as facts.²⁴ In that respect it does tend to delimit information history in a way that is not productive. It seems more promising to follow Weller, who favours the application of rigorous historical methods in the study of past information cultures.²⁵ It is still pertinent to discuss how information is used as a prism and how historians understand and conceptualize information. This discussion ought not to lead to a common and unified definition, however, but to a continued exploration of the plurality inherent in information as a historical phenomenon.²⁶

Information and the history of knowledge

From my own academic standpoint in information history, I have followed the discussions in the history of knowledge about the concept and definition of knowledge with curiosity. My own interest has been the attempts to distinguish knowledge from information, and thus the history of knowledge from information history. As formulated by Peter Burke, a common distinction, ‘Borrowing a famous metaphor from Claude Lévi-Strauss’, is ‘to think of information as raw, while knowledge has been cooked.’²⁷ The quote seems to address a common-sense distinction between information and knowledge: information is somehow unprocessed, whereas knowledge needs someone (an individual) to process it. I do not query the definition as such, but I will question its depiction of a particular, one-sided understanding of information and consequently of information history, which Burke refers to as an American enterprise based on ‘the empiricist culture of the USA’.²⁸

In the introduction to his *What is the History of Knowledge?*, Burke further explores the rawness of information. He modifies it to a degree by acknowledging that the cultural horizon of those who gather information determines the selection criteria, and that the human mind perceives and processes the data. Yet he remains vague on whether he holds information to be some kind of raw material, which would exempt it from historical scrutiny.²⁹ In looking at how knowledge is processed, Burke includes information in the history of knowledge as a part of such processes as gathering, organizing, and storing information. Information is absorbed as a component in the making of knowledge, and consequently absorbed in the history of knowledge.³⁰ Martin Mulrow advocates the same reduction, and juxtaposes information with facts. Information history then becomes merely the ‘history of the collection, propagation, and adoption of facts’ which he without further elaboration subordinates to the history of knowledge.³¹ An argument like this reduces information to the status of a unit beyond history, and precludes historical awareness and the scrutiny of information. Information needs to be just as historicized as knowledge, if not more, and that is precisely what information history is about. An interesting assumption here is

that the definition of information as facts reflects a conceptualization of knowledge that stems from an understanding of it as ‘justified true belief’—a conception generally refused as a productive definition of knowledge in the history of knowledge, and thus it should be replaced by definitions that extend knowledge even further than the newer tendencies in the history of science.³²

A Denkraum

The constant criticism by historians of science of the vague conceptualization of knowledge used by historians of knowledge leads on the other hand to prosperous theoretical exchanges about knowledge as a unifying concept in historical analyses. As I have argued elsewhere, there is an understandable wish for a non-restrictive definition of knowledge.³³ Unsettled definitions make for extended theoretical elaborations, and to paraphrase Claude Lévi-Strauss again, theories are good to think with.³⁴ The theoretical discussions about the history of knowledge are an inspiration when navigating information as a concept in historical analyses. I will therefore briefly reflect upon some of the inspirations so gained.

Basically, I see two lines of inspiration: knowledge as a sociological concept in Peter Burke’s works; or the epistemological understanding based on the French tradition, represented for example by Philipp Sarasin of the Center ‘History of Knowledge’ in Zurich.³⁵ In short, these two perspectives emphasize what from a historical point of view seems to be the starting point for all history: that knowledge (as the object of historical inquiry) is a sociological and historical phenomenon that should be analysed by the lights of whatever specific period the historian is interested in. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger argues in his short, rather dense introduction to historicizing epistemology that epistemology should be understood in the French way, which includes reflecting on the historical conditions of how things turned into objects of knowledge (for example, scientific knowledge produced in laboratories).³⁶

The influence of the French epistemological tradition on the Swiss version of the history of knowledge is pronounced. That applies to its

anchoring in scientific knowledge as well as to its claim that knowledge is a historical phenomenon.³⁷ Most importantly, the tradition points to a societal production and circulation of knowledge that also means that knowledge is formed by its contexts, actors, and media. Sarasin argues for a history of knowledge as a *Denkraum*—a framework where the historian can deal with a complex interpretation of past events, developments, and structures, or what might be called historical ‘reality’ for want of a better expression.³⁸ He also believes that systems of rational knowledge differ from systems of belief (including convictions, norms, and ideologies) and systems of art as an expressive-aesthetic dimension.³⁹ In many respects, he draws knowledge away from its traditional basis in scientific knowledge, implying a level of practice in the historical investigation of knowledge that inserts knowledge into the realm of everyday life.

Anna Nilsson Hammar argues for such a more profound attention to everyday life: a lifeworld perspective that precedes the scientific and rational world.⁴⁰ Hammar Nilsson extends this essentially phenomenological understanding of the lifeworld by focusing on everyday life as processual—a constant becoming—and not as an already-there notion in the strict Husserlian sense. She emphasizes that the everyday life perspective is not reduced to specific persons or neglected groups in society (and thus in history);⁴¹ instead, it challenges the prevailing conceptualization of knowledge as scientific or rational, and requires a theoretical configuration of (different forms of) practical knowledge, which for example involves tacit knowledge and knowledge as an activity. She finds this in the Aristotelian tripartition of knowledge—as the *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poiesis* of different activities. This activity-bound understanding of knowledge urges multiple explorations of knowledge practices, beyond the mere communication (or mediation) of scientific knowledge in different contexts.⁴²

From the perspective of information history, I find Hammar Nilsson’s line of thinking highly interesting. Information history, after all, finds itself with an under-theorized understanding of the lifeworld and everyday life. Yet it comprises a slew of interesting studies, from visual information (illustrations, maps, models, technical drawings, pictures)

to information about etiquette to studies of practical information about cultivation methods, and much in between. These kinds of information address practical (and sometimes tacit) knowledge that is not easily communicated in print alone.⁴³ Information history has foregrounded studies of information and knowledge practices in everyday life, with a particular focus on how information was shaped and formed by different genres, media, and technologies. These studies can only benefit from the broader, stronger theoretical underpinnings offered by the history of knowledge.

Two pieces of wood and an axe

The history of knowledge has inspired me to focus on ‘suspicions’ as a form of knowledge in my studies in information history. As a part of my ongoing interest in information networks in the late absolutist state of Denmark (1784–1849), I have been studying the vast archive of the police department in Copenhagen.⁴⁴ Initially, my research focused on flows of information and news among illiterate residents of Copenhagen, and how news were mediated in print, manuscript, and word of mouth. Central to this were the ballad-mongers, who provided the latest news (and rumours) about catastrophes, wars, and crimes. In 1805 the singing of ballads was prohibited and ballad-mongers were criminalized, risking arrest and prosecution. In short, one way to identify them was in the police records. My first readings of the police files reflected my role as a historian: how best to locate cases brought against ballad-mongers? Soon I realized the simple fact that the police files constituted a huge information management system, which held and systematized information about deviance and deviants in accordance with a specific understanding of information. My next step was to focus on the informational aspects of the records, and how genres emerged and formed the information. Given that I was dealing with the same type of crime throughout, I wondered what information was recorded and how. Did the information change according to the genre, whether it was the ledger or the interrogation minutes, or the final verdict? The crimes so recorded are in this respect less important than *how* they were

recorded. A focus on genre gives a sense of what the perceived need for information was, and how it related to the daily activities of the police department and the courts.

The police department in Copenhagen was just one branch of a vast bureaucracy that sprang up with absolutist rule, and its records give glimpses of the perceptions of information that governed the construction of the administrative system of information in general. More specifically, the system of information in the police administration turned on the question of what the police needed information about. This is particularly interesting for the historian when looking at cases where the police acted on a reported suspicion.

The main ledger was the key to the archival paper trail in the Copenhagen police department. The ledger recorded reported offences, brawls, and untoward behaviour, and ordered and categorized these events carefully. Typical offences were theft, drunkenness, homelessness, idleness, prostitution, domestic disturbances, fights, libels, and all and any situations that deviated from an unspoken notion of normality. Included in this list I noticed entries about 'strangers', 'suspicious', or 'suspicious behaviour'. While almost all other keywords characterized the nature of the offence or the offender, and were duly assigned to categories of offence with known circumstances, the categories of 'stranger', 'suspicious', and 'suspicious behaviour' pointed to something unknown.

The idea of the unknown led me to examine what precisely defined a particular person, or particular circumstances, as suspect. One possibility was that the police deployed 'suspicious' as some kind of miscellaneous category. Given that I have only examined very few cases, I would argue tentatively that this was not the case. Leaving aside the question of categorization in order to focus on how information was produced and formed—and for what purpose—I realized that the suspicions not only represented something unknown, but that they also required either verification or invalidation. The result had huge implications for those suspected. If verified, the suspected person would be prosecuted based on the established information; if invalid, they were free to go. The question is not merely one of turning a suspicion into positive, certain knowledge in a more epistemological way; rather, the 'suspicion'

suggests how knowledge was produced in the first place. Many knowledge-producing practices in the everyday life of the Copenhagen police department centred on determining the state of ‘suspicion’, and the final decision was enacted and embedded in a constant flow of information in the genre system of the police bureaucracy in Copenhagen.

Suspicion is the fulcrum of police work. It is used to legitimize arrests, searches, and surveillance.⁴⁵ It defines whether specific pieces of intelligence are considered relevant or not. It connects what we know with what we do not know.⁴⁶ A suspicion can be reasonable or unfounded, but either way it signals that it has not yet been proved. When you voice a suspicion, you assume that something or someone is illegal or dishonest—‘suspicion’ in a police setting implies criminal liability.⁴⁷ What was considered criminal liability has changed since the early nineteenth century, but it seems that what was noted down as ‘being suspicious’ in the police files did not necessarily indicate criminal activity, and more often than not designated unusual or unexpected behaviour observed by a police officer or a resident.

When, for instance, on 1 December 1808 a coachman employed by a Copenhagen grocer came across an unfamiliar man with two pieces of firewood and an axe in the yard of the grocer’s house, he reported it to the police as suspicious. One may wonder whether the coachman suspected a theft, or merely found the behaviour unusual. The degree of suspicion grew when the coachman could not understand what the man was saying, and realized the axe belonged to his master.⁴⁸ These observations were recorded in the ledgers and files, supplied with identification numbers. The night watchman took the suspected man to the central police station where he was questioned. The interrogation revealed that the man was Irish and did not speak Danish, that he was ‘musketeer’ (rifleman), and that he had earned the firewood as wages for helping unload a ship. He had been in the grocer’s yard hoping to find an axe to split the wood. The police constable then simply took the Irish rifleman to find the captain of the ship, who confirmed his story. The Irish rifleman was apparently released, though the files indicate further correspondence (probably with the Royal Chancellery) that was not kept with the files.⁴⁹ The case illustrates that ‘suspicious’ was not

a fixed quality, but rather one construed from different indications, of which the Irishman's presence in a private yard after dark was only one. It also reveals something of the coachman's knowledge of status, rank, and ideas of honest behaviour, which was essential in order to get on in the strictly hierarchical society of absolutist Denmark.⁵⁰

We only know this story from the records in the Copenhagen police department archive. The report, drily formulated by one of the police officers, points to a specific information landscape that consisted of the date, the time of day, the persons involved, the place, and the materiality of the suspicion (the axe and firewood).⁵¹ As a genre, the report turns these particularities into the necessary information about a suspicious event. The records in the main ledger were based on actual events, but shaped them into a specific form of information suitable for a reactive investigation.⁵² Based on a single keyword in the entry in the main ledger, the police officer followed a simple process of verification. In the cases that I have looked into, the identification of the suspect was pivotal and involved reliable witnesses.⁵³ The question was to link existing knowledge with what was not known—in other words, a known unknown.⁵⁴

Suspensions, understood as particular forms of knowledge, inspire further examination of the files for the performance or enactment of suspicions and suspicious behaviour by police officers, bureaucrats, and ordinary people in Copenhagen: suspicions were a performative act of knowledge formation. One way of looking at the enactment of suspicions in everyday Copenhagen life is to investigate their function in the police files and the process of proving them either 'true' or 'false'. The outcome determined the fate of the suspected person.

Concluding remarks

Writing history from the perspective of information history and the history of knowledge means a shift in focus from other fields of history. My interest in the Copenhagen police files has little to do with the history of crime, the police, or criminals, and not even the history of government or bureaucracy (*Verwaltungsgeschichte*). Instead, it is a history of how a perceived need for information defined a need for certain representa-

tions of information (offences, events, people, personal characteristics, etc.) in tables, ledgers, reports, and verdicts. But it is also a history of such information being generated, shaped, and communicated, and its circulation in and beyond actual systems. In this particular area of everyday life, a knowledge of status, rank, and honest behaviour was necessary when evaluating situations in the streets of Copenhagen. Yet knowledge was also produced about people and their offences centred on ‘suspicions’ as a specific, unstable form of knowledge.

Information history and the history of knowledge are different, just as information and knowledge are different concepts. However, each can benefit the other. Information history operates with a much broader conception of information—admittedly not very helpful when it comes to distinguishing it from the history of knowledge—and provides a unique questioning of the perceptions of information in the history of knowledge, while remaining the stronghold for studies of knowledge as something different to the object of science. Information history thus pushes the agenda of pursuing studies of everyday knowledge, practical knowledge, and craft knowledge. The history of knowledge, meanwhile, contributes its strong theoretical background to information history. Information history needs this in order to situate its studies of information in past societies in the broader context of social and cultural history, a perspective from which we can gain new insights into the past. Ultimately, information history and the history of knowledge embody Sarasin’s idea of a *Denkraum*—a new way of thinking history.

Notes

- 1 Staffan Bergwik, ‘Kunskapshistoria: nya insikter?’, *Scandia* 82/2 (2018): 86–98.
- 2 Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016); Simone Lässig, ‘The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda’, *Bulletin of the GHI* 59 (2016): 29–44 and Martin Mulsow, ‘History of Knowledge’, in Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019): 159–173.
- 3 Lorraine Daston, ‘Comment’, in Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019): 173–179.
- 4 See Maria Simonsen and Laura Skouvig, ‘Videnshistorie. Nye veje i historie-

- videnskaberne', *Temp* (2019 preprint): 5–26 for a similar discussion about the relations between information and knowledge. Alistair Black, 'Information History', *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 40 (2006): 441–473, John Durham Peters, 'Information. Notes toward a Critical History', *The Journal of Communication Inquiry* 12/2 (1988): 9–23, and Norman D. Stevens, 'The History of Information', *Advances in Librarianship* 14 (1986): 1–48.
- 5 See, for example, Wayne August Wiegand, 'American Library History Literature 1947-1997: Theoretical Perspectives?', in A. B. Wertheimer and D. G. Davis (eds.), *Library History Research in America: Essays Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Library History Round Table* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, The Center for the Book, 2000): 4–35.
 - 6 Alistair Black, 'New Methodologies in Library History: A Manifesto for the 'New' Library History', *Library History* 11 (1995): 76–85. My brief sketch of the emergence of information history is however not exhaustive.
 - 7 Black, 'New Methodologies'.
 - 8 Geoffrey Nunberg, 'Farewell to the Information Age', in Geoffrey Nunberg (ed.), *The Future of the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); see also Ronald E. Day, *The Modern Invention of Information. Discourse, History, and Power* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001). Jonathan Furner, 'Information studies without information', *Library Trends* 52/3 (2004): 427–446.
 - 9 Alistair Black, 'Information and Modernity: The History of Information and the Eclipse of Library History', *Library History* 14/1 (1998): 39–45.
 - 10 See, for example, Black, 'Information History' and Durham Peters, 'Information'.
 - 11 Durham Peters, 'Information', 10.
 - 12 Durham Peters, 'Information'; see also Toni Weller, *Information History—An Introduction: Exploring an Emergent Field* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2008).
 - 13 Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 85.
 - 14 Weller, *Information History*, 19.
 - 15 Charles Bazerman, 'Nuclear Information. One rhetorical moment in the construction of the information age', *Written Communication* 18 (2001): 259–295.
 - 16 See, for example, Laura Skouvig, 'Genres of War: Informing a City', in Jack Andersen (ed.), *Genre Theory in Information Studies. Studies in Information 11* (London: Emerald, 2015): 133–154, and Laura Skouvig, 'Et afsluttet hele? Informationsforståelser i Illustreret Tidende 1859–1924', *Temp* 7/14 (2017): 112–126.
 - 17 Bazerman, 'Nuclear Information', 261.
 - 18 Postman, *Building a bridge*. For the rhetorical dimension of data see Daniel Rosenberg, 'Data before the Fact'. In Lisa Gitelman (ed.) *Raw data' is an oxymoron*. (MIT: Cambridge MA: 2013): 15–41.
 - 19 Laura Skouvig and Jack Andersen, 'Understanding information history from a

- genre-theoretical perspective', *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 66/10 (2015): 2061–2070.
- 20 Skouvig and Andersen, 'Understanding', 2061.
- 21 Simonsen and Skouvig, 'Videnshistorie', 12.
- 22 James Cortada, 'A Framework for Understanding Information Ecosystems in Firms and Industries', *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* 51/2 (2016): 133–163; see also James Cortada, *All the Facts. A History of Information in the United States since 1870* (New York: OUP, 2016).
- 23 Simonsen and Skouvig, 'Videnshistorie'.
- 24 Cortada, *All the Facts*, 6.
- 25 Toni Weller, 'Information History: Its Importance, Relevance and Future', *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*, 59/4–5 (2007): 437–448.
- 26 James Cortada, 'Shaping Information History as an Intellectual Discipline', *Information & Culture: A Journal of History*, 47/2 (2012): 119–144.
- 27 Burke, *What is*, 6.
- 28 See also Simonsen and Skouvig, 'Videnshistorie'.
- 29 Burke, *What is*, 6 and 44.
- 30 *Ibid.* 44.
- 31 Mulsow, 'History of Knowledge', 162.
- 32 *Ibid.* 159.
- 33 Simonsen and Skouvig, 'Videnshistorie', 10. As an outsider in relation to the history of science it is not at all clear what exactly the critics are looking for when they argue for a vague concept of knowledge. What is their definition of knowledge?
- 34 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 4. Lévi-Strauss and Darnton are focused on what *things* people use(d) to think with.
- 35 Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge. From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000) and Philipp Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte', *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur (IASL)*, 36/1 (2011): 159–172. Zentrum Geschichte des Wissens is a joint collaboration between University of Zürich and ETH Zürich. <https://www.zgw.ethz.ch/de/home.html> (28 December 2018).
- 36 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Historische Epistemologie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2007).
- 37 Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte', 165.
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- Circulation of Knowledge. Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018): 107–124.
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- 42 Ibid. 114.
- 43 Toni Weller, *The Victorians and Information. A Social and Cultural History* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009), Skouvig and Andersen, ‘Understanding’.
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- 45 Kira Vrist Rønn, ‘Hypoteser og forklaringer,’ in Camilla Hald and Kira Vrist Rønn (eds.), *Om at opdage. Metodiske refleksioner over politiets undersøgelsespraksis* (Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur, 2013): 255–301.
- 46 Ibid. 257.
- 47 Ibid. 261.
- 48 Case 3719, DG-001 Københavns politi (1790–1943), *Journalsager. 1808 2401–3100 lb-nr. 42.*
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- 50 Ulrik Langen, *Det sorteste hjerte. Historien om et dybt fald i enevældens København* (København: Politikens Forlag, 2012).
- 51 Charles Bazerman, Joseph Little and Terri Chavkin, ‘The Production of Information for Genred Activity Spaces: Informational Motives and Consequences of the Environmental Impact Statement,’ *Written Communication*, 20 (2003): 455–477.
- 52 Vrist Rønn, ‘Hypoteser og forklaringer,’ 266.
- 53 Stating the true identity of an arrestee was at the heart of the judicial system of the absolute government. See, for example, Karl Peder Pedersen, *Kontrol over København. Studier i den sene enevældes sikkerhedspoliti 1800–8* (Odense: University of Southern Denmark Studies in History and Social Sciences Vol. 484, 2014), and Laura Skouvig, ‘Records and Rumors: Surveillance and Information in Late Absolutist Denmark (1770-1849),’ *Surveillance & Society* 15/2 (2017): 314–325.
- 54 Vrist Rønn, ‘Hypoteser og forklaringer,’ 256 discusses unknown unknowns and their status in pre-emptive policework.

Phronesis as therapy and cure

Practical knowledge in early twentieth-century psychotherapy

Cecilia Riving

But to truly delve into the unknown is not possible solely on the basis of knowledge and analysis. Something more is required—it requires an ability to intuitively sense that which is not fully tangible for the human mind.¹

Poul Bjerre, Swedish physician and psychotherapist, wrote these words in 1914. As the most fervent advocate of psychotherapeutic treatment in Sweden in the early twentieth century, Bjerre promoted a therapy based on psychological knowledge and intuition.² In a medical culture increasingly turned towards the natural sciences and ideals of clinical objectivity, he felt that the need for psychological understanding and emotional involvement was desperate.³

In this essay, I explore the concept of knowledge in early Swedish psychotherapy, and examine how leading psychotherapists defined their method in opposition to other forms of treatment. What kind of knowledge was considered relevant in the clinical encounter, in order to successfully treat a patient? How was this knowledge different from other forms of knowledge? And, crucially, how was knowledge to be defined in the first place? When it comes to describing mental illness and its treatment there has never been much consensus, but the early twentieth century was particularly marked by heated debates and conflicting views, as very different ways of conceptualizing mental illness evolved at the same time.⁴

Looking at the concept of knowledge in the patient–practitioner

relationship, I am inspired by the hermeneutics of medical encounters developed by the philosophers Hans-Georg Gadamer and Fredrik Svenaeus. Thus I regard the clinical encounter as much more than just a doctor treating a patient—it is a relationship between two individuals with their own personal beliefs and experiences. In order to get a genuine dialogue going, so making a successful treatment possible, the practitioner needs certain skills that are not just applied scientific or theoretical knowledge. Rather, scientific knowledge is always applied *in* the dialogical meeting; the doctor is an interpreter, trying to get a fuller understanding of the patient’s lifeworld. Practical knowledge is a key concept. It closely corresponds to Aristotelian *phronesis*, which can be described as practical wisdom gained through long experience of practical matters in life. It is an intuitive sense for what is right to do in a particular case, and cannot be transferred into a set of rules or principles, as theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) or skills in arts and crafts (*techne*).⁵ As Svenaeus describes it:

The *phronimos*—the wise man—knows the right and good thing to do in *this* specific situation; in the case of medicine we would say that he knows the right and good thing to do for this specific patient at this specific time.⁶

One could argue that *phronesis* is a core element in all clinical practice, since encounters between patient and practitioner are necessarily based on dialogue and interpretation. However, *phronesis* might also be seen as a distinct and special kind of knowledge that is different from other forms, such as theoretical and scientific knowledge. As such, it highlights the fact that there are separate forms of knowledge used in a medical context, and, most probably, different opinions on which kind of knowledge should be prioritized. *Phronesis* could be an ideal of sorts in the specific clinical encounter.

The hermeneutic approach and the concepts of practical knowledge and *phronesis* have often been applied in research on present-day medical care, but rarely in historical studies of medical practice.⁷ I thus approach the therapeutic landscape in early twentieth-century Sweden

from a hermeneutical point of view. Focusing on early psychotherapy, my aim is to see how the role of the practitioner can be interpreted from a hermeneutical perspective, and in what way it relates to the concepts of practical knowledge and *phronesis*. I do not examine what actually took place in face-to-face encounters between patients and practitioners; instead, I chart the ideals expressed in psychotherapeutic writing. How do psychotherapists describe their treatment as opposed to other treatments? Is there a conflict between practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge, between *phronesis* and *episteme*?

The therapeutic landscape in the early twentieth century

By the early twentieth century, psychiatry had been established both as an academic subject and as a clinical profession in the asylums. It was, however, a rather new and shaky enterprise; it was only in the 1850s and 1860s psychiatry was recognized as a proper medical discipline, and there was still considerable doubt as to the effectiveness and reliability of psychiatric theory and practice. Psychiatrists struggled to prove themselves as scientists and to achieve the same status as other physicians. One way of doing this was to promote a forceful biological model when it came to the origins of mental illness. Mental illness was to be understood as an organic disorder, firmly placed within the laws of the natural sciences. While treatment was generally aimed at patients' social behaviour, theories of the origins of mental illness targeted the brain, the nervous system, and lesions in the body. Thus, theory and practice were often far apart.⁸

At the end of the nineteenth century, another approach to mental illness was gaining ground. Rooted in hypnotic treatment (which in turn emanated from the curious practice of animal magnetism), early psychotherapy now saw the light of day. In Sweden, the famous physician and hypnotist Otto Wetterstrand gained an international reputation as a healer of all sorts of ailments in the 1880s and 1890s. One of his pupils was Poul Bjerre, who became the most industrious promoter of psychotherapeutic treatment in the early twentieth century, and made determined efforts to have it officially recognized. In his clinic

in Stockholm he received hundreds of patients with different kinds of nervous complaints. Other psychologically oriented physicians (they were only a few), such as Emanuel af Geijerstam and Iwan Bratt, also endorsed a treatment based on suggestion, hypnotic sleep, and a close and intimate relationship between patient and practitioner. Influenced by the expanding psychoanalytic school, early Swedish psychotherapy emphasized the unconscious and psychological roots of mental problems. The role of the practitioner was to help the patient gain access to his or her inner self.⁹

There was a heated discussion among physicians as to the value and effectiveness of psychiatry and psychotherapy.¹⁰ At the core of the conflict lay the concept of knowledge itself. In what follows, I will approach early Swedish psychotherapy from three different viewpoints: the relationship between theory and practice; the concept of practical knowledge; and the limits of knowledge.

Practice and theory

A central question in early twentieth-century medicine was the relationship between theory and practice. In the nineteenth century, medicine had expanded rapidly. Initially a marginal enterprise with modest success, it evolved into a highly powerful discipline with huge influence on official policy, social care, public debate and, ultimately, cultural values and ideas about all possible matters, ranging from the function of society to how the individual should lead a healthy and normal life. The professionalization of medicine gave physicians authority and cast them in the role of experts. This transformation was linked to what Michel Foucault has labelled 'the birth of the clinic'; that is, when the intimate conversation between patient and doctor changed into a distant examination of bodily dysfunction in crowded clinical wards. Medical discoveries in the laboratory and new successful treatments placed medicine firmly alongside the other natural sciences. The modern doctor was a scientist.¹¹

Still, the professionalization of medicine was a complex process, and the practitioner's role was multifaceted. He was a representative

of modern science, surely, but he was also a practitioner, sitting at the bedside, listening to his patients and trying to help them as best he could. While most doctors, one would suppose, thought of theory and practice as necessary and complementary components, there could certainly be conflicting views on how deeply each component should be stressed. Some doctors were theorists, others were practitioners.¹² The clash between theory and practice was perhaps even more pronounced in the case of mental illness, as, unlike somatic medicine, psychiatry could boast of no substantial therapeutic achievements, and treatment generally amounted to the stimulation and regulation of patient behaviour. Still, the biological paradigm was forcefully maintained in Swedish psychiatry at this time.¹³

So, how did early psychotherapists respond to the biological and theoretical turn? Poul Bjerre, who wrote extensively on the topic, made it clear that psychiatry and medicine in general were paying far too much attention to experimental research, with its sole focus on bodily dysfunction, whereas the caregiving and comforting role of the medical practitioner had been devalued and rejected. His ideal was the old-fashioned family physician who made house calls, knew everything about his patients' everyday lives, and was an authority not only on health but on issues of all kinds. Bjerre wrote:

The physician emerging from the laboratory, who through his training in the hospital has learnt to treat the patient as a research object, is hardly fit to take on this calling. He could be ever so skilful in his particular branch, but when he is confronted with existential matters, on which the well-being of his patients is dependent, he can be quite lost—surely, we can agree on that?¹⁴

What Bjerre called for was, one could say, a holistic approach; the patient should be regarded as a whole person, not just the sufferer of a specific symptom. If the doctor lacked insight into the everyday life of the patient, how would he ever find out about all the little things that might be necessary clues to the illness? Here, Bjerre is getting close to the hermeneutical approach, stressing the importance of understanding the patient's lifeworld. As Gadamer makes clear, illness is a social and

psychological state of affairs. It is much more than a scientific fact, it affects the individual as a whole being, and thus the doctor has to regard the patient as such. Influenced by phenomenology, Gadamer thinks of health as much more than just the absence of biological dysfunction; it is a state of being-in-the-world, a meaningful coexistence with other people—an equilibrium. We do not notice health, but when we get ill, we become painfully aware of what we have lost. The practitioner must be responsive to this loss, to this new state of being.¹⁵ For Bjerre, this was clearly the ideal: the doctor as someone who knows you and feels for you in times of need.

The early psychotherapists repeatedly stressed that the well-being of the patient must always be the priority. In an article about hypnosis, Emanuel af Geijerstam criticized what he called the ‘pseudo-scientific therapeutic nihilism’ that some physicians were guilty of, not having the treatment of the patient as their first priority.¹⁶ In Bjerre’s opinion, being a physician was a calling, a special vocation that was not to be taken lightly. If in a clinical encounter one had to choose between the roles of comforter and scientist, the scientist must yield. To him, practice must always be valued higher than theory. This was important for ethical reasons—the Hippocratic oath to always help and comfort. When describing the work of his two role models, the magnetizer Pehr Gustaf Cederschiöld and the hypnotist Wetterstrand, Bjerre stressed the fact that neither of them could actually explain why their treatment was successful, but that they could not care less as long as the patient was cured. Wetterstrand’s knowledge was immense, Bjerre noted, but what actually happened in the clinical encounter ‘must remain a secret between him and the patient’.¹⁷

From the psychotherapists’ perspective, the knowledge of the practitioner was not any less solid than the knowledge to be gained from theoretical speculation. On the contrary, practical knowledge was absolutely vital in the clinical encounter. Not being able to give a systematic account of why the treatment worked did not mean there was no knowledge behind it. In an article about treatment of neuroses, Iwan Bratt quoted the physician Rhazes, who once said that the medical treatment described in books is vastly inferior to a sensible doctor’s practical expe-

rience.¹⁸ The clinical encounter was considered the source of a special form of knowledge that could not be learnt from books or in the laboratory. From a hermeneutical point of view, Gadamer discusses practical experience as something else than experimental experience. In modern scientific medicine, Gadamer states, experience is not the starting point of knowledge but rather the ‘tribunal of verification’ before which theoretical postulations can be confirmed or refuted. Science is certainly based on experience but aims at abstraction, a knowledge that isolates individual casual relationships, whereas practice produces knowledge from ever-changing life situations and human action.¹⁹ In modern medical care, the challenge is to unite theory and practice, and to find a way of combining scientific observation and practical knowledge:

What we need to do is to learn to build a bridge over the existing divide between the theoretician who knows the general rule and the person involved in practice who wishes to deal with the unique situation of this patient who is in need of care.²⁰

Bjerre clearly felt that practical knowledge was under threat. In a debate held at the Swedish Society of Medicine in 1913, the front lines were drawn sharp and clear. The psychoanalytical movement was up for discussion. Bjerre was, at this time, part of the movement and the first physician who introduced psychoanalysis in Sweden. Most Swedish physicians were highly sceptical, and criticized Freud’s school on several grounds, not least for its lack of a firm theoretical basis.²¹ Among the critics were the physicians Olof and Julia Kinberg, who were both present at the meeting in 1913. Their main objection was that it was hard to make something of any success in psychoanalytic treatment, since no one really knew why the method worked. According to Olof Kinberg, psychoanalysts such as Bjerre always tried to steer round the theoretical complications by referring to their practical results; a useless strategy, since the results only verified the effectiveness of the method if they were actually obtained using the method, which was thus far entirely unproven.

Bjerre answered that the main reason why there was disagreement about the usefulness of psychoanalysis was the fact that psychoanalysts

were more experienced. Years of practice were required before one could form an opinion, and it was indeed futile to discuss the issue with a theoretician. In psychoanalysis, experience came first; theory was only needed later, to structure clinical knowledge. If every theory presented by psychoanalysis proved to be incorrect, it was of no significance, since the facts acquired through practice would still remain solid. Olof Kinberg was not convinced. According to him, it was useless to refer to practical experience since it was basically just the practitioner's subjective interpretation—and there was so far no theory that proved the accuracy or indeed viability of these interpretations.²² Bjerre ended the debate:

To conclude, in this fight between theory and practice, I will quote a saying which is quite often found in psychoanalytic literature: 'One well-observed case overthrows every theory.'²³

The debate clearly shows two different ideals for medical knowledge: one that favours a solid scientific theory behind the clinical method, and one that favours the practical effectiveness of the method, regardless of what knowledge lies behind. The conflict was not just about a specific treatment; it sprang from two opposing views on how knowledge itself should be defined. In Olof and Julia Kinberg's opinion, practical experience consisting of listening to patients' chatter and offering subjective interpretations could not be the foundation of reliable scientific knowledge. Rather, it was a form of guessing, of constructing loose hypotheses. As Julia Kinberg said: we can *believe* that we know what we are doing but we cannot *know* for sure. In Bjerre's opinion, the experience gained from the clinical encounter *was* knowledge. There was no need to squeeze experience into small theoretical boxes in order to make it scientific: what the doctor learnt from talking to the patient amounted to an independent form of knowledge.²⁴

From a hermeneutical perspective, there is no doubt as to the value of the knowledge gained from practice—one might even call it hermeneutical knowledge. In Aristotelian terminology, *praxis* is the acting out of *phronesis*, an act that is always dependent on the specifics of the situation and the actions of others.²⁵ The practitioner adapts to the

circumstances, listens carefully, and learns from the unique situation. Gadamer describes medical practice as something that goes beyond scientific measuring. For him, the German word *Behandlung* is significant, as it tells us what it is all about: letting a well-practised and perceptive hand feel its way over human tissue, sensing, understanding. According to Gadamer, this method reaches far beyond modern technical improvements; it is the hermeneutical approach that acknowledges the patient as a whole being.²⁶

However, for the psychotherapists, advocating practice was not the same as saying that any clever person could treat people suffering from mental distress. Bjerre, af Geijerstam, and Bratt all emphasized that the psychotherapist had to be a medically trained physician to be able to separate physical ailments from mental.²⁷ Since psychotherapy originated from older forms of religious counselling and confession, they felt it was important to make a clear distinction.²⁸ The doctor was not a priest. According to Bjerre, redemption through confession was a primitive relic; true liberation was a psychological process and should be explored as such. He saw psychotherapy as the perfect compromise between the natural sciences and religion: it was built on solid scientific knowledge but approached patients as human beings, not just bodies. This is why Bjerre for many years (but with little success) asked for specialized training for psychotherapists that would include the natural sciences, but also the liberal arts such as philosophy and history.²⁹

For the early psychotherapists, practice was undoubtedly the prioritized part of medical work. They saw the daily encounter with patients, listening to their anxieties and their longings, as the source of a unique knowledge. Medical training was necessary, but not every physician could be a good psychotherapist; special skills were needed too.

Practical knowledge and empathy

So, if clinical practice was the source of a special kind of knowledge, what was the content of this knowledge? How should it be applied? What were the qualities of a good psychotherapist?

For the early psychotherapists, true dedication and commitment

were crucial. In his articles, Emanuel af Geijerstam repeatedly stressed the importance of enthusiasm—of truly believing in the method and in the recovery of the patient. According to af Geijerstam, other medical professionals tended to regard hypnotherapists as ‘therapeutic enthusiasts’ with no objective judgement, but this was clearly incorrect—a dedicated therapy did not threaten scientific knowledge. A doctor could be sceptical about theoretical matters, but in practice he had to believe in what he did.³⁰

At this time, it was generally agreed that the personal character of the practitioner was of vital importance in the treatment of mental illness, and it was particularly pronounced among psychotherapists, especially by Bjerre.³¹ He made clear that not every medical professional could fill the shoes of a psychotherapist. Something special was called for: an aptitude for empathy, an ability to intuitively sense the other person’s thoughts and feelings, a willingness to make sacrifices and always put the patient first. To be a good psychotherapist, one needed both internal and external knowledge. The therapist had to find inner harmony and possess a truly liberated spirit, but also needed to know about the outside world, of which medicine was a component. The required knowledge had several sources: formal education, clinical experience, profound self-reflection.³²

Reading Bjerre, one gets the impression that the true psychotherapist had a special calling. This elitist attitude (also emphasized in his biography) made Bjerre stand out among his contemporaries, and seems quite far from a hermeneutical approach. It shows the complexity often evident in Bjerre’s thinking.³³ Bjerre repeatedly underlined the exclusiveness of psychotherapy. Much of the critique of psychotherapeutic treatment was pointless, Bjerre wrote, because only those who had attained a true state of mind could know what it was all about.³⁴ In a famous case study from 1912, when Bjerre treated a woman diagnosed with paranoia, he explained his success as resulting from his personal influence on the patient. He concluded:

One must also, and first of all, consider how the doctor, often unknowingly, influences the patient through his own being. Unfortunately, this is

one of the peculiar things that cannot be scientifically explained. I have already mentioned that her process of recovery started when she felt safe. Where this feeling came from cannot be resolved with certainty; I am convinced, however, that a doctor who does not immediately transfer this feeling to his patients should stay away from psychotherapy.³⁵

According to Bjerre, the method of a successful psychotherapist could never be systematically and scientifically explained, since it originated in insight, sensitivity, and subjective interpretation. He emphasized that treating a patient was not about serving up a quick diagnosis and prescribing a bottle of pills (Bjerre repeatedly criticized the habit of treating nervous problems with bodily cures such as radium or steaks); rather, it was a profound spiritual process, a union of souls. There is almost an element of mysticism in Bjerre's thinking. Probably a legacy from the practice of animal magnetism, this mysticism was already obsolete in Bjerre's own time. In his view, releasing a patient from suffering could only be done by taking on some of that suffering and he used dramatic metaphors to describe how the therapist must fight, must never give up but had to conquer or perish. The oversensitivity to suffering was the necessary basis of what Bjerre called 'the intuitive medical gaze' ('den intuitiva läkarblicken').³⁶

The medical gaze, a well-known concept in medical care past and present, can be described as the ability to intuitively sense what the patient is suffering from. It is not a mystical quality (as one would suppose from reading Bjerre), but part of the practical knowledge gained from experience and reflection. Back in Bjerre's time, no one would call it *phronesis*, but the term adequately describes what it was about—knowing how to identify a certain situation, not depending on theoretical dogmas learnt from books, but having an immediate sense of what is going on and how to act. It is closely linked to an ability to sense the other person's suffering. Today, we would use the term 'empathy'. According to Fredrik Svenaeus, empathy could well be thought of as 'the feeling component of *phronesis*'. *Phronesis* partly consists of empathy, since it is impossible to have this kind of practical knowledge without being

an empathetic person. However, they are not the same thing: *phronesis* depends not only on empathy, but also on long practical experience.³⁷

The ideals for the psychotherapist in the early twentieth century encompassed practical knowledge, experience, empathy, and intuition. Knowledge was essential. However, it was important to remember that knowledge was never final, never complete. It had its limits.

The limits of knowledge

As we have seen, psychotherapists stressed that practical knowledge could not be systematically explained or theorized. Partly, this was a response to the experimental turn of medical science. Another aspect is worth considering, though: the belief that there was a limit to knowledge. Not everything could, or should, be explained. Life was a mystery and so was the human mind. Iwan Bratt quoted the physician Rhazes, who said that ‘truth in medicine is a goal which will never be reached’. Bratt continued, ‘A competent practitioner does not always describe his most valuable therapeutic tools, because he cannot always provide valid scientific support for his views.’³⁸

According to Bjerre, modern medicine was based on a huge misunderstanding: that a neutral examination of material objects was the source of true knowledge. In fact, all research relied on sensations that would always, to some extent, remain illusory. Sensations could never be trained to be exact, nor could they be isolated from psychological processes in the scientist’s mind. A scientist would always have a clearer view of the things he wanted to see, than of the things he was less interested in. In Bjerre’s opinion, true knowledge could only be found in inner experience.³⁹

Scientific knowledge is always limited, says Gadamer in a discussion on the relationship between theory, technology, and practice. There is a tension between theoretical knowledge and the practical application of this knowledge (as various forms of technology), since the highly specialized and rational organization of modern science—and the role of the scientist as an unassailable expert—makes it harder for people to exercise their own judgement. We place less faith in our own prac-

tical experience. The rationalization of scientific knowledge has led us to invoke science beyond the limits of its actual competence, not least when it comes to how it is applied, Gadamer states. In medical science, for instance, knowing your facts is only part of the job. He takes the diagnosis as example: the practitioner may apply the most sophisticated technology to find out what the patient is suffering from, yet there is always an element in the clinical encounter which is not rationalized, and thus makes practical experience indispensable. Knowing the limits and the indefiniteness of knowledge would help us to re-establish faith in our own common sense.⁴⁰

The process of rationalization discussed by Gadamer was obviously not yet so dominant in the early twentieth century, and when it comes to the treatment of mental illness, the profession adopted a modest estimation of its own scientific standards. Leading psychiatrists at the time had a stoic attitude towards their work and the scope of psychiatric knowledge.⁴¹ There was, however, a difference in how the limits of knowledge were perceived. Where psychiatrists were deeply concerned about the theoretical gaps and put their hope in future scientific progress, psychotherapists such as Bjerre and Bratt had a different outlook. Focusing on practice and practical knowledge, the limits of knowledge did not pose such a threat to them, as the only really important thing was to cure the patient. As a matter of fact, Bjerre argued that *not* knowing was actually a good thing, as life itself was largely a state of not knowing. Some factors in psychotherapeutic treatment could and should not be explained; an imposed analysis would break the unity that was the true essence of existence.⁴²

Conclusions

I have explored how Swedish psychotherapists in the early twentieth century conceptualized the good clinical encounter and how their ideas fit into a hermeneutical philosophy on the patient-practitioner relationship. The central aim has been to analyse the concept of knowledge. The hermeneutics of medicine developed by Gadamer and, in a Swedish context, Svenaeus, highlight the clinical encounter as a relationship based on

understanding and interpretation, a dialogue between two individuals where the practitioner should ideally help the patient to regain health, not just in terms of a physical recovery but in a larger sense, as a return to being-in-the-world. This necessitates a different kind of knowledge than the purely scientific and theoretical. Key concepts are practical knowledge, *phronesis*, experience, practice, and empathy.

It seems clear that there are certain areas where Bjerre's ideals deviated from how *phronesis* would be interpreted in contemporary psychotherapeutic practice: his belief that only a chosen few have the necessary personal qualities to do the job and that the knowledge of a true psychotherapist is not possible to verbalize, that it remains secret and mystical to those not experienced in the craft. In many cases, however, his principal ambitions were well in line with a hermeneutical approach: his strong emphasis on the prominence of practice, his stress on practical knowledge as absolutely vital in the clinical encounter, his view of the practitioner as an empathetic person who intuitively senses the patient's suffering. As we have seen, other psychotherapists also stressed the importance of practical knowledge, of prioritizing the patient instead of scientific research. In Bjerre's view, the psychotherapist possessed scientific knowledge, no doubt, but his duty reached far beyond the limits of natural science; it was similar to what artists do in their ambition to explore the unknown, the incomprehensible. There is always an element of uncertainty; knowledge is never a finished product that fits smoothly into pre-organized compartments. The uncertainty lies in life itself.

In his extensive appeals for a more psychological and practice-based treatment of mental illness, Bjerre was openly confronting the biological turn of the psychiatric discipline. Obviously, the graver mental illnesses dealt with in state asylums were of a quite different character to the milder nervous ailments treated by Bjerre and other nerve specialists in their private practices, and the fact was that psychiatrists themselves used psychotherapy in less severe cases. The split between psychiatry and psychotherapy was not total, and, as Gadamer acknowledged, psychiatry has always been close to hermeneutics, being of an essentially interpretative nature.⁴³ However, psychotherapists obviously felt there were conflicting views on how mental illness should be treated and what

kind of knowledge was needed in the clinical encounter. While practical knowledge and experience were no doubt considered important by most doctors, regardless of speciality, it was certainly not given primacy above other forms of knowledge. Psychotherapists were aware of the fact that their speciality was not generally accepted and that they had to fight for it. While only Bjerre promoted such hierarchical and hermetic professional standards, other psychotherapists also made it clear that special qualities were needed in order to successfully treat patients. For them, rooted as they were in a tradition of animal magnetism and hypnotism, being able to reach inside the patient's inner self was essential.

Of course, psychotherapists in the early twentieth century never used the term *phronesis* themselves, and one can only speculate how they would have assessed the concept. My attempt has been to show that some of the therapeutic ideals that guided early psychotherapy came close to a hermeneutical approach, in which practical knowledge and *phronesis* were the basis of successful treatment. Further, I have examined how practical knowledge was positioned in direct opposition to scientific-theoretical forms of knowledge. The treatment of mental illness was a contested field of knowledge.

Today, the concepts of practical knowledge and *phronesis* have found their way into psychotherapeutic practice. In a publication from Södertörn Studies in Practical Knowledge from 2009, a number of psychologists and philosophers claim that practice, practical knowledge, and *phronesis* are highly useful concepts to define what psychotherapy is really about. They stress the unique character of psychotherapy and its incompatibility with current scientific ideals of 'evidence-based', objective standards for medical care.⁴⁴ The debate continues, the question remains: what knowledge do we need in order to understand and help another human being?

Notes

- 1 Poul Bjerre, *Studier i själsläkekunst* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1914), 55. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
- 2 In the early twentieth century, psychotherapy was not formally recognized as an independent discipline. Thus, the terms 'psychotherapy' and 'psychotherapist'

- are somewhat anachronistic, but I use them nonetheless, as they were established at the time and used by physicians practicing psychotherapeutic methods.
- 3 For an extensive and thorough biography on Poul Bjerre, see Ingemar Nilsson & Jan Bärmark, *Poul Bjerre – 'Människosonen'* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1983).
 - 4 In a larger research project, I am currently studying the clinical encounter within several disciplines treating mental illness in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sweden. The concept of knowledge plays an important role.
 - 5 Fredrik Svenaeus, 'Hermeneutics of Medicine in the Wake of Gadamer: The Issue of *Phronesis*,' *Theoretical Medicine* 24 (2003), 416. Academic research on clinical encounters is today a vast field, ranging from sociological and anthropological studies of the patient-practitioner relationship to practice-based studies in the sciences of nursing and medicine. The hermeneutics of medicine have received more attention as a result of a more patient-focused outlook in medical care, emphasizing patient rights and integrity, medical ethics, and the need of empathy. For an overview of the field, see 'Introduktion: Vardagsvärlden och medicinen,' in Sonja Olin Lauritzen, Fredrik Svenaeus & Ann-Christine Jonsson (eds.), *När människan möter medicinen. Livsvärldens och berättelsens betydelse för förståelsen av sjukdom och medicinsk teknologi* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2004).
 - 6 Svenaeus, 'Hermeneutics of Medicine,' 418.
 - 7 I have previously applied the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Svenaeus in a historical study of the patient-practitioner relationship, see Cecilia Riving, 'Komplotten i Köpenhamn. Mötet mellan patientens och läkarens berättelser vid 1800-talets slut,' in Roddy Nilsson & Maria Vallström (eds.), *Inspärrad. Röster från intagna på sinnessjukhus, fängelser och andra anstalter 1850–1992* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2016).
 - 8 See Cecilia Riving, *Icke som en annan människa. Psykisk sjukdom i mötet mellan psykiatrin och lokalsamhället under 1800-talets andra hälft* (Möklinta & Hedemora: Gidlunds, 2008), 86–89.
 - 9 See Franz Lutzenberger, *Freud i Sverige. Psykoanalysens mottagande i svensk medicin och idédebatt 1900–1924* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1989); Suzanne Gieser, *Psykoanalysens pionjärer i Sverige* (Stockholm: Proprius, 2009); Per Magnus Johansson, *Freuds psykoanalys, ii: Arvtagare i Sverige* (Gothenburg: Daidalos, 1999).
 - 10 For nervous ailments, there were also other treatments available at this time—bodily cures such as diets, baths, rest, and other physical therapies were popular. See Petteri Pietikäinen, *Neurosis and Modernity. The Age of Nervousness in Sweden* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007), 182–187.
 - 11 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1973]); Karin Johannisson, *Tecknen. Läkaren och*

- konsten att läsa kroppar* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 2004), 45–73; Eva Palmblad, *Medicinen som samhällslära* (Gothenburg: Daidalos, 1990).
- 12 Johannisson, *Tecknen*, 274–277.
 - 13 Riving, *Icke som en annan människa*, 86–89, 275–277.
 - 14 Poul Bjerre, 'Psykoteraeutiska reflexioner', Minutes from Swedish Society of Medicine 1917, published in *Hygiea* (1917), 266; see also Nilsson & Bärmark, *Poul Bjerre*, 447, 487, 512.
 - 15 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996 [1993]), 42–43, 112–116; see also Fredrik Svenaeus, 'Psykiatrins hermeneutik. Om samtalets möjligheter och diagnosens makt', in Anders Burman (ed.), *Hans-Georg Gadamer och hermeneutikens aktualitet* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2014), 178–179, 181.
 - 16 Emanuel af Geijerstam, 'Några ord om hypnotismens ställning i den nutida medicinen och om dess teknik', *Psyke* (1907), 157–159.
 - 17 Poul Bjerre, *Fallet Karin: en experimentell studie af de s. k. spiritistiska knackningarna* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1905), 104; Poul Bjerre, *Pehr Gustaf Cederschiöld som föregångsman inom psykoteraupien* (Stockholm, 1908, offprint from *Hygiea*), 19; Bjerre, *Studier i själsläkekunst*, 79–87.
 - 18 Iwan Bratt, 'Om frågeställningen inför vissa sjukdomssymtom och konsekvenserna därav för behandlingen', *Svenska läkartidningen* 36:21 (1924), 843.
 - 19 Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health*, 3–6. Compare Christian Nilsson, 'Att upptäcka den egna praktiken på nytt. Om psykoanalysen, psykoteraupin och högskolan', in Christian Nilsson (ed.), *Psykoteraupiens & psykoanalytikerens praktiska kunskap* (Södertörn Studies in Practical Knowledge 2: Stockholm, 2009), 29.
 - 20 Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health*, 94.
 - 21 Nilsson & Bärmark, *Poul Bjerre*, 276–281; Johansson, *Freuds psykoanalys*, 289–304.
 - 22 Minutes from Swedish Society of Medicine 1913, published in *Hygiea* 75 (1913), 493–499.
 - 23 Minutes from Swedish Society of Medicine 1913, 499; see also Nilsson & Bärmark, *Poul Bjerre*, 279–281. Johansson states that Bjerre's introduction of psychoanalysis was in several cases incorrect and based on misunderstandings. According to Johansson, Bjerre's belief that the psychoanalytical framework is based solely on empirical results does not correspond with Freud's view of psychoanalysis as a science based on practical experience *and* speculation. Johansson, *Freuds psykoanalys*, 302–303.
 - 24 Minutes from Swedish Society of Medicine 1913, 496.
 - 25 Nilsson, 'Att upptäcka den egna praktiken', 32.
 - 26 Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health*, 99.
 - 27 Poul Bjerre, *Hur själen läkes. Den psykosyntetiska läkekunstens grunder* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1923), 5–10; af Geijerstam, 'Några ord', 162; Iwan Bratt,

- Kultur och neuros. Om nödvändigheten av livsformernas omgestaltning* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1925), 122–123.
- 28 Bjerre, *Hur själen läkes*, 5. The relationship between religion and medicine, and the competing roles of priests and doctors, have been investigated in, for example, Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Fontana Press, 1994 [1970]); Bengt Erik Eriksson, *Vägen till centralhospitalet. Två studier av den anstaltsbundna sinnessjukvårdens förhistoria i Sverige* (Gothenburg: Daidalos, 1989); Riving, *Icke som en annan människa*, 170–182.
- 29 Gieser, *Psykoteraapis pionjärer*, 44–45.
- 30 Emanuel af Geijerstam, ‘Några reflektioner med anledning af prof. K Petréns uttalanden om hypnoterapi uti sista upplagan af ‘Terapeutiskt Vademecum’, *Allmänna Svenska Läkartidningen* 13:8 (1911), 222–223; Emanuel af Geijerstam, ‘Om hypnotismens ställning till andra former af psykoteraapi’, *Allmänna Svenska läkartidningen* 8:9 (1912), 138.
- 31 See Motzi Eklöf, *Läkarens ethos. Studier i den svenska läkarkårens identiteter, intressen och ideal 1890–1960* (Linköping: Linköpings universitet, 2000), 265–336; Johannisson, *Tecknen*, 76–82.
- 32 Bjerre, *Studier i själsläkekonst*, 53–54.
- 33 Nilsson & Bärmark, *Poul Bjerre*, 574–613.
- 34 Bjerre, *Studier i själsläkekonst*, 53–54.
- 35 Poul Bjerre, *Zur Radikalbehandlung der chronischen Paranoia* (Leipzig & Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1912), 52.
- 36 Bjerre, *Studier i själsläkekonst*, 61; Bjerre, *Fallet Karin*, 48; see also Bjerre, ‘Psykoteraapeutiska reflektioner’, 256–262; see also Nilsson & Bärmark, *Poul Bjerre*, 112–113.
- 37 Fredrik Svenaeus, ‘Empathy as a Necessary Condition of *Phronesis*: A Line of Thought for Medical Ethics’, *Medical Health Care and Philosophy* 17 (2014), 296–297; Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health*, 138.
- 38 Bratt, ‘Om frågeställningen’, 843.
- 39 Bjerre, *Studier i själsläkekonst*, 39–40. See Nilsson, ‘Att upptäcka den egna praktiken’, 26–27; Lotta Landerholm, ‘Vad kännetecknar en tillräckligt bra psykoteraapeut?’, in Christian Nilsson (ed.), *Psykoteraapeutens & psykoanalytikerens praktiska kunskap* (Södertörn Studies in Practical Knowledge 2, Stockholm, 2009), 56.
- 40 Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health*, 16–23; see also Jonna Bornemark, *Det omätbaras renässans. En uppgörelse med pedanternas herravälde* (Stockholm: Volante, 2018), 206–208.
- 41 See Riving, *Icke som en annan människa*, 79–82, 88–89; Patrik Möller, *Hemligheternas värld. Bror Gadelius och psykiatrins genombrott i det tidiga 1900-talets Sverige* (Gothenburg: Göteborgs universitet, 2017), 102. Svenaeus suggests that present-day psychiatry, with its focus on biology and evidence-based methods,

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has moved closer to the 'rationalization' of science and scientific application described by Gadamer. See Svenaeus, 'Psykiatrins hermeneutik', 181–189.

42 Bjerre, *Studier i själsläkekonst*, 83.

43 Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health*, 168–169.

44 *Psykoterapeutens & psykoanalytikerns praktiska kunskap* (ed. Nilsson), see also Bornemark, *Det omätbaras renässans*, 137–140.

What is conventional wisdom?

J. K. Galbraith and the acceptability of knowledge

Björn Lundberg

New academic disciplines take shape in the nebulae of critical discussion. For a loosely gathered cloud of scholarly inquiry to mould into a bright shining star of scientific distinction, members of a new field must deliver justifiable answers to queries about the nature of the discipline itself. For historians of knowledge, the most fundamental question concerns the nature of knowledge. What *is* knowledge? One might object that the point at issue should not be phrased in present tense, as historians of knowledge are less concerned with what knowledge *is* than what it *has been*. Simone Lässig has remarked that knowledge is subject to change, and accordingly ‘the history of knowledge explores what people in the past understood by the idea of knowledge and what they defined or accepted as knowledge’.¹ Yet, the question does not go away so easily. Although knowledge is understood as changeable, historians of the field must grasp what this changing object of study is. It has been pointed out that there otherwise is a risk that the concept of knowledge, much like that of culture for cultural historians, becomes vague and lacking in analytical precision.² In the words of Lorraine Daston, what doesn’t it cover?³

Reflecting the inclusive nature of knowledge as a concept, historians of this new field have taken interest in the production and circulation of both practical and theoretical knowledge as well as knowledge traditionally considered ‘high’ or ‘low’.⁴ The will to include different forms of knowledge has led scholars to propose that knowledge should ultimately be considered an empirical question—in other words that the object of

study is what has been considered knowledge in given circumstances.⁵ But this definition has its own limits, since it excludes forms of knowledge that may not have been recognized as knowledge in particular historical contexts, such as practical knowledge of low-status groups in society.⁶

Linguistic entrenchment also contributes to the vagueness of the concept of knowledge. For example, epistemologists differentiate between propositional knowledge and acquaintance knowledge ('to know that the Earth orbits around the sun' as opposed to 'to know someone'), but that distinction does not necessarily make sense in other languages.⁷ In Swedish, to know someone is expressed using the verb *känna*, to 'feel' or 'sense'. On the other hand, the Swedish verb *kunna*, to 'know', also means 'to be able to'. Further, the German *wissen* and the Swedish *veta* translate as knowing, but mainly refer to theoretical or propositional knowledge (or in the German case, memory). It is difficult not to interpret the lively debate between German proponents of history of knowledge as opposed to history of science in light of the linguistic similarities between the words *Wissen* (knowing) and *Wissenschaft* (science).⁸ These examples illustrate that the understanding of what knowledge is in relation to other concepts such as science, emotion, proficiency, truth, or memory, is to some degree influenced by language.

Even if we disregard the particularities of different languages, epistemology does not provide ready blueprints for a more precise conceptualization of knowledge in history. Since antiquity, philosophers have discussed the nature of knowledge, often in terms such as 'true judgement' or 'true, justifiable belief'. However, these definitions have inherent limits⁹ and do not account for non-propositional knowledge (knowing how to swim does not require truth). Nevertheless, other forms of knowledge such as practical or embodied knowledge also rest on justification to be socially acceptable or desired.¹⁰ As Simone Lässig has pointed out, the history of knowledge 'is concerned with the interaction of different types and claims to knowledge and the process of negotiation between opposing understandings of knowledge'.¹¹ In order to bring greater precision to the study of knowledge in history, an emphasis on processes of justification appears to be called for.

There are several possible ways to proceed in this endeavour. One

possibility is to address justification in relation to the social dimensions of science, by scrutinizing the social logics and institutional conditions that influence the justification of knowledge among scholars and scientists.¹² Another approach to the problem is to empirically examine how different actors have shaped the understanding of knowledge in contemporary society, or in academic discussions. Studies in this vein have covered influential critics and commentators such as Daniel Bell, Michel Foucault, and Thomas Kuhn.¹³ However, there are also other, less prominent actors who have exercised influence on the popular conceptualization of knowledge in the post-war era, but who have not garnered extensive attention from historians of knowledge or science. This essay will direct the attention to one such figure: the Canadian American economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1908–2006). Most famous for his treatises on the affluent society and the role of corporations and states in modern economies, he made a specific contribution to the history of modern knowledge by coining the term ‘conventional wisdom’, which has since gained considerable popularity.¹⁴

In this essay, I will examine how Galbraith employed conventional wisdom as a concept to justify particular knowledge claims concerning life and economics in affluent societies. The approach is informed by an understanding of knowledge claims as grounded in historical contexts and conceptual contestation. Quentin Skinner has argued that ‘there *is* no history of the idea to be written but only a history necessarily focused on the various agents who used the idea and their varying situations and intentions in using it.’¹⁵ Skinner’s conceptual analysis considers the community or society in which a text was written, what the text argued against and whom it sought to persuade. From the viewpoint of legal history, Pamela Brandwein has proposed a methodology for the study of the successes and failures of scholarly knowledge claims based on sociohistorical analysis.¹⁶ Brandwein argues that the ‘careers’ of competing knowledge claims do not result only from the intrinsic value of the claims, but must be viewed relative to the interpretative communities in which they compete. This includes how arguments and narratives are constructed and the modes of persuasion employed.¹⁷ It is worth contemplating what happens if we apply the same approach

to the history of knowledge. In other words, we may ask how different agents have justified information and know-how as knowledge, and for what purposes they have made use of certain knowledge. While its scope does not allow for a thorough socio-historical analysis of Galbraith's personal and professional networks or his general audience, this essay brings overlooked agents into the study of production and circulation of knowledge by studying a specific case of how knowledge has been justified.¹⁸

Background

The concept of the conventional wisdom was presented by John Kenneth Galbraith in his 1958 publication *The Affluent Society*. While the term had in fact been used in a few instances at least as early as the nineteenth century, Galbraith doubtlessly popularized it.¹⁹ It is worth noting that the concept of conventional wisdom did not come about by chance. Galbraith later affirmed that he had put some effort into the thought-process on how to label the phenomenon he sought to describe. After testing a few alternatives on his colleagues at Harvard, his choice fell on 'conventional wisdom'. As Galbraith acknowledged: 'I should add that the selection of that name owes more than a little to Harvard colleagues on whom I tried out several possibilities.'²⁰

The Affluent Society quickly became a bestseller in the US, was translated into several languages, and made Galbraith a leading public intellectual.²¹ Sixty years after its original publication, the volume remains in print, and it has been hailed as one of the most influential non-fiction books of the past century.²² While the impact of the book and the relevance of Galbraith's economic theory have been covered at considerable length, the concept of the conventional wisdom has not previously attracted much attention among scholars.²³

Perhaps this can be explained by the seemingly insignificant role the concept played in Galbraith's book. As suggested by the title, *The Affluent Society* was not a book primarily about knowledge theory. Instead, it sought to explain economic and social development in increasingly affluent post-war societies, primarily the US. One of Galbraith's key

concerns was the relationship between ‘private opulence and public squalor’, where private consumption experienced rapid growth while society remained poor in terms of public spending.²⁴ Thereby, Galbraith also challenged the notion of increased productivity as a straightforward measure of increased societal wealth.

Galbraith’s critique of consumer society came at a time that in hindsight has been regarded as a turning point in American consumerism. Private consumption and materialism had been at the centre of society in the US since at least the 1930s. After the constraints on private spending that had been imposed by the Great Depression and the Second World War ended in 1945, Americans indulged in a prolonged shopping spree that filled post-war middle-class homes with television sets, kitchen appliances, record players, and futuristic furniture.²⁵ Riding the wave of optimism and wealth, *The Affluent Society* gave rise to a heated debate about economics and welfare far beyond the borders of the US. Although Galbraith’s importance as an economic theorist was eventually diminished by the demise of institutionalism, his treatise on affluence had a considerable influence on policy and discourse in North America and Western Europe.²⁶

Introducing conventional wisdom

As with many popular phrases, the notion of conventional wisdom can take on different meaning, but is commonly understood as knowledge that is accepted within a certain community or among the general public. Unlike some other expressions that enter the language through a single book—such as ‘the end of history’ or ‘imagined communities’²⁷—the concept of conventional wisdom was not directly connected to the title of the book or even the central economic argument of *The Affluent Society*. But according to Galbraith, one of the purposes of the book was also to show how economic thinking was still guided by theories grounded in the inequalities and scarcities of the past.²⁸ Like John Maynard Keynes had argued three decades earlier, Galbraith claimed that economic theory failed to deal with contemporary issues. In Galbraith’s historiography of orthodox economics, the so-called central tradition

had treated scarcity as natural law. Following Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, this tradition had allowed little room for governmental intervention in macroeconomic affairs. Increasingly affluent societies, argued Galbraith, needed to accept new knowledge.²⁹

In the introduction to the book, Galbraith argued that a certain logic explained why economists and politicians still clung to the logics of scarcity when the (industrialized) world experienced rapidly increasing affluence. To Galbraith, this was a consequence of the logics of the conventional wisdom.³⁰ To strengthen his argument, an entire chapter in *The Affluent Society* was dedicated to explaining this concept. It may seem surprising that Galbraith discussed the general production and mediation of academic knowledge in a book that covered a specific aspect of economy and society, but the urban studies scholar Michael Berry has argued that the concept was important for the substantive economic arguments of the book, since it presented a historical background that explained the current status of economic theory.³¹

Galbraith primarily discussed economics, but his notion of conventional wisdom was presented as a general concept, applicable to various scientific fields as well as political discourse. He did not overburden this in the second chapter in the book with theoretical models or appeal to the authority of epistemologists or his predecessors and fellow economic theorists by the use of extensive footnotes. In fact, he included a minimum of references to other scholars (the first two chapters of the book featured a total of three footnotes).³² Instead, Galbraith presented what can be described as a theory of knowledge that mostly appealed to the common sense of his readership.

In this framework, Galbraith laid out what he understood to be the conventional wisdom of orthodox economics. It clearly accentuated how established knowledge in the field had become outdated. In order to explain why this archaic knowledge remained strong despite rapidly changing circumstances in society in terms of production and productivity, Galbraith described conventional wisdom as a form of social logic. Since patterns of social life, including economics, are complex and often incoherent, he argued that there is always room for personal assumptions or a certain degree of arbitrariness. Because of this, people

will tend to hold on to opinions and ideas that fit with their established worldviews. Accordingly, the conventional wisdom provides an obstacle for the acceptance of new knowledge or novel and original thinking, and makes it possible for people to go on with their everyday lives without a constant shattering of worldviews.³³ To its adherents, it provides comfortable padding against inconvenient truths and the complexities of reality. Galbraith stated: ‘Therefore we adhere, as though to a raft, to those ideas which represent our understanding. This is a prime manifestation of vested interest. For a vested interest in understanding is more preciously guarded than any other treasure.’³⁴

Galbraith thus argued that the acceptability of new knowledge is crucial in order to account for the impact of economic theories and other products of knowledge. This would explain why acceptable ideas are disinclined to change, and those ideas that are appreciated at a given time or by a given group primarily because of their acceptability were what Galbraith labelled conventional wisdom. In the struggle between what is correct and what is agreeable, Galbraith argued that conventional wisdom had a tactical advantage.³⁵ Further, the notion of acceptability framed the production and circulation of knowledge in terms of psychology. ‘There are many reasons why people like to hear articulated that which they approve’, wrote Galbraith. ‘It serves the ego: the individual has the satisfaction of knowing that other and more famous people share his conclusions. The individual knows that he is supported in his thoughts—that he has not been left behind and alone.’³⁶ Here, Galbraith did little to hide his animosity towards the self-congratulatory tendencies of his fellow scholars. Galbraith likened academia to a religious rite with little interest in the pursuit of new knowledge: ‘Scholars gather in scholarly assemblages to hear in elegant statement what all have heard before. Yet it is not a negligible rite, for its purpose is not to convey knowledge but to beatify learning and the learned.’³⁷

At this point, we may ask how it is possible to conceptualize epistemic change if convenience regularly trumps truth and our understanding of the world is governed primarily by self-interest or vanity? To Galbraith, the answer was the test of time:

The enemy of the conventional wisdom is not ideas but the march of events....The fatal blow to the conventional wisdom comes when the conventional ideas fail signally to deal with some contingency to which obsolescence has made them palpably inapplicable....Meanwhile, like the Old Guard, the conventional wisdom dies but does not surrender. Society with intransigent cruelty may transfer its exponents from the category of wise man to that of old fogy or even stuffed shirt.³⁸

This illustrates that the notion of the conventional wisdom includes relationships of power in regard to knowledge, according to which new knowledge may be combatted or ignored by those who adhere to established principles. In this sense, the concept anticipated Thomas Kuhn's famous notion of scientific paradigms in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* published four years later.³⁹

Galbraith's use of the term conventionality signalled that old beliefs were held out of convenience. The word 'wisdom' further associated established knowledge with age and tradition as opposed to new insights. While the use of the term 'conventional' signalled a position in opposition to the unconventional, and thereby set the stage for assessing competing knowledge claims, Galbraith understood change as a process primarily brought about by the amassing of facts. In his own example, the increasing affluence in society must eventually be accounted for. Galbraith's conventional wisdom thus emphasized the importance of external events to account for structural change: 'Ideas are inherently conservative. They yield not to the attack of other ideas but to the massive onslaught of circumstance with which they cannot contend.'⁴⁰

Conventional wisdom as justification

Six decades after its original publication, *The Affluent Society's* legacy is inconclusive. While hailed as one of the most widely read and accessible books on economics of the past century, Galbraith's influence on mainstream economic theory is negligible.⁴¹ With the demise of institutionalism and the hegemonic status of neoclassical economics in the decades that followed after its publication, it may be said that the conventional wisdom of economic theory has remained just that—conven-

tional. Nevertheless, the concept of the conventional wisdom entered the language, and was even used to describe Galbraith's economic theory, as the author himself noted: 'To my surprise and, no one should doubt, my pleasure, the term entered the language. It has acquired a negative, slightly insulting connotation and is sometimes used by people with views deeply adverse to mine who are unaware of its origin. Few matters give me more satisfaction.'⁴²

In this essay, I have presented and discussed the background and context of the concept as it was used by Galbraith in *The Affluent Society*. The concept of the conventional wisdom was not presented in sophisticated philosophical terminology, but Galbraith's notion can nevertheless be understood as the basis of a simplified theory of knowledge. I have sought to show how such theories can also make for interesting empirical cases in the historiography of knowledge, as they reveal something of the intentions of certain agents in light of what they argued for and against.

As a rhetorical device the concept of conventional wisdom accentuated the difference between established truths and new knowledge, which was one of Galbraith's primary intentions. Its usage signalled that its author was fighting a battle against ignorance and old beliefs as opposed to new knowledge claims. Thereby Galbraith rhetorically also sought to put forward his own arguments to a position beyond contention. As evident from the popularity of the term, conventional wisdom served the purposes of the author. Since its use in *The Affluent Society* in 1958, politicians, pundits, and practitioners of science and philosophy alike have used the term to stress the rupture between accepted knowledge and whatever propositions the person in question seeks to present as convincingly new and different.

The concept of conventional wisdom casts light on important aspects on how to explore knowledge in the past. For example, the concept highlights the acceptability of knowledge and turns the historian's attention to knowledge claims as social and communicative processes. It raises questions on the importance of audiences on how knowledge claims in the past have succeeded or been silenced, which opens up interesting perspectives. We may ask, for example, how particular contestations of knowledge have been informed by the social context in which they

took shape. Further, the term 'conventional wisdom' highlights the often contentious relationship between novel claims and established truths in the production of science and other forms of knowledge. Insofar, Galbraith anticipated Kuhn's influential argument in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

However, the rhetorical strength of conventional wisdom also exposes its weakness as an analytical concept. Berry has described Galbraith's use of the concept as 'vague and whimsical'.⁴³ There is an obvious risk that the dichotomic discrepancy between knowledge old and new, traditional and novel, outdated and informed, conventional and innovative, serves to conceal the multifaceted nature of knowledge in circulation. There is a strong argument that historians of knowledge should not pass judgement in the form of teleological narratives of how new knowledge eventually prevails over outdated beliefs, but rather empirically examine the various ways in which historical actors have sought to justify knowledge under given circumstances.

To sum up, the concept of conventional wisdom serves as an empirical example of how a specific actor sought to legitimize and justify a particular knowledge claim. By introducing the concept of conventional wisdom, Galbraith presented a history of economic theory that had become fundamentally out-of-touch with contemporary challenges, while presenting his own knowledge claims as a remedy to this situation. Instead of referencing other theorists, his claim appealed to the common sense of the reader by the use of rhetorical strength. Apparently, it was a successful tactic. Today, an Internet search on 'conventional wisdom' provides countless hits. A search of the academic database Google Scholar alone produces more than 600,000 results. In other words, conventional wisdom has become an important concept in public, political, and academic discourse, describing and affecting the understanding of knowledge in society.

I have argued that the historical justification for knowledge constitutes an important area of research for historians of knowledge. Needless to say, researchers in the fields of science studies, sociology of science and the history of science have also studied the history of knowledge claims. What historians of knowledge can bring to the table is the study of know-

ledge claims made outside academia, and with it an emphasis on the production and circulation of knowledge in relation to society at large.

Notes

- 1 Simone Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016): 39.
- 2 Staffan Bergwik, 'Kunskapshistoria: nya insikter?', *Scandia* 84/2 (2018): 87.
- 3 Lorraine Daston, 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1:1 (2017): 143.
- 4 Daston, 'The History of Science'; Anna Nilsson Hammar, 'Theoria, Praxis and Poiesis: Theoretical Considerations on the Circulation of Knowledge in Everyday Life', in Johan Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018), 107–124.
- 5 See for example: Martin Mulrow, 'History of Knowledge' in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 161.
- 6 Lorraine Daston, 'History of Knowledge: Comment', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.) *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 174.
- 7 For a discussion on the relevance of epistemology for historians of knowledge, see Nilsson Hammar, 'Theoria, Praxis and Poiesis', 112–114.
- 8 See, for example, Daston, 'The History of Science'; Ulrich Johannes Schneider, 'Wissensgeschichte, nicht Wissenschaftsgeschichte', in Axel Honneth & Martin Saar (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Zwischenbilanz einer Rezeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003); Jürgen Renn, 'From the History of Science to the History of Knowledge—and Back', *Centaurus: An International Journal of the History of Science & its Cultural Aspects* 57/1 (2015).
- 9 The most famous example concerns the so-called Gettier problem, raised by Edmund Gettier in 1963. Edmund L. Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* 23/6 (1963): 121–123.
- 10 The social conditions of embodied knowledge, or 'techniques of the body' was designated by French sociologist Marcel Mauss as *habitus*. See Marcel Mauss, 'Techniques of the body', *Economy and Society* 2/1 (1973): 70–88.
- 11 Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge', 39.
- 12 Ludwik Fleck, *The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Helen E. Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton: PUP, 2002).

- 1990); Steven Shapin, 'The History of Science and Its Sociological Reconstructions', *History of Science*, 20 (1982): 157–211.
- 13 For example: Malcolm Waters, *Daniel Bell* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996). The literature on Foucault and Kuhn is very extensive. Recent overviews on Kuhn are presented in William Devlin & Alisa Bokulich (eds.), *Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50 Years On* (Cham: Springer, 2015); Robert Richards & Lorraine Daston (eds.), *Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty: Reflections on a Science Classic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). Examples of analysis of Foucault and knowledge: Gary Gutting, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989); Stephen J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1990); Ellen K. Feder, 'Power/knowledge' in Dianna Taylor (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Kathy Nicoll & Andreas Fejes (eds.), *Foucault and Lifelong Learning: Governing the Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Jeremy Crampton & Stuart Elden (eds.), *Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
- 14 John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967).
- 15 Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8/1, 1969: 38, original emphasis.
- 16 Pamela Brandwein, 'Studying the Careers of Knowledge Claims: Applying Science Studies to Legal Studies', in Dvora Yanow & Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (eds.), *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 229.
- 17 Brandwein, 'Studying the Careers', 233.
- 18 The reception and circulation of Galbraith's key concepts in Scandinavia will be detailed in the forthcoming essay Björn Lundberg 'The Galbraithian Moment: Affluence and Critique of Growth in Scandinavia 1958–72' in Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen & David Larsson Heidenblad (eds.), *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas, and Aspirations* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, forthcoming 2020).
- 19 For an early example of the term, see J. K. Galbraith, *An Inquiry into the Moral and Religious Character of the American Government* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1838), 35. More notably, Torstein Veblen used it in *The Instinct of Workmanship* (New York: Macmillan & Co, 1914), 39. It is not far-fetched to think that Galbraith may have picked up the term, consciously or unconsciously, from Veblen.
- 20 John Kenneth Galbraith & A.D. Williams (ed.), *The Essential Galbraith* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2001), 19.
- 21 Richard Parker, *J. K. Galbraith: A 20th Century Life* (London: Old Street Pub-

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- lishing, 2007), 273–310; James R. Stanfield, *John Kenneth Galbraith* (New York: S:t Martin's, 1996), 41–60.
- 22 Examples include: Robert McCrum, 'The 100 best nonfiction books of all time: the full list', *The Guardian* 31 December 2017, www.theguardian.com/books/2017/dec/31/the-100-best-nonfiction-books-of-all-time-the-full-list; '100 Best Non-fiction books', *The Modern Library*, www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/100-best-nonfiction; Dinita Smith, 'Another Top 100 List: Now It's Nonfiction', *New York Times* 30 April 1999, www.nytimes.com/1999/04/30/books/another-top-100-list-now-it-s-nonfiction.html.
- 23 An exception in this regard is Michael Berry, who discusses Galbraith's use of the term. Michael Berry, *The Affluent Society Revisited* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).
- 24 J. R. Stanfield, 'The Affluent Society after Twenty-five Years', *Journal of Economic Issues* 17/3 (1983); Robert Heilbroner, 'Rereading The Affluent Society', *Journal of Economic Issues* 23/2 (1989); Stanfield, *John Kenneth Galbraith*; Parker, *J.K. Galbraith*.
- 25 Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 67, 111–145; Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939–1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 101–128.
- 26 Galbraith's influence in Europe has been covered in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (eds.), *An Affluent Society? Britain's Post-War 'Golden Age' Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 6; Eva Friman, *No Limits. The 20th Century Discourse of Economic Growth* (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2002).
- 27 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 28 Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, 3.
- 29 Ibid. 21–33.
- 30 Ibid. 7.
- 31 Berry, *The Affluent Society Revisited*, 7.
- 32 Galbraith was frequently faulted by academic colleagues for his style of writing, including the lack of references. See Parker, *J.K. Galbraith*, 296.
- 33 Berry, *The Affluent Society Revisited*, 9.
- 34 Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, 8–9.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid. 11.
- 37 Ibid. 12.
- 38 Ibid. 13–14.
- 39 Kuhn, *Structure*.
- 40 Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, 20.
- 41 For a discussion on Galbraith's legacy in the fields of economic theory and public

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policy, see Parker, *J. K. Galbraith*, 647–669. Galbraith's relation to institutionalism is covered in Malcolm Rutherford, 'Institutional Economics: Then and Now', *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 15/3 (2001): 185; see also James Ronald Stanfield and Mary Wrenn, 'John Kenneth Galbraith and Original Institutional Economics', *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics*, 28/1 (2005): 25–45.

42 Galbraith, *Essential Galbraith*, 19.

43 Berry, *Affluent Society Revisited*, 12.

Histories before history

Condorcet's temporal dimensions reconsidered as history of knowledge

Victoria Höög

How many general histories can we have that are regarded as reliable, professional accounts of the past? The history of knowledge has been both welcomed as a renewal and questioned as too vague and beyond definition. The latter argument is that knowledge without a specified subject can be interpreted as including everything from perceptions to practices, both in past and present. The claim of 'uncovering and explicating diverse forms of knowledge', it has been asserted, is not substantial enough to form its own discipline.¹ However, given the view that history should be considered in the plural, light is glimpsed at the end of this blind alley. Until historicism's academic triumph in the mid nineteenth century, history writing was a flexible genre close to literature, in its descriptive form as well as content. History was considered in plural, not a singular, universal, progressive process. In the German language, history was originally in the plural form *die Geschichten*, but changed in the eighteenth century to be used as a collective singular. From then on, history acquired its modern shape, and with it the task to report what counted as historical reality.

Despite intense scholarly discussions in recent decades, general academic history has neglected temporality, or more specifically how different experiences of time are historically shaped, viewing it as a problem for the philosophy or theory of history, and hence not of interest for the practising historian. Practices, materiality, mediality, and circulation have dominated the present theoretical discussion.

The widely used concept of the circulation of knowledge was imported from science studies.²

By contrast, I would suggest that a revival of Reinhart Koselleck's concept of multiple histories, paired with a theory of temporality, can provide a new, though pragmatic justification for a history of knowledge as a refigured academic history subject in its own right. Together with a new focus on temporality that extends beyond linear time, the history of knowledge can provide something new, with the added virtue of connecting to the ongoing historiographical discussion of the past's relation to the present.³

The international historiographical discussion of time has thus far been largely historiographical and not applied to specific cases.⁴ My suggested case is a rereading of Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1794) with temporality, or the relationship with time as the guiding framework, suggesting that it will open for a multi-dimensioned view of progress.⁵ A helpful concept for a reinterpretation of Condorcet is 'regimes of time' or more precisely 'multiple of temporal regimes', concepts coined by Reinhart Koselleck and further developed by Helge Jordheim.

The thesis pursued in this essay is that a theory of historical time, building on Koselleck's later work, would be a theoretical concept that could provide history of knowledge with a unique quality. I will proceed in three steps. First I will give the historical background to the theories of histories and temporality by introducing Koselleck's concepts. Second, I will use the Koselleckian tools of multilayered temporality on Condorcet's well-known *Esquisse*.⁶ My intention is to depict a humanistic multifaceted view of Condorcet that replaces the standard view of Condorcet as ardent promoter for cold reason- and science-driven society. Third, I will discuss what a practical application of historical time can do for establishing the history of knowledge as a historical field in its own right, and lastly, some comments on how a theory of time can help to form a less mythical account of the Enlightenment.

From scientization to narrativism

In the post-war period, historicism was given a post-Rankean nudge towards scientization by the Anglophone analytic philosophy of science. Questions such as how history relates to science, how we understand or explain historical events, whether historical explanations have different forms from other sciences, what sort of objectivity is conceivable, and can and should historians formulate laws as in the natural sciences have dominated the theoretical discussions. Carl Hempel's covering law model, first formulated in *The Function of General Laws in History* but reiterated in new editions into the 1970s, kept its hold on history's philosophical identity as primarily a branch of epistemology.⁷ Debates about history's scientific and methodological requirements detained historians. The idea of several histories became forgotten in the scholarly climate that dominated history departments in the Western world.

A slow but fundamental change took place beginning in the 1960s, with a focus on the forms of historical writing. Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* in 1970 and Hayden White's *Metahistory* in 1973 were very influential in driving the historiographical shift from epistemology to rhetorical narrative strategies.⁸ Foucault had his international breakthrough when his books were translated to English in the late 1970s, whereas Hayden White enjoyed more immediate success.⁹ A discussion and awareness of different imaginative styles of historical writing emerged. The rhetorical aspects came to the fore, leading to a new awareness of how texts, not only in fiction, but historical writing, were influenced and marked by the existent cultural configuration. Episteme and discourse were the buzzwords for several decades. The focus on style and discourse impacted on how historical change was recorded by historians. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that Foucault was not interested in temporality as an analytical category, which he viewed as belonging to old-fashioned historicity. Neither in *The Archaeology* nor in *The Order of Things* is temporality described among the defining rules for an archaeological formation.

Belonging to the same generation as Foucault, another great European thinker, Reinhart Koselleck, had to wait until the 1980s to be translated

into English. In Koselleck's interdisciplinary works, which range widely from political philosophy and hermeneutics to anthropological history, one particular idea stands out: that human history, unlike natural history, is fundamentally non-singular and constituted by several temporal dimensions, distinctly expressed as 'the synchronicity of the non-synchronicity' ('Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen').¹⁰ Since *Kritik und Krise* (1959), his main focus has been to understand how individual and collective self-understandings are formed by historical events, their dynamics and structures.¹¹ In his dissertation, inspired by Carl Schmitt, Koselleck looks for a historical answer what went wrong in Germany in the catastrophic twentieth century; however, his answer applies to the whole of European political thought, including French and English political philosophy. The utopian thought that took over the European political imagination with the French Revolution lacked the ability to distinguish between morality and politics, and constantly intermingled the two. This led to a historical consciousness, with concepts that only could imagine a history in the singular, which inaugurated a world of wars, revolutions, and permanent political crisis. The dissertation can be read as the first normative step in deconstructing this singular, unified history and open up for a plurality of histories. The methodological way to do it was to explore the history of central concepts, such as crisis, critique, and revolution, led by the idea that historical agents use language and concepts to make history.¹²

After the Second World War, time was chiefly conceived of as a given natural entity, not fluctuating in the chosen historical period of interest.¹³ When Koselleck published in the 1970s, temporality once again became a subject for historians, but modelled and hidden in what in a more immediate sense caught the reviewers' attention: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*.¹⁴

The intellectual project changed shape over the years. From a more general knowledge approach that viewed concepts as constructions of historical agents to create and shape history, Koselleck changed focus to theorizing time: how the individual and collective self-understanding of time had developed in history.¹⁵ Temporality became for Koselleck

ultimately constitutive for individuals as well as societies, the former aspect a heritage from Kant and Heidegger, but developed as new perspectives. His efforts have provided historians with an impressive set of new temporal terms, such as *Zeitschichten* (time layer), *Sattelzeit* (saddle period), and *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (non-simultaneousness), held together by a problematization of the origin and nature of modernity.

What happened during the *Sattelzeit*, according to Koselleck, is what he calls ‘a process of singularization’, which is reflected in the shifting content in central concepts. Freedoms became freedom in the singular, and histories that hosted a spectrum of different experiences and temporal horizons became history in the singular—a history that is in perpetual change, filled with the spirit of the time. Progress also lost its multifaceted references and became a singular abstract concept, without specified content: one of the prime examples of the changed temporal dimensions in modernity. For the later Koselleck, a main requirement for history to remain a scientific discipline was to develop a theory of historical times. He claimed that history in general, and not only conceptual history, could not do without a theory of time.¹⁶

In this Koselleckian framework of objecting to singularity, a history of knowledge might have an emancipatory potential. Behind the undertaking is a normative conviction: that we cannot form a sustainable politics from any viewpoint, neither the ordinary citizens, politicians or policy planners in a market-driven corporation without an imaginary that comprise ideas of progress in the future. Without an imaginary that feeds hope we are lost in collective depression. If we accept Koselleck’s theory of multiple temporalities, another image of the eighteenth century might emerge, hosting multiple ideas of progress, a possible platform for an enriched political imaginary that goes beyond today’s gloomy or even catastrophic outlook on the future.

Instead of viewing a historical period as constituted by one temporal dimension, multiple temporal regimes make sense for a reinterpretation of the *Esquisse*. That can open for a historical understanding of the Enlightenment not as a one-way argument leading straight to a dangerous Utopia, but more in line with a profound historicity. The standard interpretation of Condorcet’s last work has kept to the linear time model

held together by an idea of progress. Keith Baker's biography *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (1975) positioned the 1970s perspective on Condorcet, congruent with the collective mindset of the time, interpreting the Enlightenment as the successful elaborator and follower of the scientific revolution.¹⁷ Condorcet is portrayed as the excellent thinker that worked hard to apply scientific thinking in 'all aspects of social affairs', an ambition that 'marked a feature of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries, particularly in France.'¹⁸ Subsequent biographies followed the same path.¹⁹ An accurate brilliant version was given in Rothschild's masterly monograph, but temporality and plurality are not among her analytical tools.²⁰

Condorcet reread

My purpose here is to explore if a retemporalization can change interpretation of the *Esquisse* or *the Sketch* as the Enlightenment manifest for interminable progress.²¹ For that we need to return to the seventeenth century, and the origin of the modern 'regimes of historicity.' If we accept multiple histories, we might accommodate multiple temporalities without the quest to synchronize. From a multiple view of history as *histories*, it follows that the concept of progress can be rehabilitated to include a varied and non-deterministic content.

In the last decades the negative view of the Enlightenment's heritage has taken over and dominated the academic circles inspired by post-structuralist views on history, strengthened by Foucauldian influences.²² What these interpretations share, despite their contrary conclusions, is the same view on the modern temporality. Temporality is conceptualized from a linear progressive time concept, as processes of speed, on one hand glorified as the wanted and non-avoidable journey to a continuously better future, on the other hand a destructive temporal order, fragmenting the roots of the past that frame its necessary human meaningfulness.

A superficial reading of *The Sketch* can prove that the mythical prejudices about the book are correct. Progress is one of the most frequent nouns and verbs in the introduction and makes it easy to hang

up one's attentions to afford the standard interpretation. However, the first thing to bear in mind is that Condorcet used *progrès* in the plural: *les progress* with concrete references and instances. This crucial grammatical difference is a first indication of how Condorcet viewed progress: as uneven and with different historical dynamic. Progress in the plural makes it relevant to identify a direction in history, but not as one firm, abstract-determined, metaphysical totality. Instead it opens for many histories; history in the plural. One passage at the end of the introduction is significant for the whole *Sketch* and turns around the standard interpretation:

if we survey in a single sweep the universal history of peoples we see them sometimes making fresh progress, sometimes plunging back into ignorance, sometimes surviving somewhere between these extremes or halted at a certain point, sometimes disappearing from the earth under the conqueror's heel, mixing with the victors or living on in slavery, or sometimes receiving knowledge from some more enlightened people in order to transmit it in their own turn to other nations.²³

Condorcet's way of pointing out that progress and knowledge are not gained in linear temporality is a substantial idea in the *Sketch*. The awareness and attention to unequal human conditions is the dominating theme, not abstract progress in general, or in the sciences. There is manifold of expressed hopes, but sided with multifarious of gloomy conditions.

The first epoch in mankind's history is outlined with the title 'Men are united in tribes.' Here Condorcet points out a detail that reverses the standard story. The first signs of a political institution are detected, as it also 'has had the contrary effects upon human progress' and 'accelerated the progress of reason at the same time as it has propagated error'.²⁴ The complexity of the history of humankind is obvious for Condorcet: it is not one singular history, but a multiplicity of histories, taking place in chorus. The division of mankind into two races occurs; 'one destined to teach, the other for believing...the one wishing to place itself above reason, the other renouncing its own reason'. This unequal condition accompanies humanity through all the following epochs. First in the

future, in the tenth epoch, the abolition of inequality *might be* diminished without disappearing altogether. The cause of inequality is closely connected to dependence. Condorcet's proposal is astonishing for its clarity, and precedes political ideas of social justice by centuries:

The degree of equality in education that we reasonably hope to attain, but that should be adequate, is that which excludes all dependence, either forced or voluntary. We shall see how this condition can be easily attained in the present state of human knowledge even by those who can study only for a small number of years in childhood, and then during the rest of their life in their few hours of leisure...we can teach the citizen everything he needs to know in order to be able to manage his household, administer his affairs and employ his labour and his faculties in freedom; to know his rights and to be able to exercise them.²⁵

In the second epoch several statements do not point at collective singular progress as the dominating feature, but as well the beginning of miseries such as slavery that since have accompanied mankind.²⁶ In the third agricultural epoch the alphabet was invented, which of course was progress, but simultaneously a new class of men arise, 'an hereditary nobility...a common people condemned to toil, dependence, and humiliation without actually being slaves...origin of feudal system'.²⁷ As in the previous epochs, this one ends with more oppression.²⁸ The fourth epoch was Greek. Most of the section discusses the mistakes the Greeks made as thinkers—largely, establishing theories before assembling facts. The death of Socrates marked the beginning of the war between philosophy and superstition, a war that is still going on. Condorcet highlights the advantages of political citizenship that brings together citizens in a public place, but immediately writes at length that this arrangement 'had as their object the liberty or the happiness of at most only half of the human race.'²⁹ A look of the temporality in the subsequent fifth to eighth epochs shows an unevenness in the history of the progress of the human spirit. Progress is not depicted as a singular movement, but in the plural, spread over a range of human spaces, sometimes stable and sometimes in decline. Much in human history is

characterized by repetition, not only by change, and structures interact with singular events.

In the ninth epoch, 'From Descartes to the Foundation of the French Republic', the text has a more dramatic character. France as a nation is glorified in a few sentences, but with the strong statement that liberty also has encouraged tyranny and superstition to return, and 'mankind is plunged once more into darkness'.³⁰ The progress of the different sciences is uneven and difficult. A comment on the application of the probability theory expresses Condorcet's modesty: 'the applications have also taught us to recognize the different degrees of certainty we can hope to attain'.³¹ It was well known that his conception of knowledge was probabilistic and nonelitist: only knowledge attained by education across a whole community, living lives of liberty and equality could be relied on, and was a condition for communal well-being. To ascribe Condorcet the view that the sciences are unaffected, objective phenomena is a misreading, frequently made in the twentieth century, illustrating what Quentin Skinner identified as 'the mythology of prolepsis'.³²

The need for a plurality of histories is directly addressed by Condorcet in the last pages of the ninth epoch: 'Up till now, the history of politics, like that of philosophy or of science, has been the history of only a few individuals: that which really constitutes the human race, the vast mass of families living for the most part on their fruits of their labor, has been forgotten...it is only the leaders who have held the eye of the historian.'³³ It is the consequences of historical changes for the majority of people that should be the historians' vocation to record.³⁴ The people's history has been absent from the historical record.

After the opening section of the tenth epoch, the text shifts focus to describe how the abolition of inequality between nations and men will bring an end to 'our murderous contempt for men of another colour or creed, the insolence of our usurpations'.³⁵ Several pages discuss the enslaved colonies, and the necessity of fighting for change—for Condorcet the necessary action if one comprises the idea of equality between men. But this equality is not unconditional. Condorcet is unambiguous about the fact that inequality can never totally disappear, as it is a result of natural causes. An attempt to bring about an entire disappearance

would ‘introducing even more fecund sources of inequality, ... more fatal blows to the rights of man.’³⁶ Inequality between men is a part of human nature; it can never be totally abolished.

The standard version of Condorcet as a spokesman for human progress is true, but in a more multifaceted and non-deterministic way. For Condorcet *les progrès* are not a ‘supranatural organ of performance of events’, not abstract historical agents.³⁷ Progress is not used as an overarching concept from which the human conditions can be assumed.³⁸ He uses the concept, founded on concrete details from how the human conditions can improve and leave behind the sufferings the common people have experienced. He does hope for a better future, he believes in justice and equality for all humans, but is completely averse to using political or social force to establish it—that would be tyranny. Man must encompass these principles voluntarily, exercising the moral sentiments that are a shared human property. Condorcet viewed freedom as a sentiment, in the same way as the Scottish philosophers, a fact that most scholars of the French Enlightenment have neglected.³⁹

Thus Condorcet is not modern in the sense that he calls progress in itself a determinate legitimate historical process. Rather his use is anthropological—what man was, is, and could be—which implies an openness to many possible human histories. His view is very far from ‘the embodiment of the cold oppressive enlightenment’, and instead emphasizes sentiments as individual properties that have differentiated cultural and historical shapes.⁴⁰ Condorcet was neither bold spokesman for the scientization of the politics and a society built on reason, nor incongruous revolutionary leader. He believed in universal principles, but also in the individual’s right to decide for themselves, and never impose their beliefs on others. He rejected the concepts of collective happiness and public utility; ‘it was in the name of public utility that the Bastille was filled...and that people were tortured.’⁴¹ He belonged to the Enlightenment, but was also one of its sternest critics.

Temporality and the history of knowledge

Let us return to the theme with which I opened this essay: the history of knowledge as an innovative academic field. How can the history of knowledge develop by adding a temporal perspective? In the present scholarly discussion the two subjects—temporality and history of knowledge—have not been discussed together.⁴² From a history of science view, the most advanced theoretical argument for a history of knowledge was formulated by Lorraine Daston in the journal *Know* in 2017. There her two main arguments are both negative; for decades we have known that the narrative of modern Western science that we teach students is ‘gravely flawed’. She points to Steven Shapin’s textbook *The Scientific Revolution*, which begins by ironizing that ‘There was no such thing as the Scientific Revolution and this is book about it.’⁴³ The second argument is a variant of the first, namely that the phrases about modernity and science are no longer evident statements and hence a disciplinary change is needed. More exactly what history of knowledge would be about is stated as a vision that lists the difficulties. The ‘probing conceptual analysis’ that the history of science in dialogue with ‘sociology, philosophy, psychology, and science studies’ has undergone in recent decades is also needed for the category of knowledge to undergo. She illustrates this by noting that such an analysis ‘might begin by looking at how classifications and hierarchies of knowledge as well as cardinal epistemic virtues shift over time’, but also ‘more comparative studies also offer a promising field’.⁴⁴

Temporality is not given as a topic for reconsideration, despite the fact that main criticism of the history of science is the idea of a linear narrative with its clear-cut periodicities from antiquity to modernity. Daston’s article, like other texts about the history of knowledge, illustrates the prevalent attitude towards time among historians. Time has become naturalized and instrumentalized, and is used unreflectively as a matter of periodization.⁴⁵ Jordheim points to the mistranslation of Koselleck’s ‘theory of historical times’ as the ‘theory of periodization’, yet the same reduction was made by German scholars.⁴⁶

So what can a theory of historical times do for the history of know-

ledge? What need is there for a theory? Koselleck posed this very question in 'On the Need for Theory in the Discipline of History.'⁴⁷ One challenge is that history cannot be defined in terms of its object of research as 'economics, political science, sociology, philology, linguistics', 'for history can declare just about anything to be a historical object...Nothing escapes the historical perspective.'⁴⁸ Yet, according to Koselleck, 'only theory transforms our work into historical scholarship'.⁴⁹ Historians have treated time as a naturalized, non-analytical category, and have ignored the fact that from the eighteenth century on the old regime of temporality was denaturalized. Time was experienced and expressed by new concepts of movement.

The theoretical concept of the 'circulation of knowledge' has been one of the founding elements in the history of knowledge. Though still vague and much-questioned, it has the advantage of introducing movement as a force for change, forcing it on our historical attention. The results offer the hope of introducing further metahistorical concepts to empirical research.⁵⁰ The theoretical framework helps with probing and deconstructing the rigid chronological triad of antiquity, Middle Ages, and modernity, leading us to look instead for the 'simultaneity of the non-simultaneous', or discrepant structures of time, in what is approved as the natural course of time. To single out temporal differences may push the history of knowledge to renew history, loosening it from its nineteenth-century historical moorings of personality, people, and class as the structuring categories of historical writing.

The analytical category of 'temporality' can support historians in stepping back from descriptive, fact-determined history writing that assumes all historical perspectives are self-legitimizing. My suggestion is that Koselleck's concept of historical times and multiple histories provides a new, though pragmatic, legitimation of the history of knowledge as a refigured academic history subject in its own right. With its focus on temporality, extending beyond linear time, the history of knowledge can provide a historicity that identifies the forces in history that induce transformation *and* combine them to new configurations. It also has the added virtue of connecting to the ongoing historiographical discussion of the past's relations to the present.

An analytical concept of multiple historical times paves the way for a history of multiple histories. Applied consistently, this would influence the practice of history. In normative terms, getting away from a single chronological time will push us to write multifaceted histories that include the history of the oppressed and the victimized, not only the story of the positive fruits of modernity—equality, freedom, and technological progress, with their beginnings in the Enlightenment. As I have argued, one of its leading thinkers, Condorcet, did not support the mythical standard view of the French Enlightenment as obsessed with reason and progress. The recent debate about the Enlightenment’s historiography illustrates that pertinent history writing involves taking an ethical stance. My belief is that the Enlightenment’s legacy can be a source of emancipatory thinking in an age of disillusion and despair. Condorcet and his fellows were the first to fight for equality and liberty, regardless of cultural borders, class, sex, and ethnicity. Perhaps the time is out of joint, but modernity cannot subsist without foundational truths that give hope for the future.

Notes

- 1 ‘Editor’s introduction,’ *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1/1 (2017).
- 2 Bruno Latour, *Science in action: how to follow scientists and engineers through society* (Cambridge, Mass: HUP, 1987); James A. Secord, ‘Knowledge in Transit,’ *Isis* 95/4 (2004): 654–672.
- 3 Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York: CUP, 2011); id. *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Post-war Identity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); id. & Linda Short (eds.), *Memory and Political Change* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Anton Froeyman & François Hartog, *Regimes of historicity: presentism and experiences of time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Eelco Runia, *Moved by the Past: Discontinuity and Historical Mutation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); *Past & Present*, volume 243, Issue 1, May 2019 has a special section about temporality. In anthropology, postcolonialism renewed an awareness of how time is part of constructing the Other, which has been prominent theoretically for several decades, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and The Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia Univ.

- Press, 1983); for a more recent text see Stefan Helgesson, 'Radicalizing Temporal Difference: Anthropology, Postcolonial Theory, and Literary Time', *History and Theory* 53/4 (2014): 545–562.
- 4 One of the first contemporary scholars, except Koselleck, to explore changes in society's ways of relating to past, present and future was François Hartog, see above. The recognition from Sweden is still pending with some exception, for example Victoria Fareld 'Tiden är nu. Presentism, tidskris och historiska sår', *Samtider. Perspektiv på 2000-talets idéhistoria* (Gothenburg: Daidalos, 2017), 19–36.
 - 5 Condorcet's *The Sketch or in French Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit Humain* is available in many editions. I have used easily accessible English and French scholarly editions. Condorcet, 'The Sketch', in Steven Lukes & Nadia Urbinati (eds.), *Condorcet. Political Writings* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012) and a French Internet edition: Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique, des progrès de l'esprit Humain*, http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/condorcet/esquisse_tableau_progres_hum/esquisse_tableau_hist.pdf.
 - 6 Koselleck's work about temporality was published quite late, in the 1990s, also in German. 'Sediments of Time', that gave the title to the recent published English collection, was originally published as 'Zeitschichten' 1994. Helge Jordheim, 'Introduction: Multiple Times and The Work of Synchronization', *History and Theory* 53/4 (2014).
 - 7 Carl Hempel, 'The function of general laws in History', *Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1942): 35–47.
 - 8 Michel Foucault, *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970); Hayden V. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination In Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1973).
 - 9 About the translation of Foucault's work, see Jeroen Vandaele, 'What is an author, indeed: Michel Foucault in translation', *Perspectives* 24/1 (2016): 76–92.
 - 10 See Christophe Bouton, 'The Critical Theory of History: Rethinking the Philosophy of History in the Light of Koselleck's work', *History and Theory* 55/2 (2016): 163–184; Helge Jordheim, 'Introduction: Multiple Times and The Work of Synchronization', *History and Theory* 53/4 (2014): 498–518; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); see also the excellent biography by Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural. An Introduction to The Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).
 - 11 Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis. Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1988). Olsen *ibid.* essay two, 'Explaining, Criticizing, and Revising Modern Political Thought', 41–100.
 - 12 When *Kritik und Krise* was published 1959 it was read by some as a conservative

contribution to the post-war political debate, not least because of its negative view on the Enlightenment. Niklas Olsen, 'History in the Plural. An Introduction to The Work of Reinhart Koselleck', 41. In the English edition Koselleck clarified his view in a new preface. For a discussion about Carl Schmitt and his relation to Koselleck, see Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind. Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven: YUP, 2003), especially the second essay.

- 13 The exception is the Annales school which in its second post-war era focused on constructing analytical universal temporal structures. Most famous is Ferdinand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).
- 14 Otto Brunner, Werner Conze & Reinhart Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 1972–1997). Johan Östling reviewed the first Swedish translation of Koselleck's work in *Historisk tidskrift* 126/3 (2006), emphasizing Koselleck as historian of concepts.
- 15 See Koselleck's own reflection on his changing approach in Willem Melching & Wyger Velema (eds.), *Main Trends In Cultural History: Ten Essays* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press 1994), 7.
- 16 Koselleck, *Sediments of Time*, 3.
- 17 Keith M. Baker, *Condorcet. From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).
- 18 *Ibid.* viii.
- 19 David Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).
- 20 Rothschild stresses Condorcet's articulated awareness of societal value conflicts: 'the diversity of individual opinions; with the shortcomings of proto-utilitarian theories of happiness; with individual rights and individual independence; and with trying to show that the imposition of universal and eternal principles is the most sinister of despotism.' Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 2001), 196.
- 21 In the following text the English translation of the *Esquisse* will be used and is hence referred to as 'The Sketch'. References are given both to the English translation and the French original.
- 22 Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2017); Jonathan Israel, 'Poststructuralist and Postcolonialist criticism', https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/files/56977381/Insikt_och_handling_26_inlaga_printed.pdf#page=18.
- 23 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 5; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 43. Note that in the French original 'progress' is in the plural.
- 24 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 11; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 51.

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- 25 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 132; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 201.
- 26 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 14; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 56.
- 27 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 20f; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 65.
- 28 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 24; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 70.
- 29 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 36; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 84.
- 30 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 89; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 150.
- 31 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 116; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 182.
- 32 Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the history of Ideas' in James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context. Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton: PUP, 1969), 73.
- 33 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 124; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 190f.
- 34 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 125; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 192.
- 35 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 127f; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 196.
- 36 Condorcet, 'The Sketch', 130; Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 199.
- 37 The expression 'supranatural' is used by Reinhart Koselleck in 'Progress and Decline. An Appendix to the History of Two Concepts' in *The Practice of Conceptual History: timing history, spacing concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 219.
- 38 Koselleck makes an important remark about how 'progress' was used by Diderot and Voltaire. Diderot saw a catastrophe in the near future and the Encyclopedia was supposed to be Noah's Ark to save the knowledge. Candide effectively knocked down progress as an honest state of mind. Ibid. 231. About Condorcet, Koselleck mentions the former's pluralistic use of progress, not used as a collective singular. Ibid. 229.
- 39 Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 209.
- 40 Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 195.
- 41 Condorcet, 'On the emancipation of women', in Steven Lukes & Nadia Urbinati (eds.), *Condorcet. Political Writings* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 160.
- 42 For an overview of the historiography for the history of knowledge, see the introduction to Johan Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: explorations in the history of knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018), 9–33.
- 43 Lorraine Daston 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', *KNOW: A Journal of the Formation of Knowledge* 1/1 (2017), 149; Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).
- 44 Lorraine Daston, 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', 145.
- 45 François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 8.
- 46 Helge Jordheim, 'Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities' in *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 151–171.
- 47 Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 2003), 1–19.
- 48 Ibid. 4.

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- 49 Quoted from John Zammito, 'Koselleck's Philosophy of Historical Time(s) and the Practice of History', *History and Theory* 43 (2004): 124.
- 50 Johan Östling et al. *Circulation of Knowledge*.

In the laboratory

Forms of knowledge as a methodological concept for the study of knowledge circulation

Karolina Enquist Källgren

The more located knowledge becomes, the less it is possible to speak about it in terms of circulation. If knowledge is fundamentally dependent on the situated circumstances of a particular context, what is to say that it is the same knowledge—or knowledge at all—in a new context? And if knowledge, when it circulates through media and spaces, is subjected to transformations and translations, how is it possible to study non-knowledge (or the false) from a perspective of knowledge circulation? In the following I will argue for a set of methodological concepts that can be used to distinguish what remains the same in an object of knowledge as it circulates, transforms, and is translated. My argument turns against a kind of material theory of circulation of knowledge influenced by among others Bruno Latour, and that focuses heavily on practices and mediums of circulation.

In an attempt to overcome or set aside these questions, circulation studies, influenced by Latour and the material turn, typically emphasizes practices and mediums of circulation. They focus on an entity—a material object or an idea—that moves between media and locations, tracing transformations and translations, the product of which is knowledge. From this perspective knowledge is deemed to have been created in relation to one context: the very process of circulation. Consequently, there is no object of knowledge before the process of circulation occurs. In their widely recognized *Laboratory Life*, Latour and Wolgar write that ‘the object exists solely in terms of the difference between inscrip-

tions. In other words, an object is simply a signal distinct from the background of the field and the noise of the instruments' and that the object is 'constituted by the steady accumulation of techniques.'¹ This idea comes with significant problems attached, however. First, since it implies that knowledge is always constructed (in Latour's view both object and subject participate in this construction²) through a set of practices and transformations, it effectively places the focus on the positive construction of knowledge. For that reason, the perspective typically does not allow for the study of fault, as it would entail studying an object that does not exist. Given that knowledge is the outcome of a set of social and material practices, if these practices do not occur there is nothing to study. (Even though, in this perspective it would be possible to study events of forgetting as circulatory practices.) Neither can it help us study the differing strength of various knowledge-producers—for example between objects and subjects, or between state institutions and vested interests—since knowledge is what comes out of an entangled process of inscription. A second problem is that for many proponents of the practice-based idea of circulation, ontology and historiographical method collapses. When the circulation of knowledge is posited as the means by which knowledge comes about in practice and with embodied effects, the historical narrative of the researcher is taken to directly correspond to the real and ontological past of the circulatory process. Latour calls this 'the historicity of elements', defined as a process that simultaneously constitutes the object ontologically, and is available as an inscription for the historian to describe, typically using archival material.³ Historicity here becomes the fact that an object has a history, not a critical reflection on the traces that are left to us over time. Against what would usually be a historian's critical view of source material, in Latour's description of circulatory processes, the object is what is visible in the sources; at the same time, the ontological object and the object of study.

Latour's concepts may be theoretically innovative, but they amount to a conception of history where objects of study are readily available to the researcher. Curiously, his questioning of a positivist view of the natural sciences leads him to a positivist and unreflecting view of history. Gen-

eralizing somewhat, in Latour-inspired perspectives knowledge is only knowledge if it circulates, and if it circulates it is sure to be knowledge. As opposed to this perspective, I argue that historians of circulation need a set of methodological tools that allow for a critical evaluation of historic circulatory processes and that recognizes that history as a science constructs objects of study on the basis of interpreting traces. Methods are needed with which to reflect on and motivate why certain (and not all) historic objects can and should be studied as they move between historic contexts and historic times. Such a set of concepts should take account of the fundamental contingency of historical contexts, distinguish objects of knowledge that circulate as a kind of entity different from other objects that do not circulate, and be able to explain what happens when those objects move between different local contexts. Here I develop the notion of form with four lower level concepts into a methodological approach for identifying stable objects of knowledge within processes of circulation and transformation.⁴ Against Latour's reading of laboratory practices, I interpret the circulation of knowledge at a leading research institute, showing how a focus on circulation demands other methodological concepts than those offered by Latour.

The Max Planck Institute for Theoretical Physics

Consider for a moment the circulation of concepts at the Max Planck Institute for Theoretical Physics in Berlin in 1930. Max Planck became the professor of theoretical physics at the University of Berlin in 1892. The chair came with a small institute, a library, and a research assistant, and for years—until 1927 when he retired and was replaced by Erwin Schrödinger—Planck held lectures four times a week and organized a physics seminar.⁵ The institute became increasingly important in the 1920s when the government supported the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft, in which Planck had a leading position; he was working towards the establishment of a free-standing and larger physics institute, but failed to raise sufficient funding for the necessary buildings and equipment.⁶

The institute was a creative arena for the encounter between the various competing schools of physics. Bohr paid the occasional visit,

as did Heisenberg. Einstein was a close collaborator—it was known for its inclination towards theoretical rather than experimental physics.⁷ Both Planck and his successor, Schrödinger, defended an interpretation of quantum physics that held that an ultimate causal explanation of nature could be found. Both believed that such an explanation could be encountered theoretically, even if it could not be found through experimentation, spurring interest from other disciplines such as philosophy and theology.⁸

The Spanish theologian and professor of the history of philosophy at the Universidad Central in Madrid, Xavier Zubiri (1898–1983), arrived at the institute in 1930 and stayed for the academic year. We know of the interaction from Zubiri's own account, as well as from letters later sent between Zubiri and Schrödinger, who also visited Spain in 1934.⁹ An overview of the materials available to us—letters, newspaper clips, lecture notes, academic articles, and a theological treatise—tells us that at stake between the members of the colloquium was the choice between a unified field theory (both Einstein and Max Born were developing competing proposals of the idea) and the statistical worldview proposed by Heisenberg and the Copenhagen school.¹⁰

Events or objects between contexts

The primary sources available from the Max Planck Institute are all different forms of clearly structured and intentional communications, consciously addressed to an imagined reader with some mathematical training. It extends to mathematical formulas and descriptions of experiments as well as explication. In lecture notes and published articles, the object of debate is so clearly defined that it can be discussed in fairly precise mathematical terms, the formulation of which may be debated, but which nevertheless places the issue at hand firmly in an intellectual geography of physical laws and mathematical correspondences agreed on by all involved.

At the outset, the material seems to invoke precisely that kind of circulation in one medium of inscription that can be studied following the method proposed by Latour.¹¹ In two studies, Latour describes how

Pasteur went about producing lactic acid as an object of knowledge through a succession of practical actions, which Latour calls events. These events, Latour claims, are visible in the archive as a material set of attributions, inscriptions, and techniques of accumulation that circulate between various scientific institutions and networks, part of which can be attributed to the lactic acid itself. In his account, a relatively unstable process of successive events was stabilized as object of knowledge by relatively stable media and actions of circulation—what he calls ‘optical consistency’.¹² In the case of the interaction at the Max Planck seminar, it would have been possible to trace how the idea of a wave, to take one example—annotated as the repeated modelling of mathematical integral and differential equations at the seminar—came to compete with statistical models of quantum theory. Following Latour, such an interpretation would have presupposed the stable medium of mathematical and physical inscription, that is, one context of circulation.

But the matter is complicated by the theological outcomes of Zubiri’s stay at the institute. Drawn from his studies there, his theological conclusions are a clear example of circulation between contexts and disciplines—Spanish Catholicism and German Physics—where no one medium of inscription can be presupposed. In his *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* of 1944, Zubiri published essays written between 1932 and 1944 on topics ranging from the history of the concept of nature and Hegelian metaphysics to quantum physics and Pauline theology. In the essay (from 1934) treating quantum physics at length he cites as yet unpublished articles by Schrödinger and Heisenberg.¹³ In the texts he discusses the statistical foundation of reality, and the kind of mathematical concepts that entails. But rather than seeing statistics and calculability as a scientific rebuttal of theology, he equates the pure mathematical concept—or what he calls the function of functions designated by $f(x)$ (or sometimes by a series of $x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots$)—to the concept of substance which he ultimately places in God. These theological conclusions were the direct result of a circulation of certain scientific objects from one scientific discipline to another.

The occurrence of $f(x)$ within two very different disciplinary discourses should lead us to ask if the object of knowledge, in this case the

$f(x)$ of the physicist, is the same object as the $f(x)$ of the theologian. In the effort to reconstruct the traces of a circulatory process occurring at the physics seminar, we have to presuppose that there was a difference between debates in (Spanish Catholic) theology and quantum physics, both serving as necessary contexts for our reconstruction. Here, the object of knowledge was not created out of the unknown as a set of scientific inscriptions, it moved between various existing sets of inscriptions. At the same time, Zubiri clearly felt that the mathematical functions that he used in his elaborations added something of value. While the meaning of the concept clearly changed—in fact Zubiri emphasized that he has had to refrain from mathematical accuracy in his essay—the concept $f(x)$ moved between physics and theology, retaining enough to be able to speak of it as the same object, or else there would be nothing for us to study as circulation. When treating circulation between contexts, the historian is in need of methodological criteria to distinguish how something that circulates maintains sufficient similarities to be called an object, at the same time as the meaning-context in which it is taken to be ‘knowledge’ changes.

Latour’s formalism and immutable mobiles

In another discussion of the emergence of scientific facts, Latour concerns himself with this problem.¹⁴ He argues that scientific objects are the result of processes of inscription, allowing objects to be transferred from one place to another and piled together with others. Inscription gives scientific objects the character of ‘immutable mobiles’ by making them ‘immutable, presentable, readable and combinable with one another’.¹⁵ What distinguishes the truth claims of contemporary science from former scientific truths is the acceleration of processes of inscription, allowing for a higher degree of accumulation of information and authority around certain scientific interpretations. The process involves scientific findings being inscribed as ‘ever-simplified’, eventually allowing for a merging of descriptive language and mathematical and geometric notations.¹⁶ ‘Indeed’, writes Latour, ‘what we call formalism is the acceleration of displacement without transformation.’¹⁷

Even though they are the product of material processes of inscription, in Latour's perspective scientific objects are formal objects. Interestingly enough, with all his emphasis on materiality—as against economic materialist interpretations, and interpretations focusing on the transcendental capacities of the mind—Latour's proposal is a realism dependent on a transcendental structure in a system of actions and inscriptions transcending meaning-context. What Latour calls displacement is in reality a movement from empirical practice to abstraction, losing sight of the fact that the common purpose of scientific abstraction is its renewed applicability in empirical activities or in another discipline. Latour's framework admits of circulation only within one set of inscriptions or one medium, and it cannot give account of circulation between contexts, believe-systems or disciplines for example. It will not explain problems of translation between languages or different historical contexts, nor the survival of different solutions or subsets of inscriptions over extended periods of time.

Form in the Berlin laboratory

I would argue that the concept of form, rather than formalism, can be used to understand how objects of knowledge circulate: that is, objects of knowledge that move from one context and are relocated and unfolded in a new context. Returning to the Max Planck seminar, I will also chart four lower-level concepts—origin, synthesis, coherence, and equivalence—and show how they can be used in an analysis.

In a publication from very late in life and reflecting on his work as a physicist, Schrödinger writes that although when he was writing (in 1956) theology and the sciences were often perceived to be two separate roads of knowledge, they should be made to converge, contributing different perspectives on the question of what is man.¹⁸ What science cannot explain, for example the causes on which a universe ordered according to quantum mechanic principles keeps together, can best be explained by turning towards concepts borrowed from theology. The same themes are discussed in several of Schrödinger's post-war books. In the Tarner lectures from 1956—subsequently published as *Matter and*

Mind—theological or religious concepts such as one mind or ‘Mind by Time’ are used to conceptualize the ways in which a statistical universe is kept together.¹⁹ In Schrödinger’s works, theology is a discipline that can contribute with concepts precisely because it is not physics, and it does so by intersecting with the mathematical inscriptions by which quantum physics become a science. In his lectures, Schrödinger distinguishes the mathematical location of the intersection thus:

it is then quite clear that a measurement of x affects not only (as is always said) p [x ’s momentum], but also x itself. You have not *found* a particle at K [x ’s definite position], you have *produced* one there!... Before the second measurement, it is ubiquitous in the cloud (it is not a particle at all).²⁰

This is the impossibility in wave mechanics of taking real measurements of particles, as they are in constant motion and cannot be identified in one position. As Schrödinger argues, locating a particle x at a certain point does not only affect its momentum (here p), but in fact creates it as an identifiable particle, which is otherwise only ‘in the cloud’. The cloud here refers to the outer boundaries of a statistical formation constituted by the totality of the charge and radiation (that is, movement) around the atom core. Schrödinger’s argument is thus that it is only from the point of view of an observer that imposes measures that ‘the cloud’ can be turned into determined particles. In Schrödinger’s account there is no difference between the physical reality of observation and the observer.²¹ The argument that follows upon these statements turns to theology for concepts, and elaborates on the possibility of there being laws of nature that are universal and simultaneously created by each observer. Ultimately the question is what holds such a universe together? Schrödinger suggests the one consciousness hypothesis, by which each individual observer is in fact only part of ‘Mind by Time’, an idea that Schrödinger draws directly from Indian but also Christian mysticism (he mentions Spinoza repeatedly).

The mathematical concept of x is, as Latour has it, completely formal, in the sense that it can be used to substitute any kind of number (even though there are inscriptive practices, such as $f(x)$ denoting the

function). But the x that Schrödinger used had a specific meaning in its physical context, and while it could be used within the physical set of inscriptions, it could also be the point of departure for another layer of meaning found in theology. In the interaction between Schrödinger and Zubiri the concept x was loaded with layers of meaning, in relation to wave mechanics and its treatment of optics, as well as theology. It was the increasing complexity of the term—rather than simplification—that made it possible to let it circulate between disciplines. Complexity made the term circulate, but it also ordered more and more particulars under a stable form, in this case the completeness problem.

Zubiri used the $f(x)$ demarcation when discussing optics and the problem of measurement in quantum physics, proposing a solution similar to that found in Schrödinger's late texts. In his *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios*, he writes that the problem of measurement ultimately places light in its two aspects—as the medium of visibility and vision and as the action to observe—at the foundation of the statistical universe. In his version, the theological concept of divine light adds another layer of meaning to the physical meaning: divine light is equalled to radiation and vision is equalled to observation.²² In his book, $f(x)$ becomes the denotation for a specific physical perspective that entails series of increasing power and descriptions of the wave-like motions of atoms. In connection to which theology could offer tools by postulating the divine light as the underlying concept of unity keeping the physical statistical universe together. Where Schrödinger proposed 'Mind by Time', Zubiri posited divine light, both of which could be expressed as a function, $f(x)$.

The problem of unity in a statistical universe was referred to as the completeness problem and lay at the basis of Schrödinger's late physical philosophy. Zubiri had been introduced to the problem, not only by Schrödinger, but also from attending the lectures by Richard von Mises on differential and integral equations in mechanics and physics, held at the Max Planck Institute in 1930–31. Zubiri took his notes from those lectures back to Spain, and they are preserved in his archive. The notes are interesting because apart from mathematical explanations and proofs, the document contains sparse but informative comments on the meaning-context in which Zubiri followed the mathematical discussion.

In relation to functions that calculate elasticity and its correlation to temperature, Zubiri comments on the possibility of developing a particular position into a series so as to be able to determine the integral function (that is of a specific series). He writes:

Here we see clearly what the problem of development actually is, it deals essentially not with the fact that the series converges, but that any particular function comes out. That is the completeness question!²³

By following the circulation through different kinds of relevant documents of the formal mathematical notation of $f(x)$ it can be shown that Zubiri clearly received even detailed and abstract mathematical explanations in light of the completeness problem as it circulated between theology and physics. Like Schrödinger, he distinguished between theology and physics as meaning-contexts, which could be used to supplement each other by adding complexity: observation could be substituted by vision, and experimental visibility in turn could be substituted by the totality of the divine light, ascribing not only an analogical but a functional relation between them. The process by which the concept of $f(x)$ circulated between physics and theology was not based on simplification—even though the mathematical inscription as such was completely abstract—but rather on a process of overlaying, leading to increased complexity of meaning. Nevertheless though, as complexity of meaning arose, that complexity was ordered by the completeness problem in a similar form within the two disciplines.

The form worked to stipulate a relationship between particular parts—local to the meaning-context of physics or to theology—at the same time as that relationship remained the same even when the particulars changed. The object of knowledge transformed between contexts, but in form it also remained the same. The purpose and use of integral calculus, discussed in Mises lectures, by which a series of particulars could be developed into a whole (volume or area) was given enhanced complexity by adding theological meaning to it. Likewise, in Schrödinger's late text, the particularities of physical reality were overlayed with the meaning particulars that he had received from theology as he developed the

functional notion of ‘Mind by Time’ to describe the two axes by which the unity of the universe could be thought.

Form against formalism

The concept of *form*, and not inscriptive formalism, is key to understanding the tension between local meaning-context and displacement.²⁴ Using form as a methodological concept pinpoints the relationship between the order of particulars in a specific meaning-context and how that form remains when moving into other meaning-contexts, even as particulars change or are layered with new and more complex meaning. In Zubiri’s take on optics, vision is no longer just experimental observation but the capability of seeing the light as the connection between the individual and divine totality. But, even as this new meaning is added to the act of seeing in science, it nevertheless retains the meaning of experimental observation, described in detail by Zubiri. Knowing the original meaning-context of the problem of completeness is what allows him to transform or add to some of its parts within the new meaning-context of theology, without simplifying nor fundamentally transforming the inner relations by which particulars (for example, observer, light, fundament) were related to one another—in other words, its form. And similarly, it is because theology allows for concepts of totality that Schrödinger turns to it in search for the concepts that he cannot find in physics. From this it can be concluded that it is because objects of knowledge are complex yet ordered forms that we can study circulation, allowing partial translations—transformations without changing the fundamental form. This version of knowledge circulation also admits that the knowledge that circulates may very well be false, or not supply sufficient answers to the problem or problems that it addresses: what counts is its capacity to order particulars in a meaning-context. In fact, insufficient explication may very well be one of the reasons for circulation, or so thought Schrödinger and Zubiri, drawing on theology to resolve what they deemed could not be resolved within the original physical meaning-context of *x*.

From this can be derived four suggestions of methodological concepts

that become important when the historian wants to identify forms of knowledge in circulation. Rather than looking at circulation as a creative process of simplification and inscription with an ontological bearing, the historian should look for the source traces of circulation with the aim of determining what was the form of knowledge that ordered those traces so as to allow them to circulate between contexts of meaning. In doing so, the historian must determine the origin of the form of knowledge—the who and where of its first context.

The first step is to describe the particulars of a meaning-context as they appear in the sources, tracing the form that orders them. One should keep in mind that forms that circulate can be related to forms that cannot circulate, the latter being heavily dependent on the original meaning-context. In our case, while the form ordered around the completeness-problem did circulate, Zubiri's argumentative adherence to Pauline theology cannot be found in the archive material available or in Schrödinger's own publications. As opposed to Latour's method, where objects of knowledge are produced through circulation, using the form concept allows us to distinguish between objects of knowledge that circulate and objects of knowledge that do not. It also allows us to ask an important question: for whom is the object an object of knowledge?

Latour's method is deliberately set up against a history of science overly dependent on the arguments of scientists. Identifying immutable mobiles, he suggests, allows a way out of the interpretation of reasonable arguments by scientists. But in order to identify them, he nevertheless has to rely on the uniform rationale of the medium of inscription. Furthermore, avoiding an overall dependency on reasonable arguments from scientists does not mean that we should avoid interpreting the meaning-context of an object of knowledge as a reason for circulation. With the form concept, the aim is to find *coherence* of form in the original meaning-context, and to describe how it is re-established as the object of knowledge travels into a new context, without presupposing the medium of inscription. Schrödinger's solution was widely criticized by many physicists at the time, arguing that the completeness problem should in fact be left to theologians or philosophers, but they did not question the coherence of the form that was ordered by completeness as a problem, despite the fact

that they accepted the idea of a statistical universe. The thick description required of the historian is thus the possibility of demonstrating, using the traces, the coherence of the form in both its original and in its receiving meaning-context, even when there is no coherence between them. What is false or myth in one meaning-context can nevertheless be integrated as truth in another without it necessarily changing the form of knowledge.

In a second step, circulation is established by distinguishing the same form in the traces of a new meaning-context, together with a description of the new layers of meaning added there. This step resembles what Latour called simplification and stabilization, but rather than focusing on how empirical material is turned into formal truths, the analysis should aim at understanding how the new context synthesizes particulars from one meaning-context with another. In this perspective, circulation is what occurs when Zubiri uses Schrödinger's argument about optics and its relation to wave mechanics to argue for the necessity of unification in God.

Analysing *synthesis* can in fact prove more efficient in bringing light to power-relations than can accumulation, simplification, and stabilization, as it demands for the clarification of meaning as well as value connotations stemming from more than one context. Analysing synthesis thus entails the disclosure of the structures of power and hierarchy between which a meaningful object travels. In our analysis of circulation at the Max Planck institute, focusing on synthesis would mean to analyse the ways and points at which the two disciplines intersected. This would mean to highlight motivations or reasons for circulation rather than practical causes of circulation, and thus lead to an increased focus on meaning in different contexts. While the language of physics used in quantum physics had a long-standing reputation for scientific exactness, the concept x changed hierarchical position when it travelled, lending scientific patina to the at that time struggling scientific discipline of theology.

The focus on coherence and synthesis allows the historian to describe orders of particulars under the form of knowledge in one meaning-context, thus emphasizing its local (and as may be embodied and practical)

meaning. That should however be followed by an analysis of what we could call *equivalences*. That is, analysing how particulars that are not directly synthesized in the new meaning-context are either substituted by particulars that are different but of equal value or simply not rendered in the new meaning-context. That allows the historian to investigate how what is knowledge in one meaning-context is disavowed or simply ignored in a new context, sometimes because it does not fit with the particulars of the new meaning-context, and sometimes because actors consciously do not provide all the information ordered by the form in the original context. It can also aid in showing how certain objects of knowledge with a high degree of legitimacy in one meaning-context, because they are not rendered with an equal value in a second meaning-context, can be common knowledge but still not be deemed important to the solution of problems or lead to emotional conviction. Looking for equivalence thus also contributes to the possibility of analysing the value of objects within a specific order or form of knowledge.

I have argued that the concepts of form, origin, synthesis, coherence, and equivalence can be used to identify meaningful and stable orders of knowledge in the study of circulation between contexts. In so doing, knowledge has been broadly defined as that which is knowledge to someone situated within a meaningful and coherent context. As a consequence, circulation becomes a process of increasingly complex and value-laden interaction between different contexts of meaning, between locality and transformative movement. And as opposed to Latour's attempt at overcoming the tension between local meaning and circulation by stating that knowledge is the product of circulation, I propose that this tension is the general object of analysis by the historian of knowledge circulation, and that it should not be overcome.

Notes

- 1 Bruno Latour & Steven Wolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: PUP, 1979), 127.
- 2 Bruno Latour, 'Do scientific objects have a history?', *Common Knowledge* 5/1 (1996): 76–91.
- 3 *Ibid.* 82.

- 4 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).
- 5 John L. Heilbron, *The Dilemmas of an Upright Man* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 35, 40.
- 6 Ibid. 94–95, 175–179.
- 7 Helge Kragh, *Quantum Generations: A History of Physics in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: PUP, 1999), 149.
- 8 Heilbron, *The Dilemmas*, 194–195.
- 9 Xavier Zubiri, *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios*. (Madrid: Alianza editorial, 2007), 294; see also, Jordi Corominas & Joan Albert Vicens, *Xavier Zubiri—la soledad sonora* (Madrid: Taurus, 2006), 225–242; Jose M. Sánchez-Ron, ‘A man of many worlds: Schrödinger and Spain’, in Michel Bitbol & Olivier Darrigol (eds.), *Erwin Schrödinger: Philosophy and the Birth of Quantum Mechanics* (Gif-Sur-Yvettes Cedex: Editions Frontieres, 1992), 9–22.
- 10 See for example, Max Born & Erwin Schrödinger, ‘The Absolute Field Constant in the New Field Theory’, *Nature* 135 (1935): 342; Erwin Schrödinger, ‘The Statistical Law in Nature’, *Nature* 153 (1944): 704–705.
- 11 Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993). Latour, ‘Do scientific objects have a history?’
- 12 Bruno Latour, ‘Visualisation and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands’, *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* 6 (1986): 7–8; Latour, ‘Do scientific objects have a history?’, 85.
- 13 Zubiri, *Naturaleza*, 318–321.
- 14 Latour, ‘Visualisation and Cognition’, 1–40.
- 15 Ibid. 7.
- 16 Ibid. 19–20.
- 17 Ibid. 21. Italics in the original.
- 18 Erwin Schrödinger, ‘Religion und Naturwissenschaft’, *Physikalische Blätter* (1961): 105–110. The text was also published earlier in *Die Natur und die Griechen* (Hamburg & Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1956).
- 19 Erwin Schrödinger, *Matter and Mind* (Cambridge: CUP, 1958), 52–68, 69–87. The issue is also present in *What is life?*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1945), 87–91 there discussed in terms of determinacy and free will.
- 20 Erwin Schrödinger, *The Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics: Dublin Seminars and Other Unpublished Essays* (1949–1952), ed. M. Bitbol. (Woodbridge CT.: Ox Bow Press, 1995), 195.
- 21 Schrödinger, *Matter and Mind*, 51.
- 22 Zubiri, *Naturaleza*, 346–350, 428–433.
- 23 Xavier Zubiri, Folder 003-03-04, 76, Zubiri’s personal archive at the Fundacion Xavier Zubiri, Madrid. The document is a mechanograph notebook, signed by Zubiri. Titelpage says: Prof. von Mises. Differential- und Integralgleichungen

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der Mechanik und Physik. Berlin, Wintersemester 1930–1931. ‘Hier sehen wir deutlich was das Problem der Entwicklung eigentlich ist, es handelt sich im wesentlichen nicht darum, dass die Reihe konvergiert, sondern dass eine beliebige Funktion herauskommt. Also die Vollständigkeitsfrage!’

- 24 I use a form concept similar to the concept of symbolic form introduced by the German philosopher and historian of science Ernst Cassirer in his 1910 *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff*. ‘Each particular member of experience possesses a symbolic character, in so far as the law of the whole, which includes the totality of its members, is posited and intended in it, Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function, and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity* (Chicago/London: Open Court Publishing, 1923), 300.

III

SETTING KNOWLEDGE IN MOTION

A societal knowledge breakthrough

Knowledge of potatoes in Sweden, 1749–50

Erik Bodensten

In 1749–50, a societal knowledge breakthrough occurred in Sweden. Via two different forms of media—the pulpit and the printed almanac, the closest Sweden had to mass media at this time—almost the entire Swedish population would have received a thorough grounding in a completely new crop: the potato. This knowledge intervention would by extension prove highly significant for Swedish society, as it lay the foundation for one of the most important transformations of Swedish agriculture, at a time when Sweden still suffered recurrent crop failure crises and had begun to experience increasingly rapid population growth.

However, the historiography has barely noticed this event. Instead, it has focused on the origins of the knowledge—first and foremost the figure of Jonas Alströmer, who in 1727 published a small book promoting the potato in Sweden—the most innovative texts and authors, the spatial dissemination of the knowledge, the moments when particularly numerous texts were published, and when the practice of growing potatoes had its breakthrough and potatoes became an important food crop.¹

The inclination to focus on origins, producers, discoveries, and innovations, and how knowledge travels spatially, is of course a general and longstanding trend among historians working on the multifaceted subject of knowledge. Even though the old model of diffusion has been thoroughly refuted, there is still a clear tendency to pay less attention to knowledge as it moves socially, away from elites, learned communities, and the original sites of knowledge production, towards society at

large. Generally, historians continue to be obsessed with novelty and rather narrow social strata.²

Although there is no doubt a growing interest in the circulation of knowledge, historians of knowledge still only rarely analyse this process from a truly societal viewpoint, giving priority to the many rather than the few, to knowledge of obvious societal importance, and with close attention paid to economic, media, political, social, and cultural contexts alike.³ The aim of this essay is to analyse the historical moment when a particular society experienced an important knowledge breakthrough. Using the case of the potato, I seek to demonstrate empirically how historians of knowledge can approach the important phenomenon of how and why knowledge circulates and attains broad societal significance. Echoing an old ambition in social history, and paraphrasing James Secord, this essay thus asks how, why and when knowledge of the potato ceased to be the exclusive property of single individuals and groups and became part of the accepted understanding of much wider groups of people in early modern Sweden.⁴

Initial interventions, 1727–47

In 1727, a small tract on potatoes appeared in Sweden. Hardly more than a leaflet, 84 octodecimo pages, it was primarily devoted to sheep farming. In fact, the subject of the potato was only addressed in a final appendix, fifteen pages in all. However, the publication was written in a highly accessible fashion, in Swedish, and sold at the reasonable price of 13 öre silvermynt. In it, the author Jonas Alströmer (1685–1761) offered his Swedish audience the first detailed account of how potatoes were grown, harvested, stored, and cooked. Having spent almost two decades abroad, mainly in Britain, becoming both a wealthy and enlightened man, Alströmer had had plenty of opportunities to observe the growing of potatoes. After returning to his war-torn country in 1724, he had established a major textile manufactory in the town of Alingsås, and, alongside many other projects, had started an experimental garden of his own. Three years later he was ready to announce his complete confidence in the potato, a most useful food crop, generally familiar to Europe, but,

according to Alströmer, thus far completely unknown to his Swedish compatriots. His explicit mission was to ‘encourage one and all’, ‘here in Sweden’, to start growing potatoes. This would ensure, somewhat more implicitly, a much-needed general agricultural improvement, especially for the less fortunate, constantly facing the threat of famine.⁵

The knowledge Alströmer set out in his tract would form the basis of much of the Swedish understanding of the potato for a long time. In that regard, it was a highly influential knowledge intervention. However, its social reach and impact seem to have been very limited. The knowledge first and foremost circulated in a narrow circle—a knowledge network if one will—comprised of Alströmer’s friends, relatives, business partners, and political allies. Over the years, knowledge of the potato was all but absent from the many texts where one would otherwise expect to find it: only a handful other authors circulated the knowledge. Most influential was probably Eric Salander (1699–1764)—soon to become one of the most prolific economic writers of his age—who in 1731 included a five-page subessay on the potato in the revised edition of his reasonably successful *Gårds-Fogde Instruction*, a book in the German *Hausväter-literatur* tradition, primarily aimed at the landed gentry. Being one of Alströmer’s closest associates and an earlier employee at his manufactory, Salander never mentioned Alströmer, although clearly following in his footsteps, using the same examples and similar phrasing.⁶

Following the initial interest in Alströmer’s new food crop, nothing much happened. In 1733, Alströmer made a new attempt to draw public attention to the potato, publishing a second text on the subject. In the foreword, he said he had considered writing an entirely new edition of his earlier publication, but recognizing there was really not very much to add, he had decided to just write a three-page addendum to the text.⁷ One possible explanation to this lack of interest in the new crop—framed as a surrogate for grain, and associated with the poor and especially crop failure—can be found in the good, in many cases truly abundant, harvests in Sweden in the subsequent period.

This all changed in the 1740s. In the early years of the decade, much of Sweden suffered a severe crop failure. The following years also saw bad harvests.⁸ Now, the Riksdag, the Swedish Diet, began to take an

interest in the potato. In February 1747, the parliamentary Economy and Commerce Committee had a report read aloud on the benefits of potatoes, especially in relation to crop failure, which had been drawn up by the same committee in 1741, although then without any consequences noted. The committee now returned to its old report, as a few ‘knowledgeable men’ with experience of the crop also presented the great benefits of the potato to the committee. These men—not named in the minutes—focused on the acute food shortages in many parts of the country and on the large grain imports, significant even in normal years, but truly worrying as they created a large trade deficit.⁹

Shortly after this hearing, Salander, informed the Committee that the Royal Academy of Sciences—of which Salander was a member—had the intention to publicize some kind of a report of the potato. In response, the Committee informed the Academy that it would very much like to see the Academy go forward with this initiative. Several of the Academy’s most influential members, among them two of its co-founders Mårten Triewald (1691–1747) (another long-time friend of Alströmer) and Sten Carl Bielke (1709–53), displayed a deep interest in the potato, and the motion was granted. In fact, Triewald and Alströmer had brought the potato to the Academy’s attention a session back in 1739. Now, the Academy turned to Alströmer, one of its other influential co-founders, who, in his role as editor, in turn invited three men to give short comments on the subject.¹⁰ These reflections, written in the form of letters, were then published in the quarterly journal of the Academy, in early autumn 1747.¹¹ They were also referred to in great detail in the Stockholm newspaper, *Stockholms Weckoblad*, and in the learned magazine *Lärda Tidningar*.¹²

Alströmer’s position in the Academy clearly left its mark on the publication, and his claim to be the great advocate of the potato was now confirmed in print. The first contribution, written by Alströmer’s teenage son, Patrick (1733–1804), set the tone. In seven pages, it recapitulated what his father had already presented, with explicit references to both of his publications.¹³ The most substantial contribution, fifteen pages long, was written by Jacob Albrecht von Lantingshausen (1699–1769). Lantingshausen had recently returned to Sweden to be appointed

major-general after more than twenty years of foreign military service. It was this foreign experience that Alströmer asked him to present to the Academy. Lantingshausen explained that the potato was very widespread in Germany, and that it had proved to be just as beneficial as Alströmer claimed. He consistently spoke of Alströmer as a patriot and a leading light: it was he who should have all the credit for this knowledge having reached Sweden. Most having already been said on the matter, Lantingshausen still wanted to make a few additions and careful corrections though. A new element in Lantingshausen's account was that the potato should leave the kitchen garden for the fields. He was also the first in Swedish to describe the potato as adequate feed for domestic livestock, and also that it could be used for making aquavit, even though he had not seen this himself.¹⁴

Someone who had actually witnessed an experiment with distilling was Carl Skytte, author of the third contribution, who in just two pages gave a brief outline of the procedure.¹⁵ The following year, the Academy—which would frequently return to the subject in subsequent decades—published a similarly short contribution by Eva De la Gardie, in which she described, on the basis of her own successful experiments, how she had used potatoes to produce both aquavit and starch, the latter something Alströmer had previously only mentioned as a possibility.¹⁶

Public announcements, 1749–50

Following the Diet of 1746–47, at which the Estates of the Realm frequently discussed how knowledge of potatoes could be disseminated as widely as possible, the issue was handed over to the government. Once again, we are able to discern Alströmer's key role in the circulation of knowledge. In March 1748, the government asked for a report from the responsible departments on the measures proposed by the Diet. The report was at least drafted by Alströmer, who had served as a senior official at one of departments, the Board of Commerce, since 1739. Published in July 1748, the report rejected the compulsory provisions advocated by the Diet. Before anyone could be obliged to grow potatoes, the supply of seed potatoes had to be secured. As potatoes were

still only grown on a very limited scale, seed potatoes would have to be purchased overseas. The government departments thus recommended that the government acquire 100 barrels of foreign seed potatoes ready for the following spring, which the government subsequently approved. It was also suggested that the Board of Commerce issue to all Swedes a printed summary of all the relevant knowledge on the subject. This too was approved.¹⁷

The task of writing the public announcement was given to Ulrik Rudenschöld (1704–65), a junior official at Alströmer's department, who had studied agriculture abroad for many years on behalf of the department. His subordinate position vis-à-vis Alströmer is clearly seen in the announcement, both in the phrasing and the detailed description of the cultivation method. The outline was mainly taken from Alströmer *films*. However, Rudenschöld—he too a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences—also incorporated the knowledge conveyed by Lantingshausen the previous year: the source of the information that potato plants should be trimmed, and that the leaves could be used as animal feed. De la Gardie's information about the manufacturing of flour, bread, and aquavit was also incorporated. Her account of the process for producing potato flour and potato starch, however, was considered redundant, as the announcement was aimed at 'the service and relief of the peasantry and the poor'.¹⁸

For the purposes of disseminating this knowledge, the official public announcement system was used, which Swedish authorities had benefited from for generations when they wanted to inform Swedes of something of particular importance. In April 1749, 4,000 copies of the text were distributed to both the civil and the ecclesiastical administration. According to a well-regulated procedure, the actual announcement was then made by the parish priests, read aloud from the pulpits of all churches—some 3,000—across the country. The priests were explicitly prohibited from cutting or in any way summarizing the contents of these texts: everything had to be read in full, which in the case of these eight dense quarto pages would have taken some time. The congregation—nobility and peasants alike were required to attend church, with very high church attendance as a result—was expected to listen in

silence, and had the opportunity to read the announcement on their own afterwards.¹⁹

Rudenschöld's announcement and the manner in which it was communicated in 1749 to virtually every Swedish subject, together with the duly imported and distributed seed potatoes, marked a societal knowledge breakthrough in the country. Compared to the earlier publications that had discussed the potato, in rather expensive editions of a few hundred copies at most, this had a completely different kind of impact, especially as it was backed by all the royal and ecclesiastical authority and legitimacy that came from an announcement of this kind.²⁰

However, almost as important was the fact that the Royal Academy of Sciences chose to include sections on the potato in several editions of the almanacs it had just been granted a monopoly to publish. Thus, in 1749—that is, the first year the Academy itself could decide the content of the almanacs—a short essay, four quadragesimo-octavo pages long, was included. It was written by Erland Zacharias Tursén (1722–78)—a junior clerk at the Academy, who attended Alströmer's sheep-farming school outside Alingsås—and was largely a précis of Alströmer's knowledge, with explicit references to both his publications. The edition numbered some 18,000 copies. The following year, an edited extract of Rudenschöld's public notice was included, in two different editions, eight pages long. The Finnish edition was translated into Finnish, the language primarily spoken in the eastern part of the country. These two editions numbered 53,000 copies in total, at a time when Sweden—including present-day Finland—counted just some 400,000 households.²¹

Few, if any, types of secular printed material had an impact that could even begin to measure up to the almanac. It was sold at a very low price—2 öre silvermynt, as it had been for a long time—and at a time when even the most popular newspaper, *Stockholms Post Tidningar*, had a print run of only 1,500 copies, it was printed in uniquely large editions. It thus reached a considerable portion of the population, for whom it was a much-loved book. The almanac underwent only very small, gradual changes in terms of form and content. By the mid eighteenth century, in addition to astronomical data such as weather forecasts and dates for sowing, it also included miscellaneous information about such things as

postal rates and market days. For many ordinary people, the almanac was indispensable, and frequently the household's only printed book. Furthermore, the almanac also included a short essay on a subject of public interest, most often farming or medicine, and this was something the Academy of Sciences continued and enlarged on. This was also the format in which the knowledge of potatoes now was presented.²²

Explaining a societal knowledge breakthrough

The societal knowledge breakthrough in 1749–50 did not result in any general breakthrough concerning the *practice* of growing potatoes in Sweden. From an apparently modest start, however, it seems that potato cultivation had increased considerably in many places in subsequent years. However, it would not be until the 1770s, when Sweden suffered a particularly severe crop failure crisis, that it broke through in Sweden on a significant scale, and it was not until the early nineteenth century that the potato became a Swedish staple crop. Clearly, this required more than just knowledge. A shortage of seed potatoes, legal limits on alcohol manufacture for private use, as well as mainly unenclosed farmland, were just a few of the factors that for long stood in the way of the general breakthrough in potato cultivation.²³ The societal knowledge breakthrough of 1749–50—when most Swedes acquired at least a rudimentary understanding of the potato, and how it should be grown, harvested, stored, cooked, and refined—nevertheless marked the crucial first step in this protracted process.

The societal knowledge breakthrough of 1749–50 was anything but the result of a linear, cumulative, predetermined diffusion process. The origins of the knowledge are also of little guidance in understanding this breakthrough. Instead, it was the result of favourable circumstances, which, from the more general perspective of the history of knowledge, may be attributed to the knowledge actors and knowledge institutions involved, and the growing new demand for knowledge.

It should be noted that knowledge of the potato did not just trickle into Sweden from abroad, but was deliberately set in motion on the initiative of individual actors. The determined efforts by Jonas Alströmer and his

associates stand out. Alströmer in particular exhibited a strong desire to make knowledge of potatoes available throughout society. As such, he served as a good example of the emphasis on utility, mercantilism, and patriotism of his time, and its patriarchal views on the diffusion of knowledge: useful knowledge could only benefit the general public if enlightened men such as Alströmer undertook to pay for and do the business of knowledge dissemination. These efforts and the civic credibility following on from this also came in handy in the political sphere in the pursuit of lucrative state loans and subsidies, something that should probably not be underestimated.

Another key factor was the significant and increasing resources at the disposal of these knowledge actors. Their access to several important knowledge institutions, from where it was possible to promote knowledge both directly and indirectly and to transcend social boundaries, seems to have been particularly important. The Royal Academy of Sciences—to which Alströmer, Salander, and Rudenschöld all belonged and to which Eva De la Gardie would also be included by dint of her husband Clas Ekeblad's membership—clearly played a crucial role. Alströmer's prominent position at the Board of Commerce, where he was assisted by Rudenschöld, represented another important platform. The parliamentary Committee of Economy and Commerce, the Manufacturing Board, and Alströmer's manufactory and sheep-farming school should also be mentioned.

This knowledge network, centred on Alströmer, was also united in its political preferences and excellent political connections. Lantingshausen, for instance, was a rising star in the ruling Hat Party, soon to become one of its leading figures; he was also a member of the Diet, and sat on the Committee of Economy and Commerce. De la Gardie, on the other hand, had been born into the Hat Party: her parents had belonged to its early leadership, and her husband attained increasingly prominent positions. Indeed, in December 1746, Clas Ekeblad joined the government—where he would show a great deal of interest in the potential of the potato—just as the Hat Party was about to consolidate its position. Rudenschöld, if not through his superior Alströmer then through his own family, could also be linked to the Hats. And not

forgetting that the Academy of Sciences had been founded under the auspices of the Hat Party in 1739, and would long continue to be closely associated with the party.²⁴

Alströmer and Salander were seen as some of the most high-profile proponents of the Hat Party's protectionist manufacturing policy. As owners of two of the largest manufactories in the country, and courtesy of their influential political patrons in the Hat Party, they were able to ensure very substantial government subsidies for very long periods. This made both of them politically controversial, and they were heavily criticized by the political opposition. For example, Alströmer's appointment to the Board of Commerce in 1739 met with strong opposition, and could only be implemented on condition that he was unwaged. He later did very well from the Hat Party's political victory in the Diet of 1746–47, finally receiving the salary he had previously been denied, while his manufactory was granted both new privileges and highly favourable government loans.

To sum up, the people in Alströmer's network who set out to make the potato better known in Sweden did not lack resources and power. Without, it is difficult to see how this breakthrough would have been made possible at that stage. The initial intervention in the 1720s, albeit not without significance, was of limited success. However, when the same network tried again twenty years later, it did so from a much different position, this time working from within several important knowledge institutions and with much stronger external support. This is true also with respect to the content of the knowledge: what enabled Alströmer and his associates to determine the contents of the knowledge put into societal circulation was the positions of power they eventually managed to reach. Hence, this speaks to the general point: that in order to understand the circulation of knowledge, and perhaps even more so the societal breakthrough of knowledge, one needs to pay close attention to the level of power and resources available to the actors. As emphasized by Kapil Raj, one important strength of the circulation model is that it acknowledges the importance of agency, which the diffusion model does not. However, Raj continues, this is not to say that all historical actors involved were equally important. They clearly were not. Even the

figure of Jonas Alströmer proved significantly more influential in his efforts circulating knowledge when, late in life, he wielded greater power. Thus, the circulation perspective also helps us identify the conditions and restrictions under which the actors operated.²⁵

Now, turning to the growing new demand for knowledge of the potato, it had started in the 1720s and 1730s. Following Sweden's crushing defeat in the Great Northern War (1700–1721), the general sentiment was that Sweden needed to be revived. This perspective included a number of different areas, and not least agriculture, which was highlighted in a new way, often by looking at Britain, which was the main agricultural model of the day. One reason for this was the import of grain, which had become significant—in relative terms—after Sweden lost its grain-producing Baltic provinces to Russia, and which resulted in a negative trade balance. According to the mercantilism of the time, this represented a major problem. In the 1740s, the interest in agricultural matters increased further, as was reflected not least in the sharp increase in farming literature.²⁶

The growing interest in agriculture among the social elite was a general European trend. This was due in part to a desire to reduce imports of foodstuffs and thus improve the trade balance, a discussion which in Sweden—not least at the Diet of 1746–47—came to turn on how the extensive alcohol production could be reduced and regulated, and encouraged to use the potato as a substitute for grain.²⁷ Another new and gradually more important motive was food security. All across Europe, governments and elites began to rethink the basis of national wealth and strength. Centred on the concept of the population, a wide-ranging field of knowledge arose, examining how the state should best ensure a large, healthy, and productive population. The stakes were undoubtedly high, because the result of this project would determine—it was thought—the economic and military might of the state. Thus viewed as the prime resource of the nation, the state had to secure an ample supply of nourishing food for the population. It was within this new framework of governance that the potato began to attract ever more interest in the eighteenth century, the historian Rebecca Earle argues.²⁸

In conclusion, two expanding fields of knowledge came together in

the potato: one related to fiscal matters and one related to population policy. Combined, they created favourable conditions for a societal knowledge breakthrough. The interest was further strengthened by the crop failures of the 1740s, and in particular the severe subsistence crisis in the early years of the decade. Thus, the societal knowledge breakthrough that occurred in Sweden in 1749–50 can be seen as an example of how large-scale societal crises, as Johan Östling and David Larsson Heidenblad have suggested, can create a new demand for knowledge and initiate a socially much broader form of knowledge circulation.²⁹ Naturally, the breakthrough occurred with a certain delay, and it was an irony that when it finally came in 1750 it coincided with the most abundant Swedish harvest of the entire century.

For historians of knowledge, writing a societal history of knowledge demands an important analytical shift, and almost inevitably places different actors, institutions, events, time periods, practices, sources, and media in focus.³⁰ In the literature on the potato in Sweden, the years 1749–50 have been at best very peripheral. The same must be said of important knowledge actors such as Eric Salander, Ulric Rudenschöld, and Erland Tursén, not to mention the thousands of parish priests, civil servants, and peddlers in almanacs who were crucial in realizing the societal knowledge breakthrough. However, for a societal history of knowledge, and particularly one centred on the issue of societal knowledge breakthroughs, events and actors such as these must be closely scrutinized.³¹

Notes

- 1 Gustaf Utterström, 'Potatisodlingen i Sverige under frihetstiden: Med en översikt över odlingens utveckling intill omkring 1820', *Historisk tidskrift* 63/2 (1943); Hugo Osvald, *Potatisen: Odlingshistoria och användning* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1965); Carl-Johan Gadd, *Järn och potatis: Jordbruk, teknik och social omvandling i Skaraborgs län 1750–1860* (Gothenburg: Ekonomisk-historiska institutionen, 1983).

Jonas Alströmer was born Jonas Toresson, later changed his name to Alström, and took the name Alströmer when he was ennobled in his sixties.

- 2 James A. Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit', *Isis* 95/4 (2004); Andreas W. Daum,

- ‘Varieties of Popular Science and the Transformations of Public Knowledge: Some Historical Reflections’, *Isis* 100/2 (2009); Philipp Sarasin, ‘Was ist Wissensgeschichte?’, *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* (IASL) 36 (2011); Simone Lässig, ‘The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda’, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016); Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, Erling Sandmo, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg, ‘The history of knowledge and the circulation of knowledge: An introduction’, in Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018).
- 3 Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘Cirkulation—ett kunskapshistoriskt nyckelbegrepp’, *Historisk tidskrift* 137/2 (2017).
 - 4 Secord, ‘Knowledge in Transit’, 655. The outlined framework first and foremost draws inspiration from the modern period works by James Secord, and David Larsson Heidenblad respectively, see for instance James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘Mapping a New History of the Ecological Turn: The Circulation of Environmental Knowledge in Sweden 1967’, *Environment and History* 24/2 (2018); see also Erik Bodensten, ‘Political knowledge in public circulation: The case of subsidies in eighteenth-century Sweden’, in Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge*.
 - 5 Jonas Alström, *Den Swänska Wårdande Fåra-Herdens Trogne Wäg-Wisare Til en god Fåra-Skiötzel, Jemte et Bihang om Potatoes eller Jord-Päron, samt Alm-Wild-Apal- och Eke-Träns planterande...* (Stockholm: Benj. G. Schneider, 1727): 62–72; Eli F. Heckscher, ‘Jonas Alströmer’, *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, no. 1 (1918).
 - 6 Eric Salander, *Tilförlätelig Gårdz-Fogde Instruction, Grundad i nödige Mål på Lag och Kongl. Förordn. Eller Underrättelse För Gårdz-Fogdar och Landt-Hushållare ... förbättrad och tilökt i denna Andra Edition* (Stockholm: Johann Heinrich Russworm, 1731): 102, 159–164; Lars Magnusson, ‘Eric Salander’, *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, no. 31 (2000–2002).
 - 7 Jonas Alström, *Fåra-Herdans Hemliga Konster, Uptäkte Samt thet Gyllene Fåra-skinnetz Oskattbara wärkan och säkra Genwäg Til Sweriges Rikes och thes Inbyggares Welferd, Kortteligen föresteldt, Genom Tilökning, Til Then Swenska Wårdande Fåra-Herdans Trogna Wägwisare, Hwar til ock är bifogat något angående Potatæs Planterande ...* (Skara: Herm. Arnold Möller, [1733]): 50–52.
 - 8 Rodney Edvinsson, ‘Swedish Harvests, 1665–1820: Early Modern Growth in the Periphery of European Economy’, *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 57/1 (2009).
 - 9 Utterström, ‘Potatisodlingen i Sverige’, 148–151.

- 10 *Kongl. Svenska Vetenskaps Akademiens Handlingar, För År 1747*, vol. 8 (Stockholm: Lorentz Ludvig Grefing, [1747]), 191; Utterström, 'Potatisodlingen i Sverige', 151–152; Sten Lindroth, *Kungl. Svenska vetenskapsakademiens historia 1739–1818, 1: Tiden till Wargentins död (1783)* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vetenskapsakademien, 1967): 262; Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1999): 149.
- 11 Lindroth, *Kungl. Svenska vetenskapsakademiens historia*, 127.
- 12 *Lärda Tidningar*, 1747, no. 50; and *Stockholms Weckoblad*, 1747, nos. 49–51.
- 13 *Kongl. Svenska Vetenskaps Akademiens Handlingar, För År 1747*, 185–191.
- 14 *Kongl. Svenska Vetenskaps Akademiens Handlingar, För År 1747*, 192–206; Utterström, 'Potatisodlingen i Sverige', 150; Olof Jägerskiöld, 'Jacob Albrecht von Lantingshausen', *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, no. 22 (1977–79).
- 15 *Kongl. Svenska Vetenskaps Akademiens Handlingar, För År 1747*, 231–232.
- 16 *Kongl. Svenska Vetenskaps Akademiens Handlingar, För År 1748*, vol. 9 (Stockholm: Lars Salvius, [1748]), 277–278; Bengt Hildebrand, 'Eva Ekeblad f. De la Gardie', *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, no. 12 (1949).
- 17 Utterström, 'Potatisodlingen i Sverige', 152–153.
- 18 *Underrättelse Om Jord-Päröns Plantering, Nytt och bruk, Af Kongl. Maj:ts och Rikens Commerce Collegio utgifwen och til Trycket befordrad År 1749* (Stockholm: Kongl. Tryckeriet, [1749]); Utterström, 'Potatisodlingen i Sverige', 154; Ulla Johanson, 'Carl Rudenschöld', *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, no. 30 (1998–2000).
- 19 For the public announcement system, see Elisabeth Reuterswärd, *Ett massmedium för folket: Studier i de allmänna kungörelsernas funktion i 1700-talets samhälle* (Lund: Historiska institutionen, 2001).
- 20 Utterström, 'Potatisodlingen i Sverige', 154–161; Janken Myrdal, 'Lantbrukslitteraturen under 1700-talet som indikator på djupgående mentalitetsförändringar i samhället', in Olof Kåhrström (ed.), *Den svenska lantbrukslitteraturen från äldsta tid t.o.m. år 1850: Bibliografisk förteckning uppgjord av Per Magnus Hebbe: Faksimilutgåva med korrigeringar, kompletteringar och tillägg* (Stockholm: Kungl. Skogs- och Lantbruksakademien, 2014 [1939–42]): 16–18.
- 21 *Almanach För Året, Efter vår Frälsares Christi Födelse, 1749. Til Lunds Horizont...* (Stockholm: Lars Salvius, [1748]); *Almanach För Året Efter vår Frälsares Christi Födelse, 1750. Til Götheborgs Horizont ...* (Stockholm: Pet. J. Nyström, [1749]); *Almanach eli ajan tietö meidän wapahtajam Christuxen syndymän jälkeen vuonna 1750. Turun horizontin jälken...* (Stockholm: Jacob Merckelliida, [1749]); Lindroth, *Kungl. Svenska vetenskapsakademiens historia*, 827, 837, 848; Per-Ola Räf, *Färkonsulenter på 1700-talet: Biografisk matrikel över eleverna vid Jonas Alströmers schäferskola på Höjentorp och i Alingsås 1736–64* (Stockholm: Kungl. Skogs- och lantbruksakademien, 2010): 111–113; Olof Kåhrström (ed.), *Den svenska lantbrukslitteraturen från äldsta tid t.o.m. år 1850: Bibliografisk förteckning uppgjord av Per Magnus Hebbe: Faksimilutgåva med korrigeringar*,

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- 22 Gustaf Edvard Klemming & Gustaf Eneström, *Sveriges kalendariska literatur: Svenska almanachor, kalendrar och kalendariska skrifter*, 2 vols. (Stockholm: Nordstedt, 1878–79); Lindroth, *Kungl. Svenska vetenskapsakademiens historia*, 823; Ingemar Oscarsson, 'Från statstidning till akademitidning 1734–1809', in Karl Erik Gustafsson & Per Rydén (eds.), *Världens äldsta Post- och Inrikes Tidningar under 1600-, 1700-, 1800-, 1900- och 2000-talen* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2005): 142.
- 23 Utterström, 'Potatisodlingen i Sverige', 166–185; Osvald, *Potatisen*, 82–83, 88–98; Gadd, *Järn och potatis*, 108.
- 24 Bengt Hildebrand, *Kungl. Svenska vetenskaps akademien: Förhistoria, grundläggning och första organisation* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vetenskapsakademien, 1939): 238, 619.
- 25 Kapil Raj, 'Beyond Postcolonialism... and Postpositivism: Circulation and the Global History of Science', *Isis* 104/2 (2013): 344; see also Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?', 169–171.
- 26 Mats Morell, 'Den agrara ingenjörskonsten', in *Jordpäron: Svensk ekonomihistorisk läsebok* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2011); Myrdal, 'Lantbrukslitteraturen under 1700-talet'; Lars Magnusson, *Sveriges ekonomiska historia* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2016): 226–230.
- 27 Artur Evers, *Den svenska brännvinslagstiftningens historia*, 2 vols. (Lund: Håkan Ohlssons boktryckeri, 1923–31); Utterström, 'Potatisodlingen i Sverige', 150, 182.
- 28 Earle, 'Promoting Potatoes', 151–157.
- 29 Östling & Larsson Heidenblad, 'Cirkulation', 283.
- 30 Östling & Larsson Heidenblad, 'Cirkulation', 281–282.
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Contested knowledge

UNESCO and the circulation of racial knowledge in post-war Sweden

Martin Ericsson

Knowledge circulates, but not always smoothly. When it travels from one site or context to another, it has a tendency to change. Some parts are left out, others transform, others are received and interpreted in new ways.¹ Furthermore, it does not circulate on its own. Agents such as persons, organizations and governmental agencies make it circulate. They can also try to make the circulation stop or change its course. Even more so when it comes to controversial knowledge, and perhaps in particular when claims of knowledge with potentially far-reaching political implications circulate or are diffused across national borders, since they then have to be translated in order to fit into new cultural, social, and political contexts. Studying the transnational circulation of controversial knowledge thus gives us important insights into the mechanisms that promote, transform, or even stop claims of knowledge.

One case that elucidates these phenomena is the global campaign undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the early 1950s, with the goal of spreading scientific claims of knowledge of the biological concept of race. The idea was to prevent racial discrimination and genocide, and the memory of the Holocaust was one important reason for this tremendous task of ‘mental engineering’, as it has been called by historian Poul Duedahl.² The horrors of the Holocaust were seen as a consequence of the Nazis’ ‘unscientific’ racial ideas. Accordingly, in order to prevent such horrors, humankind’s understanding of race had to be based on ‘scientific’

knowledge. The campaign started in 1949–51, when two expert panels appointed by UNESCO issued two ‘statements on race’. Then, the organization launched an international campaign in which the contents of the statements were to be diffused globally. This makes the campaign interesting from a history of knowledge perspective. UNESCO did not want the new claims of knowledge to remain inside scholarly circles. The point was to make them circulate and, hopefully, become accepted as valid knowledge on human races in different national settings.

Much is known about the conception of the two statements on race; less is known about how their content was circulated, and this essay is a contribution to this under-researched topic. I will focus on Sweden, analysing the efforts made by the Swedish UNESCO council (every member state of the organization was supposed to have a national council). In 1952, UNESCO issued the book *What is Race?* based on the statements. In 1955, the Swedish council issued a translation with a somewhat different content, titled *Raser och folk* (‘Races and People’). Eleven years later, the book was reissued, this time with important alterations. I will consider the question of how UNESCO’s claims of racial knowledge were translated and transformed into a Swedish national context, examining the publication of the Swedish versions of *What is Race?*. In doing so, I draw on the theoretical observations made by historian Helge Jordheim. He has warned us against seeing books and other printed works as neutral, stable, and immutable carriers of knowledge that circulates between sites. Instead, books in themselves can also be seen as sites of knowledge circulation. Books are translated, published in revised editions, illustrated, and provided with prefaces written by a publisher or an editor. Each time one of these things happens, there is a chance that the ‘original’ claims of knowledge in the book are modified or transformed.³ As I will show, that is exactly what happened in the case of *What is Race?*

Using a method suggested by David Larsson Heidenblad, I will analyse reviews of the book in Swedish newspapers to see whether the claims of knowledge were accepted, contested, or even rejected.⁴ We cannot take for granted that everyone embraced them. In fact, we know that in other parts of the world, the UNESCO project was not unanimously

accepted. Some American states banned UNESCO educational material from public schools, accusing it of being communist-inspired, and in 1955, the anti-apartheid implications of UNESCO's racial campaign even saw South Africa withdraw from the organization.⁵

Producing knowledge: UN statements on race

The project was a result of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the second article of which stated that every human being had certain rights regardless of 'race' or 'colour'. Following the declaration, the UN Economic and Social Council directed UNESCO to launch a campaign in order to combat racism, adding that it should be based on scientific knowledge. But before this knowledge could be spread, it had to be produced.

UNESCO did so by appointing a panel, which convened in Paris in 1949 to draft a document entitled 'Statement on Race'.⁶ This panel, almost completely made up of social scientists, came up with a draft that admitted that races could be defined as populations exhibiting 'certain physical differences as a result of their somewhat different biological histories', characterized by 'some concentrations, relative as to their frequency and distribution, of hereditary particles (genes) or physical characters'. It also stated that it was common among physical anthropologists to divide mankind into three major racial groups (the Negroid, the Caucasoid, and the Mongoloid) but added that these groups were neither eternal nor fixed, and that many individuals were hard to place in a distinct racial group. It also underscored that racial groups did not correlate with religious, linguistic or national divides, and that there was very weak evidence for mental racial differences. The statement spoke out against laws forbidding racial intermarriage, since there was no evidence that race-mixing was biologically unsound. In one passage, it even claimed that the race concept had been so misused that 'it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term "race" altogether and speak of ethnic groups'. For all 'practical purposes', the concept should be seen as a 'social myth'.⁷

This was paradoxical: human races existed, but the term 'race' should

be abandoned. These inconsistencies led to circulation problems when the statement was released in 1950. In the mass media, it seems to have circulated as UNESCO wanted it to, generating favourable press coverage at least in the US.⁸ Among scholars, however, it met with severe criticism. A large number of geneticists, physical anthropologists, and biologists rejected the proposal that the term race should be abandoned, and some even criticized the denial of mental racial differences. UNESCO tried to handle the conflict by appointing yet another panel, now given the task of reformulating the original statement. The new panel consisted of fourteen scientists from the natural sciences, and one of the few members from a non-Anglophone country was the Swedish physician Gunnar Dahlberg, head of the State Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala (more of him later). Here it suffices to say that the panel was made up of scientists who in many instances had written about race and genetics since the 1930s, and that many of them, such as Dahlberg as well as the geneticists Julian Huxley and J. B. S. Haldane, had been staunch anti-fascists and from the very first condemned the Nazi atrocities against European Jews.

A conference was held in Paris in June 1951, and the result was the so-called second statement on race. It asserted that there was no scientific evidence justifying racial discrimination, repeating the first statement's denunciation of laws forbidding interracial marriages. It underscored that there were no clear lines between races, and that racial divisions rarely coincided with religious, linguistic, and national ones. But at the same time it underscored that there actually were human races, at least the three major groups mentioned in the first statement, and that it would be a mistake to abandon the term altogether. Regarding mental differences, the statement admitted that it was hard to know whether intelligence was primarily genetically inherited or a result of environmental factors. But whereas the first statement said that it most likely was significant mental racial similarities, the second statement said that it was possible, although not yet definitively proved, that 'some types of innate capacity for intellectual and emotional responses are commoner in one human group than in another'.⁹

Aside from the important differences, the two statements were broadly

similar. For example, they both dismissed all ideas of ‘superior’ races, and although they differed on the question of mental differences, both underscored that differences in intelligence could not be essential or even very large. But how new was this knowledge? One important insight in the history of knowledge is that the production and the circulation of knowledge are two different things, which do not always coincide in time.¹⁰

UNESCO’s two statements on race are a perfect illustration of this. The ideas of racial differences, and especially the ones in the second statement, were not the result of any significant scientific discovery made around 1950. In major respects they were already formulated in the 1930s. Back then, the science of race had been a battleground. On one side, there were scholars claiming the existence of superior and inferior races with fixed physical and mental characteristics. Their science legitimized racial discrimination, for example against Jews, and some aspects of their claims were incorporated into the policies of fascist regimes. On the other side, scholars such as Huxley, Haldane, Dahlberg, and others claimed that the study of racial differences was a scientifically sound project, but that the Nazis had got it all wrong. This group of scientists described racial differences as statistical genetic variations, generally saw few dangers in race-mixing, and claimed that the tendency to divide mankind into ever more races and sub-races had gone too far.¹¹ In the 1930s, these scholars had been the underdogs, challenging traditional notions of race. Now, their own claims of knowledge had prevailed, and thanks to UNESCO there were suddenly the resources to circulate them.

Circulating knowledge: *What is race?*

When the statements were released, UNESCO used its magazine, the *Courier*, to promote them as a ‘weapon’ in the ‘fight for human brotherhood’.¹² The *Courier* was, as Maria Simonsen shows in her essay in this anthology, an important resource for UNESCO in the post-war decades. In 1951–52, UNESCO also issued three book series under the titles ‘The Race Question and Modern Science’, ‘The Race Question and

Modern Thought', and 'Race and Society', all directed at adult readers. Renowned scholars, among them Claude Lévi-Strauss, contributed with texts explaining the content of the two statements. There is no systematic study of the reception of the books, but we know that their ambitions were high. By the end of the decade, some 300,000 copies had been printed in thirteen languages.¹³

Soon the idea of a publication aimed at younger readers, and especially intended for use in schools, was brought up. The result was the short book *What is Race?* It was written by Diana Tead, working at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, and illustrated by the American artist Jane Eakin. Tead collaborated closely with the geneticist Leslie Dunn, one of the scholars who had drafted the second statement. He had a substantial influence on the content, and as a result, large sections of the book were a crash-course in Mendelian genetics. That form of genetic science was not really contested in the 1950s, with the exception of the Soviet Union, where the anti-Mendelian theories of 'Lysenkoism' dominated during Stalin's dictatorship. But the question of human races was contested: that is evident from the production process of the book. In fact, it was originally published in 1951 with the title *What Science says about Race*. But that issue was withdrawn at the request of the American State Department, which feared that it could be used in the heated debate about segregation in the US South. When the new version, now titled *What is Race?*, was issued in 1952, Tead was careful not to mention any contemporary issues, and the only clear political statement in the text was a dismissal of the Nazi notion of 'Aryan' superiority as unscientific.¹⁴

What is Race? primarily diffused the claims of knowledge from the second statement, asserting that the race term was often misused, but that races nonetheless existed. 'When properly used', Tead wrote, the concept 'expresses an observable fact'. Mankind was divided into three major races, as in the statements, namely the Negroid, the Caucasoid, and the Mongoloid groups. The book listed several physical traits that could be used to distinguish these races from one another, such as skin colour, stature, skull shape, eye shape, and hair type. At the same time, Tead underscored that racial boundaries were not very precise, and that there were great genetic variations inside each group. Therefore, it was an

error to talk about ‘pure’ races, and the book saw no biological dangers in race-mixing. In perhaps the most controversial topic, Tead repeated the contents of the second statement on mental differences, claiming that there was a possibility of statistical variations between races regarding intelligence, and that some races perhaps had a larger proportion of mentally gifted individuals. But that was yet to be proven, she wrote, adding that members of all races had an ability to learn and to develop.

What is race? was not meant just to be read by schoolchildren; it was intended to be *used* by them. Therefore, the text was full of questions that readers were to answer. In the introduction, pupils were asked which human populations they thought of as races. For example, were Jews and ‘Aryans’ races? (No.) Were ‘Negroes’ a race? (Yes.) The book ended with a brief appendix with questions intended to be used by teachers in class room situations. These questions were, it can be argued, rather leading and formulated in a way that was intended to make sure that the pupils embraced the most important elements of the UNESCO campaign. A question such as ‘Why is the term “ethnic groups” better than “race” when applied to the different peoples of Europe?’ presumed that there were no separate races in Europe, and the question ‘Are we making progress in wiping out racialism (a) in our own community? (b) in the world?’ assumed that racism was something bad.

Exactly how the knowledge claims in *What is race?* circulated internationally is unknown, but we know that the book was published in English and French. A few years after its original publication, the book was translated into Swedish as well. This translation, however, did not only affect the language of the text. As I will show, it impacted on the claims of knowledge in the book, and the way these claims were supposed to circulate.

Transforming knowledge: The 1955 translation

When the Swedish version was published in 1955, it was not very easy to see where the content of the book originated. The fact that the text was written by Diana Tead and that the book already had been published by UNESCO in 1952 was never communicated to Swedish readers. The

Swedish version was titled *Raser och folk* ('Races and Peoples') and was issued by the national Swedish UNESCO council. Nothing was said about who actually wrote the book. Instead, it was said to be 'edited' by Gunnar Dahlberg, the Swedish race biologist who had been among the scholars producing the second statement on race.

The archival records of the council shows that in January 1954, Dahlberg was assigned 'to correct and to be responsible for the manuscript'.¹⁵ But what did he actually do, besides translating the text (if he was the one who did the translation at all)? To be frank, not very much. The substance of the Swedish book was an almost exact translation of Tead's text. One tiny thing was removed. *What is Race?* mentioned the archaeological discovery of the so-called Piltdown Man, an allegedly prehistoric branch of the evolutionary tree of *Homo sapiens*. In 1955, the discovery had been exposed as a hoax, and the Swedish version did not mention Piltdown Man. Another small thing was added. In a section discussing inheritance in human genetic isolates, Dahlberg added a footnote with a reference to one of his own publications.¹⁶ In fact, Dahlberg's work on the text seems to have been minimal. The plausible conclusion is that the Swedish council deemed his name as instrumental in order to add scientific weight to the publication. Dahlberg had been a respected scholar of race since the 1930s and 1940s, when he helped Jewish physicians flee Germany for Sweden, and he had published explicitly anti-fascist works. Back in 1933, he was even violently assaulted by Nazis during a public lecture in which he ridiculed the idea of a superior 'Nordic' race.¹⁷ It seems his name was a way to legitimize the controversial knowledge in Tead's text, promoting it as sound, scientific, and reliable.

The major alteration in the Swedish version came in the concluding appendix of questions. Dahlberg obviously had nothing to do with them either, since the section was rewritten by an otherwise unknown teacher.¹⁸ The appendix was substantially expanded and underwent two important changes. First, it was no longer aimed at schoolchildren, but at participants in adult education and study circles. Second, complex questions on genetic mechanisms were added, as well as questions with more direct political implications than in Tead's version. These questions corresponded well with the UNESCO campaign's goal of combating

racism in general. For example, readers were urged to interview people of 'alien origin' in order to overcome their own prejudices, and to list a few 'coloured persons who have made great contributions to the culture of the world'. Some questions even implied that racism was something that needed to be combatted inside Sweden as well as globally, from 'How do we treat negroes who visit our country?' to 'What do Swedes generally think of gypsies and so-called *tattare* [travellers]? How are they depicted in our newspapers?'¹⁹

Thus, the Swedish UNESCO council did not only want the knowledge claims contained in *What is Race?* to circulate, but to be actively used in a way that was meant to combat racism in general as well as in its particularly Swedish forms. We do not know if any of the questions were ever discussed in study circles in the way the council wanted them to be. Yet the public circulation of the book and its content can be studied in another way, by analysing how it was reviewed in Swedish newspapers. Such an analysis reveals that the ideas of race the UNESCO wanted to promote as scientific knowledge were far from automatically accepted. On the contrary, that were sometimes met with what Larsson Heidenblad calls 'rival knowledge'.²⁰

The book was discussed in at least six reviews, ranging from wholehearted acceptance to outright rejection.²¹ Two reviews, both in social-democratic papers, embraced it entirely. They summarized the book's assertions that there were human races but that no race was 'superior', and that there were few, if any, mental racial differences. They also explicitly condemned racism, although they tended to picture racism as something that existed outside Sweden, as in the American South or in apartheid South Africa.²² Two reviews, one in a liberal and one in a social-democratic paper, accepted parts of the claims of knowledge and expressed scepticism against others. They both agreed that the Nazis' racial ideology had been unscientific, and that racial discrimination was despicable. At the same time, however, they saw *Raser och folk* as too politicized a publication, claiming that the questions in the appendix were leading and that the problem of mental differences was too hastily dealt with.²³

Two reviews refused to accept the book's claims of knowledge altogether. In the liberal tabloid *Kvällsposten*, the reviewer admitted that

there had been 'racial myths' that had led to suffering and violence. But he accused UNESCO of replacing one racial myth with another, namely the 'pseudoscientific' myth of 'the equal mental endowment of the races'. He also explicitly listed some races as more 'superior' and 'inferior' than others. As the most mentally inferior, he mentioned the aboriginal population of Australia. According to this review, 'Australian Negroes' lacked all capacity to ever become civilized. A quite similar racialized view of mankind dominated in the conservative paper *Barometern*, in which a biology teacher wrote a very negative review of the book. The fact that the Nazis were wrong did not mean that UNESCO was right, he claimed, insisting that the idea of 'mental racial equality' was a fallacy. Although the reviewer did not explicitly mention any 'inferior' races, the existence of such was implied by the pictures accompanying the text. It was illustrated by two pictures put next to each other: first a photo of a gorilla, then a photo of a dark-skinned Australian Aborigine.²⁴ Thus, the ideas of race promoted as reliable knowledge in this review was completely different than the ones intended in the UNESCO campaign.

To sum up, the campaign took place in a 1950s Sweden where it was far from obvious how UNESCO's claims of racial knowledge would be received. Some historical background is perhaps necessary here. It is not an exaggeration to say that in the first decades of the twentieth century racialized knowledge of human genetic differences dominated in Swedish science and the public sphere generally. As an example, the government-funded State Institute for Racial Biology conducted several studies of racial anthropology, suggesting that race-mixing was an evil and that the Sweden's 'Nordic' racial stock had to be protected from foreign inbreeding.²⁵ In a complex process starting in the 1930s, the influence of these ideas began to decrease and the science of racial biology itself changed, partly as a result of the appointment of Dahlberg as head of the institute in 1935. But as is evident from the reviews of *Raser och folk*, these changes did not result in any single consensus view of the race concept. In the mid-1950s, the claims of knowledge promoted by UNESCO could be accepted, but also met with scepticism or even outright rejection.

Different settings: The 1966 reissue

Eleven years later, *Raser och folk* was reissued. Much had happened in Sweden in the intervening years. The early 1960s saw the emergence of new left-wing social movements and a general political radicalization. Soon, many youths and students would turn to revolutionary Marxism, but in 1966 the radicalization process still included social liberals. Young people also started to engage in new forms of anti-imperialism and international solidarity, as for example organizations aimed at combating South African apartheid.²⁶ Hence, the 1966 version was published in a different political setting from 1955. How did this affect the claims of knowledge of race in the book and the ways it circulated?

Nothing was changed in the existing text, a continuity that not necessarily strengthened the book's claim to present scientifically valid racial knowledge. For example, the number of human chromosomes was still said to be 48, despite the fact that geneticists by then had proved that the correct number was 46. But one major alteration was made. The sociologist Joachim Israel was invited to write an essay, not about the concept of race, but about racism as a social phenomenon. This was, of course, in accordance with the aims of the original UNESCO campaign, which was intended to combat racism. Israel, who was soon to be appointed professor of sociology at the universities of Copenhagen and Lund, was a politically radical scholar inspired by Marxism and the emerging anti-imperialist movements of the 1960s. In his essay, he took a clear political stance, explicitly mentioning South Africa as a racist regime. Some of the questions in the appendix were also altered, making them more politicized than before. They now urged the readers to engage in a very specific political struggle, for example with formulations such as 'Discuss possible measures to oppose South African apartheid, such as boycotting South African goods, interrupting diplomatic and economic relations, economic sanctions by the United Nations, or military intervention'.²⁷

Israel's participation led to a somewhat paradoxical situation when it came to the definitions and understandings of race. He did not really limit himself to the topic of racism (which he analysed with psychological

and sociological inspiration from the Frankfurt school and Theodor Adorno's works on authoritarian personalities), but made several assertions about race as a biological concept. He uttered severe scepticism of the term itself, writing that 'in fact, it is wrong to speak of different races. It would be better to speak of only one race, namely the human race'.²⁸ Thus, the 1966 issue of *Raser och folk* contained two completely conflicting claims of racial knowledge. One was based mainly on the second UNESCO statement on race, claiming that at least three major human races existed. Israel's essay resembled the first statement, claiming that there were no human races at all, only racism.

Surprisingly, in the circulation process of the book and its conflicting claims of knowledge, no one seems to have observed this paradox. At least, no one brought it up for discussion when the book was reviewed in the newspapers. Three of the four reviews were overwhelmingly positive, though some reviewers criticized the book for being insufficiently up to date on topics such as the number of human chromosomes. But they accepted what was said about human races in the original text (not mentioning Israel's contradicting assertions): they existed, but there were no scientific grounds for racial discrimination.²⁹ Only one reviewer took another position. In the liberal paper *Vestmanlands läns tidning*, the notion that human races did not differ, or only differed slightly, in mental capacities was vehemently rejected. This was 'UNESCO propaganda', the reviewer wrote, claiming that the lack of racial mental traits was an 'absurdity'.³⁰

This time, the proportion of reviews accepting UNESCO's claims of racial knowledge was larger than in 1955. Whether this was a sign of a general decline in racialized and racist ideas of genetic difference in Swedish society in the 1960s is hard to tell from the circulation and reception of a single book, although the analysis points in that direction. However, the fact that most reviewers accepted UNESCO's claims of racial knowledge does not mean that they denied the existence of human races. The only one who actually did so was Joachim Israel, and his rejection of the concept was not even noticed in the reviews.

Concluding thoughts

This essay has been a small contribution to the research on what happened to ideas of race in post-war Sweden. It suggests that the notion of race hierarchies, in which some races were seen as superior and some as inferior, gradually changed between the 1930s and 1960s. However, it also suggests that the concept of human races as such was not substantially questioned during this period. Of course, we need much more research before any certain conclusions can be drawn, but the findings match the international historiography on the topic. Several recent studies imply that the biological concept of race was not thoroughly challenged and discredited before the end of the 1960s.³¹

More important, from the viewpoint of the history of knowledge this essay shows what can happen when controversial knowledge circulates across borders and from one time to another. The process of producing, translating, and spreading *What is Race?* illustrates the fact that knowledge does not have to be new in order to circulate in new ways. It also shows that circulation processes are a matter of power and resources. In the early 1950s, UNESCO had the resources to make a specific form of racial knowledge circulate throughout the world. But that does not mean that it was uniformly received at all places, nor that it was used in the exact ways that the organization wanted. As I have shown, in both versions of the Swedish editions political content was added, and the 1966 version contained a new essay that even contradicted the racial knowledge of the original text. Thus, it also illustrates Jordheim's theory that books are not only carriers of knowledge, but also sites where different knowledge claims circulate.

Furthermore, it was by no means guaranteed that the UNESCO's knowledge claims would be unanimously accepted. On the contrary, the notion that race as a biological concept was useful when describing strict physical differences among humans, but useless when talking about mental capacities, met with severe opposition in some Swedish newspapers. When rival forms of racial knowledge collided, conflict was inevitable. The concept of race was contested in the post-war decades, and it has never ceased to be.

Notes

- 1 Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016): 34, 41.
- 2 Poul Duedahl, 'Out of the House: On the Global History of UNESCO, 1945–2013', in Poul Duedahl (ed.), *A History of UNESCO: Global Actions and Impacts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 3.
- 3 Helge Jordheim, 'The Printed Work as a Site of Knowledge Circulation: Dialogues, Systems, and the Question of Genre', in Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar, Kari H. Nordberg (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018): 250.
- 4 David Larsson Heidenblad, 'From Content to Circulation: Influential Books and the History of Knowledge', in Johan Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018): 71–81. To find reviews, I have used the bibliographical tool Svenskt Tidningsindex (Lund: Bibliotekstjänst) for the years 1955–56 and 1966.
- 5 Anthony Q. Hazard Jr, *Post-war Anti-Racism: The United States, UNESCO, and 'Race', 1945–1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 64–81.
- 6 The production of the UNESCO statements on race is studied in many works, for example Jenny Reardon, *Race to the Finish: Identity and Governance in an Age of Genomics* (Princeton: PUP, 2005): 27–31.
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- 13 Duedahl, 'Out of the House', 6.
- 14 Jenny Bangham, 'What is Race? UNESCO, Mass Communication and Human Genetics in the Early 1950s', *History of the Human Sciences* 28/5 (2015): 82–95.
- 15 Swedish National Archives in Stockholm (SNA), *The Swedish UNESCO council (SUC)*, vol. A1a:6, Minutes of the working committee 13 January 1954.
- 16 Gunnar Dahlberg (ed.), *Raser och folk* (Stockholm: Ehrlins, 1955): 10, 66.
- 17 Martin Ericsson, 'Anti-Fascist Race Biology: Gunnar Dahlberg and the Long Farewell to the Nordic 'Master Race'', in Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey & Johan

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- 18 SNA, SUC, vol. A1a:7, Minutes of the working committee 9 October 1954.
- 19 Dahlberg (ed.), *Raser och folk*: 73–84.
- 20 Larsson Heidenblad, 'From Content to Circulation', 73.
- 21 One review was published in four different papers, bringing the total number of papers up to nine.
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- 23 *Arbetet* 22 January 1956; *Upsala Nya Tidning* 15 November 1955.
- 24 *Barometern* 27 January 1956; *Kvällsposten* 10 April 1956.
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- 26 Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 33–37, 131–140.
- 27 Gunnar Dahlberg & Joachim Israel, *Raser och folk* (Stockholm: Liber, 1966): 140.
- 28 *Ibid.* 100.
- 29 *Aftonbladet* 3 July 1966; *Dagens Nyheter* 4 October 1966; *Upsala Nya Tidning* 18 October 1966.
- 30 *Vestmanlands läns tidning* 5 October 1966.
- 31 Bruce Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity* (New York: NYUP, 2006): 203–207; Jackson & Weidman, *Race, Racism and Science*: 213–215; Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society*: 165–171.

Routes of knowledge

The transformation and circulation of knowledge in the *UNESCO Courier*, 1947–55

Maria Simonsen

One early morning in the spring of 1947, a group of people met at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, in central Paris. The purpose of the meeting was to begin work on the publication *UNESCO Monitor*—a bulletin for official announcements and reports intended to inform the public of the organization's activities.¹ The cornerstone of UNESCO's extensive attempts to promote peace and democratic values after the Second World War was its ability to communicate its mission with the world outside political circles. Although communication was not mentioned in the acronym, it was assigned a key position in UNESCO's work, and in the Constitution communication, in general, and mass communication specifically, was mentioned as an important means of achieving the goals of the organization.² In August 1947, the first issue of the *Monitor* was launched and one of UNESCO's first steps in attempting to reach an international readership was taken.³

One of the distinguishing features of the post-war period was the rise and proliferation of international organizations. In the wake of the two world wars, a vast number of important intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) came into being, especially in the Western world.⁴ The knowledge that flowed from the different organizations in the form of various official documents such as constitutions, resolutions, and recommendations, not only became rules and regulations but also important guidelines for how states should behave

and act on issues such as human rights and military or economic matters. UNESCO was one of the most influential knowledge-producing organizations in this period. Its significance as a knowledge producer lay, first and foremost, in its initiatives on communicating and circulating knowledge about education and culture. The flow of knowledge should not only go through the governments of each member state or in cooperation with NGOs, but also directly to the public through productions for non-specialist audiences—journals, school textbooks, and films or radio programmes. In the first part of the Constitution, UNESCO's role in maintaining, increasing, and diffusing knowledge is stressed, and the member states undertook to work to 'collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication'.⁵ Thus, from the beginning, UNESCO was aware of its role as a knowledge communicator and the importance of working with different routes of knowledge to pursue its peace-building work.

From the perspective of the history of knowledge, UNESCO is a particularly interesting organization because of its sweeping ambitions for the production and circulation of knowledge on several different levels ever since its creation in 1945. Here I will reflect on UNESCO's role as a knowledge communicator, and particularly in relation to two of its publications: the *UNESCO Courier* and its short-lived predecessor the *UNESCO Monitor*. I will provide an insight into knowledge transformation and circulation designed by an intergovernmental organization to affect the public in general. What happened to the UNESCO-produced knowledge, the ideas and ideals expressed in for example the Constitution and other General Conference documents, when it left headquarters and appeared in new forms and media with the purpose of working in an environment that was not necessarily schooled in its political language or way of thinking? I focus on the educational field, and especially the ideal of 'full and equal opportunities for education for all' for girls' and women's access to education in the period from 1947 to 1955.⁶

New perspectives on book history

With the emergence of the history of knowledge, the concept of knowledge circulation has gradually gained ground both internationally and among Scandinavian historians.⁷ Knowledge circulation can be investigated by asking questions such as how and why knowledge circulates, or how knowledge has been moulded when it appears in new media.⁸ The concept of circulation, as Johan Östling and David Larsson Heidenblad have pointed out, is not a new invention in historical research.⁹ In the field of book history, circulation has been an important methodological approach since ‘the communication circuit’ was first presented by Robert Darnton in 1982.¹⁰

The communication circuit is a model that covers the overall life cycle of a book or other printed media. Through the communication circuit, the various steps that appear in a book’s production and publishing process are made visible: from the author’s original idea to the publisher’s finished product, from the print shop to the distributor, and finally to the reader, and from there back to the author again via, for example, different kinds of reader reactions or reviews. In addition to examining these different actors, the various sociocultural factors that influence the publishing are also included, for example censorship, economic factors or cultural trends.¹¹ The model shows how the book is influenced in various ways depending on where it is located in its life cycle, as well as the importance of the relationships between the different actors and their influence on the book. With the communication circuit, Darnton clarifies that no matter what part of the book’s life cycle is examined, each one is always part of something larger.¹²

In the study of printed material, such as official documents and magazines, it is often useful to include perspectives from the history of the book. In this research field, different types of documents are examined as bearing meaning and producing meaning in physical objects, in order to understand how human communication techniques and forms have interacted with social and cultural concepts and conditions in different periods. Thus in book history we find several tools for studying the different communication processes. Though there are several similarities

between the concept of circulation in the history of knowledge and the communication circuit in book history, they also differ from one another. In the history of knowledge, circulation pinpoints knowledge as the focal point of research, whereas book history often focuses on the material carrier and its production.¹³ For my part, I use the communication circuit to show the importance of the actors in relation to the knowledge transformation and circulation that occurs between the different document types.

In an important article 'Knowledge in Transit', James Secord proposes the two research questions: 'how and why does knowledge circulate? How does it cease to be the exclusive property of a single individual or group and become part of the taken-for-granted understanding of much wider groups of people?'¹⁴ The second question in particular is interesting to ask in relation to UNESCO and its role as a knowledge-producing and circulating actor. The ideals and statements expressed in the Constitution originated in the work of a relatively small group at a political level, but were intended to be disseminated to a much wider audience. The Danish historian Poul Duedahl has described how UNESCO in its first years had the 'stated purpose to do a piece of mental engineering on the world's population through the education system and thereby to create a radical change in mentality'.¹⁵ A study of how UNESCO's set of values moved from official documents to popular publications can provide insight into this work of 'mental engineering', and the role that the popular publications played in the process.

The fundamental perception in the UN system was that if the mission of a peaceful and democratic world was to be sustained, support had to be found among the world's populations.¹⁶ This helps to explain the importance of UNESCO's popular publications, but it also raises the question of who the intended audiences of a publication such as the *Courier* were. The General Conference documents and publications like the *Courier* of course had different audiences, but in its communication of UNESCO's values, the publications had to find a way to translate and present the 'policy language' (the content of the various General Conference documents) so that readers could understand and access UNESCO's ideas and ideals. To identify the readers of a specific book,

document, or (in the case of the present study) a magazine can be a difficult task unless one is in possession of the sales or subscription lists. But the readership can also be explored through a book-history perspective by including the material expression such as the layout, the size or the binding of the publication in the analysis, or by studying its distribution. Last but not least, the readers' testimony can provide insight into the readership of a specific publication. Both in terms of the general circulation of a book or magazine and how the reader understands and relates to the content of the publication. In the study of the *Courier*, both perspectives will be included.

The ideal of equal educational opportunities for all, regardless of race, gender and social and economic differences, set out in the Constitution of UNESCO, is one example of a recommendation that has been reproduced in several different UNESCO publications.¹⁷ In order to appeal to as many people as possible, the recommendation has been translated and reworded in a multitude of contexts, undergoing several transformations, and has emerged in new ways. But what happens to a recommendation such as 'equal education for all' when it is translated or when it moves from one medium to another, from a General Conference document to a magazine? In my reflections on UNESCO's role as a knowledge communicator, I will look on this question by conning perspectives from both the history of knowledge and book history. I will show how the two fields can benefit from each other and the interdisciplinary gains that the history of knowledge has brought to the field of general history. Furthermore, by focusing on knowledge transformation and circulation, it is possible to approach an understanding of one aspect of UNESCO's work, namely the impact of the official documents on the publications aimed at a wider audience—in this case, the readers of the *Monitor* and the *Courier*.

A window on the world

The *Courier* was just one of several UNESCO publications intended for a wider audience. However, what sets it apart from these other publications is its long publication history of over more than seventy years

and its circulation in all parts of the world, regardless of political and religious differences. Its longevity means that the *Courier* contains rich material that showcases how UNESCO has communicated its ideas, ideals, and activities over the years. Despite the long life of the magazine, its large circulation, and central position in UNESCO's work of communication, the history of the *Courier* has only been told in a few shorter articles with a strong focus on biographical aspects, while its publication history has remained in the background.¹⁸ In the study of the knowledge transformation and circulation, I will therefore shed light on the background history of the *Monitor* and the *Courier*.

In its first years, UNESCO understood 'that it would have to keep the public informed of its progress',¹⁹ and at the 1st General Conference in Paris in 1946, one of the declarations of the Section for Mass Communication was to work 'to publicize the program of UNESCO as much as possible and to initiate a program of mass education, in the broadest sense'.²⁰ In this work the *Monitor* was intended to be one of several initiatives communicated to the public.²¹ Most of all, however, the *Monitor* functioned as a bulletin for official announcements and reports. The four-page newspaper, printed in black and white, was built around a simple layout that consisted of several fixed paratexts.²² On the front page, a calendar provided information about UNESCO's own meetings and activities, as well as other activities where the organization was represented such as international conferences. On the left-hand side of the calendar, the editors, under the heading 'Paris Newsletter', provided a sort of executive summary of what was going on at UNESCO, while the right-hand side of the calendar was reserved for legal matters, such as agreements between the UN and UNESCO, and official reports.²³

In addition to informing readers about activities and agreements, the *Monitor* also carried a few essays discussing several of the ideas and ideals stated in the Constitution. In a two-page essay on 'UNESCO Faces Two Worlds', the American editor and member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Byron Dexter (1900–73), commented on UNESCO's goals and the means to achieve them.²⁴ Dexter's essay was a summary of an earlier article published in the *American Quarterly Review*, and in the introduction the editors clearly marked that the essay was not

an official representation of UNESCO's views, but that it was 'a rather brilliantly presented view of Unesco as seen from the outside'.²⁵ In the essay, Dexter critiques UNESCO's initiatives on the removal 'of barriers to world communication and extension of the use of the "mass media"'.²⁶ He singled out the contradictions between East and West.²⁷ Besides Dexter's essay, the closest we come to more analytical reflections on UNESCO's work in the *Monitor* was 'The Report of the General Director', in the third issue, in which Julian Huxley (1887–1975), UNESCO's first Director-General, portrayed the background for the organization, reviewed UNESCO's progress in its first year, and reflected on its future activities.²⁸ 'The reader will find below significant excerpts from the full text', the editors wrote in a long introduction to Huxley's report, which in the original edition ran to 95 pages.²⁹ The ideal of full and equal opportunities for education for all girls and women was ignored by the *Monitor*. While in its calendar one could read that UNESCO had participated or been represented at several conferences in the autumn of 1947, among them the First International Council of Women and Associated Country Women of the World, the question of gender and education was not addressed explicitly in the *Monitor*'s articles.³⁰

Both Dexter's and Huxley's texts were supplemented with a few illustrations, and kept to 'a political tone', or policy language, that was similar to the forms of communication used in UNESCO's official documents. Even though the message—the ideas and ideals expressed in the Constitution—had been moved to another medium and the audience was now 'the public', the linguistic style of the communications barely changed. Thus, by retaining the policy language no real knowledge transformation took place, and the circulation of knowledge was probably limited, at least considering the ambition to influence the world population. The editors soon understood that this was not the right way to communicate to a wider audience, and the *Monitor* only appeared three times from August to November 1947, after which it was replaced by the *Courier*.

The person behind the changes was the journalist Sandy Koffler (1916–2002), who started work at the *Monitor* at the end of October 1947. After less than a month with the newspaper, Koffler 'submitted a proposal for a journal—with its editorial line and periodicity, an outline

of its different sections, the number of columns on a page, the length of the articles, the typeface—to Harold Kaplan, the first Director of UNESCO's Bureau of Public Information'.³¹ Koffler's was a complete publishing proposal, and the following year the *Monitor* became the *Courier*. One of the world's first genuinely international magazines was born. The *Monitor* did not disappear, but was subsequently 'reserved for the publication of official texts, resolutions and proceedings of the organization', while the *Courier* was 'designed to inform the public' of UNESCO's activities, the editors stated at the front page of the first issue.³²

Koffler understood the importance of communicating to a wider audience in several languages. Koffler himself spoke no fewer than seven languages fluently—English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Hebrew, and Mandarin—and he was convinced that 'multiplying the number of language versions of the *Courier* was a way of building bridges between people'.³³ Over the years, linguistic diversity became an important feature of the *Courier*. From the 1960s onwards, editions of the journal appeared in German (1960), Arabic (1961), Japanese (1961), and Hindi and Tamil (1967), among other languages. 'When Sandy retired in February 1977, the *Courier* was being published in fifteen languages. In 1988, the magazine's editions reached an all-time high, appearing in thirty-five languages.'³⁴

With its form of an eight-page newspaper illustrated with small black-and-white photos, the first issues of the *Courier* did not stand out from other magazines on the newsstands. In fact, it had a rather simple layout compared to what was actually possible at the time. From the beginning, the *Courier* appeared monthly and in three languages (English, French, and Spanish). It was inexpensive—the price for a six-month subscription was 50 cents. The *Courier* soon changed from its newspaper look to a smaller, handier format printed on high-quality white paper and (from 1954) with colour photos, while it also grew in size and readership. In 1949, UNESCO printed 40,000 copies of the *Courier*; in 1955 the number of paid subscriptions passed 50,000; and about by the early 1980s 'this figure rose to 500,000'.³⁵ According to UNESCO estimates, each copy was read by more than four people, which meant that the *Courier* had a readership of over 2 million.³⁶ This is a somewhat

speculative calculation and exactly how large the readership actually was has been difficult to determine. There were several ways to buy it: by subscription or at newsagents. In Denmark, for instance, you could take out a subscription from the Copenhagen-based publisher Einar Munksgaard, while in Sweden, even though it was not yet a member of UNESCO it could be bought from at the publishers O. E. Fritzes in central Stockholm.³⁷ It was also possible to access the magazine in libraries and institutions, of course.

Finally, national editions of the *Courier* were also published. In Denmark, the National Commission entered an agreement with the NGO Mellemlfolkeligt Samvirke (ActionAid Denmark), and together they published the magazine *Kontakt-Courier*—a Danish-language version of the *Courier*.³⁸ The magazine was sent to numerous institutions, individuals interested in international relations, and to the press, but readers' testimony shows that the *Courier* was also read by more ordinary people.³⁹ The mathematics and former principal of the University of the Republic in Uruguay, Roberto Markarian has previously described the significance of reading the *Courier* in the 1950s: 'Between the ages of 12 and 17, I regularly read the *UNESCO Courier* and that is how I absorbed culture. I can still see the images on the magazine's covers, and so many questions that shook the world—of science, culture, and education in the past century—come back to mind.'⁴⁰ Markarian grew up in an illiterate family in a poor neighbourhood in Montevideo, but reading the *Courier* was an education for him that enabled him 'to look through an open window onto the world'.⁴¹ As this one example hints, a further study of the *Courier*'s readership, and especially readers' testimonies, would contribute to understanding the knowledge circulation and impact of UNESCO's work.

The *Courier* existed until 2001 when its monthly publication stopped. A lack of funding and support forced it to close down in 2011. But only six years later, on April 2017, the magazine was revived under the slogan 'Several Voices, One World'. Today it is available in six different languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish). It is still possible to get hold of a paper edition, although today it is mostly spread as a digital publication.⁴²

Building bridges between people

Since its first issue in February 1948, the *Courier*, being distributed by a worldwide organization, had a huge potential audience compared to other publications at the time. The *Courier* itself did not pay much attention to the fact that it was the first issue of a global magazine, and only a small notice on the front page reported the fact. Under the headline ‘To Our Readers’, the editors wrote that with ‘this first issue we begin, the publication of *UNESCO Courier*, a periodical designed to inform the public of the activities of the Specialised Agency of the United Nations for Education, Science and Culture’.⁴³ The February issue was almost entirely dedicated to UNESCO’s 2nd General Conference in Mexico City in November and December 1947, ‘at which Unesco’s activities during 1947 were appraised and a world programme of action was formulated for 1948’.⁴⁴ Article after article dealt with the various initiatives on the four cardinal points—education, science, culture, and communication—but educational aspects were prioritized, and almost all the articles touched on some educational aspect or other.⁴⁵

Compared to its predecessor, the *Courier* led to a new way in communicating with the public. Although there were several similarities in terms of layout, the shift was apparent from the very first issues of the *Courier*. First, the long essays and reports on the organization’s activities were now illustrated with photos and other kinds of illustrations, and gradually had a more and more central part in the magazine’s profile. Photos, drawings, and figures illustrated the articles which as the years passed became more and more voluminous. In 1948 the *Courier* consisted of 8 pages; by the December issue of 1955 it had grown to 36 richly illustrated pages. Another aspect is that even though the articles referred to subjects related to the four cardinal points, it was obvious that the editors had understood the need to change the way they communicated with their intended audience. One example is the two articles ‘Free Flow of Ideas debated’ and ‘Mass Media to be used for peace’, which describe the ideas and ideals expressed in the preamble to UNESCO’s Constitution, but the language is more lively, and the articles are filled with specific examples of how it can be done in practice.⁴⁶

The questions of girls' and women's rights to education had long been on the agenda within the UN system. From 1945 to 1955, UNESCO adopted a large number of resolutions and recommendations on education.⁴⁷ A review of the programme declarations—the summaries of the declarations that the UNESCO Member States decided to work on—shows that from the beginning UNESCO was alert to women's educational situation. At each General Conference since 1947, at least one resolution has been adopted that specifically addresses issues related to girls' and women's educational opportunities. Resolution 3.18 adopted at UNESCO's 2nd General Conference in Mexico City in 1947 was the first General Conference text, apart from the Constitution, to explicitly recommend initiatives to promote women's educational opportunities: 'The Director-General is instructed to collaborate with the Commission on the Status of Women of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in promotion enquiries, through competent bodies, into educational opportunities to women'.⁴⁸ At the subsequent General Conferences in Beirut (1948) and Florence (1950), the resolution was recycled and adopted with approximately the same wording as resolutions 2.17, 2.76, and 2.133.⁴⁹ After 1950, the resolutions were expanded and specified, and the General Conference delegates recommended in the 1952 Program Statement that not only the Director-General but also the individual Member States should develop the opportunities for women's access to education, while Resolution 1.25 added that the Member States were 'invited to undertake or to develop the education of women for citizenship, especially in countries where women have recently won political rights'.⁵⁰

UNESCO's increased awareness of the gender perspective in the General Conference documents was also reflected in the *Courier*. In contrast to the *Monitor*, there was a greater focus on the ideal 'education for all' in relation to girls' and women's education. From the first issue in February 1948, the various aspects of the recommendation were regularly discussed in articles, and highlighted in illustrations that often pictured girls and women reading or engaged in other educational activities. In the first issues of the *Courier*, women's access to education was mentioned in general terms, often in the context of an overall treatment

of the subject, but starting in the 1950s several articles dealt with the recommendation more independently.⁵¹ In 1955 the *Courier* published its first of several special issues on women and women's situations with the deliberately provocative title 'Are women inferior beings?'⁵² To mark Human Rights Day, the magazine devoted an issue 'to a report on the progress made by women in recent years in their struggle for equality with men'.⁵³ The articles were illustrated with photos showing women at work as police officers, factory workers, architects, and ministers. What had previously been an ideal expressed in official documents was now a reality. In the article 'Are women the inferior sex', the question on the front cover was answered: 'No, declares a scientist. Women are superior to men.'⁵⁴

In this essay, by combining the communication circuits known from book history with the concept of circulation from the history of knowledge, I have shown how the two research fields can benefit from each other. True, I have limited the empirical focus here to a few issues of UNESCO's *Monitor* and *Courier*, but it is an investigation that could readily draw on other types of UNESCO publications for non-specialist audiences in the same period. By using elements from the communications circuit and the concept of circulation, and thereby focusing on both the articles and the materiality of the magazines as bearing meaning and producing meaning, it is possible to make knowledge changes even more visible.⁵⁵

Notes

- 1 Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Dejan Verčič (eds.), *The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Aurélia Dausse, 'Remembering Sandy Koffler, my grandfather', <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-4/remembering-sandy-koffler-my-grandfather>, accessed 20 March 2019.
- 2 Vincent Defourny, 'Public Information in the UNESCO: Toward a Strategic Role', in Sriramesh & Verčič (eds.), *The Global Public Relations Handbook*. In UNESCO's first years, some of the main priorities in the budget were dedicated to different types of initiatives regarding mass communication and, through

- various media, UNESCO tried to reach the public; *UNESCO Courier* February 1948: 1.
- 3 In this context, the term ‘popular publication’ covers the UNESCO publications that are aimed at a wider audience, i.e., a readership that is not necessarily in the political realm. Examples of this type of publications may be magazines, journals, school textbooks, published for a non-specialist audience.
 - 4 A distinction between the organizations as intergovernmental or non-governmental is beside the point in this essay: common for all these organizations is that they attained widespread influence and became important producers and distributors of knowledge that was intended to set the agenda for the world society as a whole.
 - 5 ‘Article 1(a), Purposes and Functions’, *Constitution of UNESCO* London 16 November 1945.
 - 6 ‘Preamble’, *Constitution of UNESCO*, London 16 November 1945.
 - 7 Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘Cirkulation—ett kunskapshistoriskt nyckelbegrepp’, *Historisk tidskrift* 137/2 (2017): 269–284; Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, Erling Sandmo, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg, *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018).
 - 8 Östling & Larsson Heidenblad, ‘Cirkulation’, 269–284.
 - 9 Ibid.
 - 10 Later, the communication circuit has been developed by Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, as well as by Darnton himself, and it has now attained canonical status in the book historical research field. Robert Darnton, ‘What is the History of the Book?’, *Daedalus* 111/ 3 (1982): 65–83; Robert Darnton, ‘What is the History of Books? Revisited’, *Modern Intellectual History* 4/3 (2007): 495–508; Thomas R. Adams & Nicolas Barker, *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society: The Clark Lectures, 1986–1987* (London: Oak Knoll Press, 2001).
 - 11 Darnton, ‘What is the History of the Book’, 67.
 - 12 Ibid., 67–68.
 - 13 Maria Simonsen & Laura Skouvig, ‘Videnshistorie: Nye veje i historieviden-skaberne’, *TEMP—Tidsskrift for historie*, 19 (2019): 5–26.
 - 14 James A. Secord, ‘Knowledge in Transit’, *Isis* 95/ 4 (2004): 655.
 - 15 Poul Duedahl, *Fra overmenneske til UNESCO-menneske: Racebegrebet i Danmark 1890–1965* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2017): 9.
 - 16 Poul Duedahl, ‘Fra race til etnicitet. UNESCO og den mentale ingeniørkunst i Danmark 1945–65’, *TEMP—Tidsskrift for historie*, 10 (2015): 34.
 - 17 ‘Article 1(a), Purposes and Functions’.
 - 18 See Dausse, ‘Remembering Sandy Koffler, my grandfather’; Alan Tormaid Campbell, ‘The UNESCO Courier is 70! An inspiring read’, <https://en.unesco>.

- org/courier/january-march-2018/unesco-courier-70-inspiring-read, accessed 17 August 2019.
- 19 Lotta Nuotio, 'Spreading the news: The natural sciences in the UNESCO Courier, 1947–1965', *Sixty Years of Science at Unesco 1945–2005* (Paris: UNESCO, 2006): 89.
 - 20 UNESCO General Conference, 1st session, Paris 1946, see also Vincent Defourny, 'Public Information in the UNESCO: Toward a Strategic Role', in Sriramesh & Verčič (eds.), *The Global Public Relations Handbook*, 426.
 - 21 Sriramesh & Verčič (eds.), *The Global Public Relations Handbook*; Dause, 'Remembering Sandy Koffler, my grandfather'.
 - 22 'Paratext' is a concept to describe the texts which surrounds the main text. The concept of paratext is developed by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette (1930–2018) and he divides the paratexts into two categories: 'peritexts', i.e. the texts closest to the main text such as the authors' name, forewords, notes etc., and 'epitexts', which consists of elements such as interviews, publicity announcements etc. Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987): 7–19, 317.
 - 23 *UNESCO Monitor* August 1947; *UNESCO Monitor* October 1947; *UNESCO Monitor* November 1947.
 - 24 Byron Dexter, 'Unesco Faces Two Worlds', *UNESCO Monitor* August 1947: 3–4.
 - 25 Dexter, 'Unesco Faces Two Worlds', 3.
 - 26 Ibid.
 - 27 Ibid., 4.
 - 28 Julian Huxley, 'Director-General Reviews 1st Year. Report on Unesco Activities in 1947', *UNESCO Monitor* November 1947: 1–4.
 - 29 Julian Huxley, 'Director-General Reviews 1st Year. Report on Unesco Activities in 1947'.
 - 30 *UNESCO Monitor* August 1947; *UNESCO Monitor* October 1947.
 - 31 Dause, 'Remembering Sandy Koffler'.
 - 32 *UNESCO Courier* February 1948: 1.
 - 33 Dause, 'Remembering Sandy Koffler'.
 - 34 Ibid.
 - 35 *UNESCO Courier* November 1955: 1; Tomaid Campbell, 'The UNESCO Courier is 70! An inspiring read'.
 - 36 Ibid.
 - 37 *UNESCO Courier* February 1948: 8.
 - 38 Poul Duedahl, 'Fra race til etnicitet', 46
 - 39 Ibid.
 - 40 Roberto Markarian, 'The UNESCO Courier is 70: Attending the school of free thought', <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-2/unesco-courier-70-attending-school-free-thought>, accessed 20 March 2019.
 - 41 Ibid.

- 42 'Courier', <https://en.unesco.org/courier/about>, accessed 20 March 2019.
- 43 *UNESCO Courier* February 1948: 1.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 *Constitution of UNESCO* London 16 November 1945; *Unesco Courier* February 1948: 3. An example of concrete initiatives was the 'launch a world-wide appeal ...for contributions to a special fund designed to help war devastated countries rebuild their media of mass communication so sorely hit during the last war', another was 'help to the creation of an International Institute, with the aim to strengthen ties and contact among journalists throughout the world', *UNESCO Courier* February 1948: 3.
- 47 For a detailed overview of the different resolutions and recommendations in relation to girls and women's access to education see Maria Simonsen, 'Én vej: en historisk analyse af UNESCOs standardsættende instrumenter og den danske UNESCO-Nationalkommissions diskurs på det kvindepolitiske uddannelsesområde i perioden 1945–85' (Speciale forsvaret vid Aalborg Universitet, 2007).
- 48 Resolutions, The Programme of UNESCO in 1948, I Resolutions 2nd General Conference 1947 (2/19:2C/Res.): 22.
- 49 Resolutions, Programme for 1949: I Resolutions 3rd General Conference 1948 (3/29:3C/Res.): 20; Resolutions, Programme for 1950: I Resolutions 4th General Conference 1949 (64/38:4C/Res.): 18.
- 50 6th General Conference 1951: 6C/Resolutions, 19.
- 51 *UNESCO Courier* January 1950: 9; *UNESCO Courier* November 1952: 3–4.
- 52 *UNESCO Courier* November 1955.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 55 The author thanks Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad and Anna Nilsson Hammar for the invitation to contribute to the anthology, Poul Duedahl for the long-term support of her research within the project 'The Global History of UNESCO'. The author is grateful to William Kynan-Wilson and the research environment History of Knowledge at Lund for discussing various aspects of this essay, as well as the colleagues at the Institute for Culture and Global Studies at Aalborg University.

A helpful *Handbuch* of émigrés

Herbert A. Strauss and the functions of ‘acculturation’

Lise Groesmeyer

Emigration as a social event of transnational cultural impact has in recent years caught the eye of historians in the new field of the history of knowledge.¹ But ‘émigré academics and scholars’ has been a specialist subject for decades in the historiography of the National Socialist regime and its policies. Of the approximately 500,000 individuals who because of these policies emigrated from Germany, Austria, and other German-speaking regions in the 1930s and early 1940s, an estimated group of about 2,000 academic intellectuals has become the main focus in a sizeable and growing historiography of this emigration and its effects.

Neither of the fields has so far probed the historiographical infrastructure to examine the interests that have framed the basic research of this 1930s emigration. A primary piece is unquestionably the biographical dictionary in three volumes, edited by the historians Werner Röder (Munich) and Herbert A. Strauss (New York) in a transatlantic collaboration: *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933/International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Émigrés 1933–1945* (1980–83). In what was intended as, and became, the basic reference source of the field, information about 1930s emigration was collected and ordered along particular lines in terms of structure (biographical) and of specific criteria of significance, generations, geography, etc. In addition, this helpful *Handbuch* formed a vital part in establishing the predominant research tradition that set out the accul-

turation concept as the appropriate category with which to write the histories of 1930s emigration.

An encyclopaedia such as the *Handbuch* is a repository of information, a systematic overview, and summary of knowledge, typically written in an objective rather than an analytical style. It provides facts and general background information, but also ‘pre-research’ information that sets subjects in a framework ‘allowing the reader to view the bigger picture’.² This essay will investigate how sociocultural and political concerns were material to the making of the *Handbuch* and influenced the choices of content and form and of the acculturation concept as theoretical category. In this, I focus on the American side of the transatlantic editorship, Herbert A. Strauss, and the project organization there: the Research Foundation of Jewish Immigration (RFJI), set up by the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe (AFJCE).

First, reflections on the vestedness of 1930s emigration historiography set a frame for the study. Next, the *Handbuch* and its immediate historiographical context are introduced, as is its West German base, the Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Following this, I describe the path from political concern to research project on the American side, as well as the key selections and representations in the *Handbuch*. The final part analyses the different functions that the *Handbuch* and Strauss assigned to the concept of acculturation.

The vestedness of the historiography

The wider perspective, going beyond this essay, is a general hypothesis that ‘vested interests’—strong social interests—have intensely shaped the history writing of the emigration caused by National Socialist policies in the 1930s and early 1940s. Accounts of the historiography usually include these basics:³ First in focus was Hitler’s loss counted in émigré scientists and scholars and how the receiving countries gained by welcoming them, also for the benefit of science in general and to secure victory and ‘world peace’: the most notable example was the Manhattan Project with a considerable element of such imported knowledge as a vital contribution. This loss and gain approach, chiefly of Anglo-American

publications in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, was replaced by the acculturation tradition that—rather than a transfer of academics and their knowledge in neat packages to be integrated in host countries—saw a meeting of scholarly cultures, resulting in cultural awareness, multi-directional exchanges, and reciprocal adjustment. The acculturation perspective gained pace in the 1980s and has long dominated research focused on changes in academic knowledge and disciplines due to the 1930s emigration. It has—together with research into the migration of non-academics, ‘*kleine Leute*’—superseded what was the first German research approach to the emigration of Central European intellectuals in the 1930s. This approach, established in the 1960s, had focused on exiled politicians and authors as representatives of *das andere Deutschland*, the exiled political and humanist opposition to the National Socialist regime.

A ‘vestedness’ points to the particular strength of an interest because of a personal and urgent involvement, as has been an inextricable premise of much historical writing about the National Socialist regime and what came before and after it—causes and consequences.⁴ The historiography of emigration from Germany and other Central European countries in the 1930s has, perhaps to an even higher degree, been done by individuals directly or indirectly affected by this emigration. A breakdown of the historiography is therefore, at least up to a point, best done by schematically identifying the basic social interests related to the changes that were triggered by this emigration. One such attempt is the outline that introduces the *Handbuch*’s first volume, of how large-scale migration causes substantial changes affecting all parties: first, the potential unbalancing of the receiving society socially, culturally, politically or economically; second, the pressure on immigrants to adjust in order to gain a livelihood; third, their further integration finally resulting in the receiving society acquiring new qualities, either transformed elements of immigrant culture or, at least, the experience of assimilating an immigrant minority; fourth, political or ethnic conflicts in case of failed integration; and fifth, the loss of material and intellectual productivity in the country of origin as well as changes in the social frame of reference that forms the basis of collective consciousness, because of the elimination of entire population groups.⁵

When these basic social interests are seen in relation to the historiography, then the risk of unbalancing the receiving society as well as the pressure to adjust may be qualified as the social foundation of what is mostly designated as the early historiography—the loss and gain approach. The early texts are largely either the result of social science investigations or autobiographical and testimonial; typically written by the actors involved, whether a migrated academic or a native citizen involved with relief work, and for other purposes than historical analysis. Examples are Maurice R. Davie's *Refugees in America: Report of the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* (1947), described as 'a fact-finding investigation' of whether this European immigration was a liability or an asset for the US, and with the contributions of immigrant academics chipping in substantially; and *A Defense of Free Learning* (1959), written on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the British Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, by its initiator, the economist William Beveridge.

But the idea of contributing is neither the prerogative of traditional conceptions of knowledge transfer, as reflected in the standard topos of the academics being 'Hitler's gift',⁶ nor of the early texts. Narratives of how emigration generates a double perspective and cultural interaction, resulting in new knowledge, may also emphasize the contribution and value of the émigrés, whether for legitimizing, identity-building, or other purposes.⁷ Perceptible in this is also the question of whether the immigrants are seen to add new qualities to their societal context, having agency, or are the objects of a 'drill in assimilation'. An example is political scientist Franz L. Neumann's 'The Social Sciences' (1953), which is explicitly appreciative of the US reception of emigrants, and often quoted in later historiography for an ideal type triad of émigré scholars. Here, the 'third way'—the scholar integrating new experiences with old traditions, and not just jumping at the one or sticking with the other—was laid out as the most difficult but also the most rewarding.⁸

The social relatedness of these early, usually very informative texts is often plain.⁹ But the historiography 'proper' from the late 1960s was also to a great extent written by émigrés or other individuals involved in the social circumstances of the 1930s emigration. Even when done by

‘outsiders’, it has often proved difficult not to perpetuate the perspective of the sources, for instance of the writings of renowned intellectuals. Another set of vested interests relate to the German and Austrian loss of intellectual productivity and changes in frames of reference, resulting in severed intellectual roots both of academic disciplines and society in general. History writing on the impact of émigré academics on thinking and knowledge in the US, as well as their part in the (re)import of democracy, of new ways of thinking, and of entire academic disciplines, may in part be seen as an attempt to re-establish such roots. An example is the landmark scholarship of the German political scientist Alfons Söllner that focuses on émigré social scientists turned political scientists in the US and their significance for the development of the discipline internationally and the westernization of political culture in West Germany.¹⁰

The strong social relatedness may also account for a characteristic that has largely escaped attention in historiographical surveys: the preference for a biographical approach. This can take the form of regular or intellectual biographies or, on a smaller scale, a journal article or essay where the life and intellectual work of a single émigré academic, or parts of it, become the entry point, substantiating a wider historic phenomenon or development. The *Handbuch* may be argued to be both a manifestation of this biographizing preference and a factor in its prevalence, since it orders the ‘pre-research knowledge’ of the 1930s emigration along biographical lines rather than other, more generalized structures.

The *Handbuch* and its West German context

The *Handbuch* is the published outcome of a near decade of data collection and research that started in 1972 as a collaboration between the Institut für Zeitgeschichte (IfZ) in Munich and the RFJI in New York. It resulted in roughly 25,000 biographies held at both locations. The German-language first volume has about 4,000 short biographies of emigrants in the fields of politics, economics, and public life; the English-language second volume, some 4,700 biographies of emigrants in the arts, sciences, and literature; the third has bilingual indices for all 8,700

or so emigrants organized by name, emigration country, occupation and organizations.¹¹ The *Handbuch* has meant a critical step forward in the research of the National Socialist-inflicted emigration in the 1930s and early 1940s because of time saved by not having to collect basic information from scattered sources, on the one hand, and the comprehensive view that the *Handbuch* enables on the other.¹²

A shared intention of IfZ and RFJI relates to the efforts in West Germany from the late 1960s to identify and secure source material concerning this emigration and to make the material available for research on a more solid basis and, not least, using wider perspectives.¹³ Based on and continuing the results of this work, the *Handbuch* was to overcome the exclusivity of earlier research on political exile and, in particular, the distinction between exile and emigration as a way to acknowledge only specific emigration motives and activities as research-worthy.¹⁴

This exclusivity—and exclusion—was mainly the outcome of how *Exilliteratur*, the first German research into the 1930s emigration, was conceptualized at international conferences held in 1969 and 1972 on *Deutsche Literatur der Flüchtlinge aus dem Dritten Reich*. Debates at and following these founding conferences led to the consensus view that exiled authors had been the vital part of the 1930s emigration since they had remained committed to the German nation, and had not, in contrast to exiled scientists, integrated into the new countries' culture. The *Exilliteratur* research, which emerged in the social and cultural unsettlements of the late 1960s, focused on the German-language exile literature written from an anti-fascist point of view and, in doing so, extended the politically charged texts of mainly left-wing exiled authors—the self-declared 'Other Germany' opposing the National Socialist regime. Similarly, the *Exilliteratur* research field was politicized in explanations of Fascism and National Socialism as the result of capitalism's contradictions. Claus-Dieter Krohn has argued that the *Exilliteratur* research in this anti-Fascist orientation came close to the East German attempt to harness exile literature in support of a socialist state: anti-fascism became synonymous with anti-capitalism, while the persecution and murder of Jews disappeared.¹⁵

The common ground found in a revision of the *Exilliteratur* research

position is manifest in the foreword written by renowned Holocaust historian and director of IfZ from 1972 to 1989, Martin Broszat. But, together with the foreword written by the chairman of RFJI, the émigré attorney Curt S. Silberman, it also testifies to the institutions' different research positions and interests.¹⁶

IfZ—until 1952 the Deutsches Institut für Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Zeit—was established in 1949 as a highly politicized research institution, simultaneously with the German Federal Republic. It was to secure source material from the Nationalist Socialist period, research it and promote political education of the public; from 1952, similarly with respect to the periods before 1933 and after 1945. The wider scope allowed for analyses of cause and effect in a triad of themes that its director in 1999, Horst Möller, still used to describe IfZ's research focus: the establishment and destruction of democracy; the rise of totalitarian movements and creation of dictatorship; and the re-establishment of democracy.¹⁷ The persecution and murder of millions of Jewish citizens, on the other hand, was initially approached in a limited perspective, for instance in IfZ's expert report for the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial in 1963 that focused on 'the Nazi state's highly complicated "framework of action" rather than... "the factual application of power".'¹⁸ Nicolas Berg has argued that, for its first fifteen years, the Institute conceptualized the Third Reich from a strictly German point of view and produced an image that failed to reflect 'the historically central significance of the regime's exterminatory policies'.¹⁹ However, Broszat, who in Berg's view was one of the West German historians complicit in this deficit, had made a comparable point in a 1979 article on the effects of the television series *Holocaust* on German historical research: how a German 'Aktionsgeschichte' based on a 'Verfolger-Perspektive' dominated while the Jewish victims were depicted sketchily, being objects of persecution, and this resulted in a history of the Final Solution, not of the Holocaust. Against this, a focus on the Jewish 'Betroffenheitsgeschichte' and on the German Jewish social relations and attitudes would further the chance of racial policies becoming comprehensible (even 'nacherlebbar') as a victims' history of human experience and behaviour, not to remain unimaginable crimes outside history.²⁰

This perspective is visible in Broszat's foreword to the *Handbuch*, too: the uniting fact of the individuals included was the shared 'historische Betroffenheit' of forced emigration, with their details forming a mosaic of an excruciating and partly irreparable sequence of events. Broszat emphasized how—more important than the temporary exile of political adversaries—the *Handbuch* documented the expulsion of the Jewish population and the 'transfer' of people and culture in a representative way, both in view of the irreversible loss for their home countries and of their immigration and acculturation in the countries of settlement. Acculturation is the key category in the RFJI research position as will be detailed below. In Broszat's account, Jewish culture—expelled from Germany and metamorphosing in the countries of immigration—initiated new creative contacts, amalgamations, and influences in the scientific, literary, and artistic fields that also impacted upon the German-speaking countries after the war. In effect, by emphasizing this reimport of exiled culture, he drew a parallel—with respect to the German socio-political post-war reconstruction—between the Jewish intellectual emigration and the political exile that had continued an independent anti-Fascist tradition.²¹

Herbert A. Strauss and the promotion of acculturation

The *Handbuch's* introductory texts set acculturation as the central concept for analysing emigration processes, thereby continuing Strauss's promotion of this concept since the mid-1960s. Born in Würzburg in 1918, Herbert Arthur Strauss had arrived in the US in 1946 having completed a PhD in European history at the University of Bern. He had escaped to Switzerland at the eleventh hour in June 1943, after living underground in Berlin since October 1942 where he had graduated earlier as a rabbi and religious teacher at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums. His engagement with Jewish refugee organizations began in Bern and continued for a lifetime in New York. Initially a teacher of religion, his subject was history from 1948, and he became assistant professor at the City College of New York in 1960, full professor in 1971.²² Participation in a research project (1948–1951) at the New School for Social Research,

New York, which used psychological and sociological methods to analyse the accounts of Hungarian Jewish concentration camp survivors, directed his interest towards social history in what became a 50-year-long study of the causes and consequences of his generation's experiences.²³

Acculturation has been the guiding concept of Strauss's academic writings on the Jewish emigration from Germany and of research projects directed by him. In 1970, Strauss introduced it in the article intended to show that research into the Jewish immigration was viable—'Die Kulturelle Anpassung der deutschen Juden in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika'—which was also published in an amended English version in 1971.²⁴ An abridged version was presented at the *Exilliteratur* conference in 1972. The conceptual difference between Strauss' new focus on immigration—and acculturation to describe the adjustment process—and the then current exile perspective is unmistakable in the protests of East German writer and literature professor, Wieland Herzfelde, during discussions: 'Wir hatten doch 1933 keine Auswanderer'.²⁵ The sixth volume of the Strauss-edited documentation series, *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the USA (1978–1992)*, was *Essays on the History, Persecution and Emigration of German Jews*, authored by Strauss. Here he examined historic forms of cultural change in a professed belief that this American experience offered 'potential insights into acculturation and majority–minority relations'.²⁶ From 1985, a research project on *Wissenschaftsemigration*, headed by Strauss at the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung, Berlin, applied the acculturation concept to the transfer of scientific knowledge through academics' forced emigration from Central Europe and their integration in new countries.²⁷

But the inaugural text of Strauss's engagement with acculturation appeared earlier in a non-academic context. In 1965, as executive director of the AFJCE, Strauss initiated the Conference on Acculturation as a *Lerntag* to re-examine the position of this organization after almost 25 years—it was 'At the Crossroads', as Strauss put it. After assisting German-speaking Jews with legal and civic matters when settling in the US and obtaining restitutions from Germany, a profound challenge was now at hand: the foreseeable 'demise of a recognizable German-Jewish group' by its further integration into Anglo-American culture

and its amalgamation with general American Jewish life. Strauss in the postscript of the conference publication, and Curt C. Silberman in the introduction, referred to the younger generation's changed frame of understanding and their questions about 'the meaning *to them* of the German-Jewish heritage' and the relationship to American society and Jewry in general.²⁸

The spectre of intermarriage is present throughout the conference texts; so are also the seven subprocesses of assimilation that sociologist Milton Gordon had introduced in *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*, published a year earlier and still today a classic reference. The key points in Gordon's book were, first, how acculturation—understood as cultural assimilation—was the likely first process to happen when a minority group arrived in a society, and to possibly go on with no further assimilation taking place, and second, that structural assimilation—that is, large-scale participation in institutions involving personal, primary relationships in contrast to impersonal, formal, and segmentalized secondary relationships—was the critical process that would trigger other types of assimilation to follow including intermarriage and the subprocesses of discrimination and prejudice diminishing. The price of such assimilation was the disappearance of the ethnic group as a separate entity as well as of its distinctive values.²⁹

The *Lerntag* aimed to examine rather than to solve, but Strauss outlined a two-tier answer: immediately, he pointed to the increasing receptiveness of large numbers of people in the US to the type of Enlightenment critique that had characterized the last German Jewish ideology, represented by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. Strauss speculated that this criticism revived could become a major German Jewish contribution to American (and American Jewish) self-understanding by connecting to the prevalent liberal thinking and the historically strong Enlightenment traditions in the US. More profoundly, his postscript hovers over intellectuality as the salient German Jewish characteristic, for example, in the final paragraph: 'the classical German-Jewish attitudes of individualism and intellectual curiosity' combined with a commitment to 'social action humanism'. Strauss also contradicted Gordon when he

asked rhetorically, 'Would intermarriages really imply a loss for the Jewish group if American Judaism had a vital contemporary meaning?'³⁰

The AFJCE *Lerntage* continued into the 1970s as a hothouse of identity cultivation and politicization of the special German Jewish part in American Judaism as well as its (potential) significance to American society. In 1971 at the fifth *Lerntage*, on American-Jewish Dilemmas, Strauss introduced the conference by claiming the most immediate dilemma to be 'the threat of Jewish intellectuality and spirituality disappearing in an abyss of assimilatory superficiality and indifference'. American Judaism lacked a tradition parallel to the Jewish intellectualism of worldwide influence in the Weimar Republic and needed to clarify its ethical role in a plural, industrial society by 'the intellectual and emotional depth of a humanism that will survive bureaucratization and the levelling of instant culture'.³¹

From politics to *Handbuch*

In August 1969 at a meeting of the Council of Jews from Germany (CJG), Strauss together with Silberman argued the case for a stronger German Jewish cultural-political presence internationally as well as for measures to counter what might be growing anti-Semitic prejudice.³² CJG was the international umbrella organization of organizations established by Jewish emigrants from Germany and other parts of Central Europe in their various countries of settlement. The CJG rejected the call for high-profile political action. Instead, Strauss was entrusted with the responsibility for a historical, commemorative programme, in which the history of 'Jewish immigration from Germany from the point of view of the acculturation of the immigrant in his countries of settlement' was the main element.³³

The member organizations in Great Britain, France, Israel, South America, and North America were to undertake investigations and secure source material.³⁴ In the US, the RFJI was set up to organize what resulted in a large-scale oral history project and the Strauss-edited documentation series *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the USA*.³⁵ It was realized early that an integrated multinational project was difficult

to achieve, and from spring 1973, the ambition was an edited volume of heterogeneous material produced by the various organizations, reflecting how their preparatory work differed hugely.³⁶ Already in the initial project memorandum of 1969, Strauss had thought it utopian to believe that the writing of Jewish emigration history would depend merely on finding a suitable writer without taking into account if systematic tools were available and if appropriate approaches and methods for writing immigration history had been developed, as was the case in the US.³⁷

Clearly, the *Handbuch* was such a systematic tool, a first step in allowing the history of German Jewish immigration to be written across national and cultural borders. It also reflects selections of content and choices of form that correlate to the AFJCE's and Strauss' efforts concerning the position of German Jewish immigrants in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, and the failed attempt to mobilize CJG. In January 1974, Strauss presented the *Handbuch* in an interview in the New York-based, German-language newspaper *Aufbau* as an idea inspired by a newspaper report that Nobel Prizes had been awarded to two New York-based scholars, both Jewish emigrants, one German, the other Hungarian.³⁸ Strauss claimed that the *Who's Who in Emigration*—the official project title for the first years from 1973—was no 'Elite-Story' but rather the registration of representative trajectories. In the interview, Strauss let the Nobel Prize winners meet the example of a German judge turned Kibbutz worker in Israel to illustrate the elasticity of how changed circumstances were received, or, with a moralizing tinge, to show the creative responses of those forced to emigrate.³⁹ Later, Werner Röder described the *Handbuch*'s 1.7 per cent of the estimated total of 500,000 émigrés as representing 'eine relative Vollständigkeit'.⁴⁰

But the individuals of the 1.7 per cent were explicitly chosen by criteria based on achievement, adjusted to the varying social circumstances of phases before emigration, during emigration and exile, and after resettlement or remigration. Success was the guiding principle for the specific criteria that the *Handbuch* set out for each occupational field whether they adhered to hierarchical markers, public or peer recognition, or innovative excellence.⁴¹

In terms of generation, the orientation towards success in immigra-

tion was helped by including individuals of a very young age at the time of emigration. Also, at the RFJI's request, the third volume's indices included the émigrés' movements until the early 1980s, long after their trajectories had disconnected from the fact of the original emigration.⁴² Geographically, the basic delimitation was Central Europe but qualified by a cultural linguistic criterion of Germanness to include Germans, Austrians, and German-speaking Czechs as well as other nationals and stateless persons who had resided in Germany and participated in its political, cultural or economic life and been forced to emigrate.⁴³ Consequently, the *Handbuch* does not cover the full consequences of the National Socialist regime in terms of social emigration and the related cultural transfer but is enveloped in a German culture perspective.

As for the all-important choice to organize the research and presentations biographically rather than by other structuring elements, Röder and Strauss argued that biographical documentation was the most suitable, if not the only, method to provide data for a *Wirkungsgeschichte*, a history of impact, and for researching processes of acculturation on a representative basis. This was even described to be where the IfZ's and RFJI's interests intersected: the German research interest in the history of persecution, opposition, exile, and remigration, and in the impact of those emigrants who returned to Germany, and the RFJI's epistemological goals of the emigrants' integration in new countries and their social, economic, cultural, and political achievements there.⁴⁴

Functions of acculturation

Acculturation was the main concept underlying these choices, handling several functions assigned to the concept in the *Handbuch* as well as in Strauss's writings. First, it served to solve the problem of a narrow, partisan historiography. In 'Wissenschaftsemigration als Forschungsproblem', Strauss condensed this function of a value-free concept of acculturation: it had transcended prevailing value judgements of national loyalty, language preservation, party discipline, and ideological continuity, and it had permitted historical facts to be released from the exclusively German

context to become available for the histories of immigration, Jewish culture, international networks of science, and migration in general.⁴⁵

Second, acculturation was a useful category to support a particular cultural model of society intended to solve the problem of majority-minority relations. The 'value-free' was here targeted at the historically defined norms of Americanization that prescribed the integration of immigrants either in a striving for Anglo-conformity—implying the strictest demand for assimilation—or in the creation of a new man in the melting pot of cultures and people, though leaving out non-whites and non-Protestants. Both these models implied the disappearance of ethnicity in contrast to the model of cultural pluralism as Strauss emphasized in his foundational articles of 1970/1971. He thought this model analytically to grasp the reality of American social life as German Jewish immigrants had experienced it, and politically to be a tool to harmonize racial tension or religious and ethnic difference by promoting the coexistence of ethnic groups, nationalities, races and religions. The model accepted the self-evident facts that the other models based general norms upon—that the political, legal, and linguistic pattern of the US was American English, and that considerable intermixtures of cultures and people had taken place—but accommodated the circumstance that many 'old' and new immigrants still lived within their separate religious and ethnic groups, with no structural or marital integration with other groups. Potentially, the model would allow the US to become a nation-state of a special character and to resolve its racial dilemmas.⁴⁶

In keeping with this, the *Handbuch's* introduction pointed to ethnic pluralism—a shared national identity despite differing cultural traditions—as having been foreign to Germany's national self-conception. This deficit was posited as the reason for the failure of German Jewish attempts, reaching back to the nineteenth century, to make sociocultural differences between Jewry and their Christian contemporaries understandable and acceptable from the latter's point of view.⁴⁷

Further, both in the *Handbuch* and in Strauss's writings from the 1970s and onwards, the 1930s emigration from Germany and other Central European countries is consistently situated as a minor part of 'the great movement of population that characterizes modern industrial

civilizations'.⁴⁸ The point made is that, even though small in scale also compared to the 60 million people uprooted by the Second World War, this emigration had inaugurating a new chapter of Europe's history: the beginning of the post-nation-state era, of a 'continent working its way out of the chimera of the demographically and culturally uniform nation-state towards the demographic pluralism emerging in the present'.⁴⁹ Strauss claimed that in the 1970s it was still unrecognized how the migration of workers and specialists had resulted in a Western labour force composed of up to 30 per cent foreigners who in general as *Gastarbeiter* were seen as second-rate citizens;⁵⁰ and in 1991, that most European industrial nation-states had become countries of immigration but not adjusted their population policies adequately to the political, intellectual and cultural implications of this demographic change.⁵¹ In the *Handbuch's* introductory texts, Strauss spoke of 'an age of demographic pluralism' and the beginning of the post-nation-state era where the mobility of labour forces follows the basic pattern of integration, acculturation and history of impact, similar to the interwar migration waves.⁵² In short, Strauss extrapolated the norm of cultural pluralism by claiming Western Europe to consist of immigrant countries far beyond a nation-state uniformity, where the acculturation concept then would be key to a value-free understanding of the immigration processes.

Consequently, the second function of acculturation was also to reduce the nation-state as a normative ideal, not in relation to historiography as in the first function, but in order to arrive at a model of society, applicable to both the US and Western Europe, that recognized the presence of Jewish and other ethnic minority cultures. It concerned the right to remain culturally distinctive in restricted contexts and retaining a group character, while integrating economically and socially in public life, and without having to face discrimination and prejudice—striving 'to redefine minority and race relations' as Strauss wrote in 1991—but at the same time understanding 'acculturation as an enduring "unstable equilibrium"'.⁵³

In contrast, the third function of acculturation was related to the problem of being German. Its starting point was not the enduring acculturation that the second function was premised upon, but an all

too rapid assimilation where the distinctive German Jewish culture disappeared into an overall Jewish-American ethnicity, as had been discussed at the *Lerntagen*. In the 1970/1971 articles, Strauss described how the average Jewish immigrant had ‘emerged from the war with a thoroughly broken relationship to his German past’.⁵⁴ He argued, basing this on personal observation, that the true drama of the immigrants’ acculturation process in the early years was the complex process of adapting psychologically, faced with the dilemma of being German—not an assimilated Jew, but *German*—while witnessing the news of National Socialist policies in occupied Europe and of the Holocaust. The solution for many had been to stress their Jewish identity and simultaneously to strive for speedy Americanization, also pressured by their environment in the US to distance themselves from Germany altogether.⁵⁵ Given their remaining German customs, mannerisms, accent, and basic values, this acculturation process had resulted in a new sub-culture, American German Jewish, but only as a temporary ethnic group within the wider ethnic group of American Jews. To the extent that this plateau was based upon German folkways, language, or literature, it would disappear with the immigrant to become only history or memory for the second and third generation, who would merge into the integration pattern of the American Jew in general.⁵⁶

In Strauss’s interpretation, the salvage of a specific German Jewish identity would therefore depend upon the special quality distinguishing the culture of the German Jews from American Judaism; not the shared excellence in organizing welfare and philanthropic work but ‘the personal inwardness, the intellectual and emotional culture’ of the German Jews whereas the American-Jewish middle class had failed to create ‘an aesthetically or intellectually satisfactory style of life away from mass media, sports, small talk, or status-seeking consumerism’. Strauss named this the last and final opportunity to recreate this culture, but ended on a pessimistic note, claiming that the former German Jew’s lack of faith in the value of his culture and in his ability to transmit it risked turning into a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁵⁷

For the purposes of reversing this prophecy, the émigré academics had a part to play. Gordon’s seminal study from 1964—a recurring

reference in Strauss's texts—had explained the perpetuation of ethnic singularity as a matter of structural rather than cultural pluralism, claiming that most Americans preferred separate ethnic communality in their primary group relations and organizational affiliations, at least in the main. Exempt from this assumed basic ethnic loyalty were intellectuals and professionals. Instead, they belonged to 'an amorphously structured intellectual subcommunity that contains people of all ethnic backgrounds'. In Gordon's hypothesis, this was the only subcommunity in America in which people of different ethnic backgrounds interacted in primary group relations frequently, comfortably and easily. Though other types of intellectuals existed, Gordon believed the 'marginally ethnic intellectual' to dominate in numbers and to be multiplying with the expansion of higher education.⁵⁸

Strauss, like Gordon, excepted émigré intellectuals, artists, and some professionals from the usual pattern of German Jewish (and other) immigrants avoiding structural assimilation with non-Jewish Americans.⁵⁹ More importantly, Strauss also excepted émigré academicians, writers, and left-wing intellectuals from having the same broken relationship to Germany as the average German Jewish immigrant. In contrast, he described academic émigrés as being among 'the most active "bridge-builders" between America and Germany' at the time, by sustaining an intellectual cross-fertilization in sociology, political science, history, and the humanities, and by contributing to better international understanding through exchange of personnel between American and German universities.⁶⁰

The academic Jewish immigrants were then, at the same time, successfully integrated, perhaps even structurally assimilated, into American society and the intellectual subcommunity, and they were not disassociating themselves from their German roots and moving straight into mindless American Jewish culture. Further, they represented a great part of the now-defunct Weimar intelligentsia in themselves but could also be mobilized to represent the quality of German Jewish intellectuality, insofar as this was identified with the flexibility of thinking and resourcefulness that Strauss had pointed out in the *Aufbau* interview.⁶¹ A random sample of 598 biographies at RFJI showed a lower ratio of

persons professing the Jewish religion than estimated for the entire émigré population—63 per cent over against 94 per cent—but still, in the *Handbuch*'s introduction, Strauss could legitimately claim the 94 per cent of the intellectual émigrés to be part of the Jewish emigration since they had 'suffered persecution largely because in the vast majority they were Jewish or of Jewish ancestry'.⁶² Contrary to the *Exilliteratur* tradition, the crucial features of the academics would have been, first, that they had integrated thoroughly and with a perceptible and valued cultural impact, which could be advanced to represent a quality of German Judaism as still being in existence and present in the country of resettlement. Second, that they had established connections to post-war Germany, by re-emigrating or in a professional involvement, for example, as guest professors.⁶³

Such claiming of a social group required another type of acculturation, another function of the acculturation concept. The introduction to the first volume of the *Handbuch* outlined how the general acculturation of German Jewish immigrants to the US in the 1930s—other than the economic and occupational integration—had been realized primarily through the networks of newly founded organizations such as the AFJCE and RFJI as well as by the integrating effect of American schooling and army service in the Second World War; the other way around, applying these traditional communal forms to new activities and contexts was claimed to have contributed to the plural life of America.⁶⁴ But in the extensive introductory texts of the second volume, general German Jewish acculturation was left out altogether, and the factors of acculturation were related just to the migration of academic intellectuals.⁶⁵

In the text on the migration of academic intellectuals, Strauss listed how the *Handbuch* provided the first firm basis for comprehensive studies of various knowledge fields. This catalogue description is a near-exact match of the aspects that framed the research project on *Wissenschaftstransfer durch Emigration nach 1933*, directed by Strauss from 1985 and explicitly described as based upon the *Handbuch*'s second volume. Central in this project was the use of the acculturation concept to understand the history of scientific impact in the countries of settlement in 'an analysis of the impact that transferred scientific paradigms

had on the science fields in these countries, and an examination of the impact that new surroundings had on the scientific knowledge, thus mediated and changed.’⁶⁶ Moreover, the ways that scientific methods and contents were ‘transferred back’ to Germany were to be investigated, bearing in mind that 1945 did not represent a zero hour in many scientific disciplines.⁶⁷

In this way acculturation had become cultural exchanges and influences at the level of scientific knowledge, connected to a group of individuals who socially were highly disposed towards both cultural and structural integration in their country of settlement and in academia internationally. The function of this acculturation, based on the uniting history of persecution on racial grounds (‘Betroffenheit’), was to create an enduring image of German Jewish intellectuality as flexible and resourceful, and as present and relevant in the countries of resettlement as well as in the international and presumably ‘marginally ethnic’ academic world. Significantly, the application of *acculturation* to the intellectual and artistic emigration has been named the innovative development that was achieved by employing the acculturation concept for the German-language exile after 1933. The use on general integration processes of Jewish emigrants and their children and grandchildren has however stayed conceptually and methodically within the history of other immigrant groups in various countries of settlement.⁶⁸

A very specific perspective

In his review of the *Handbuch*’s first volume in 1983, Heinz Hürten pointed to the heterogeneity of its life trajectories, which had only their German origin and Nationalist Socialist-inflicted emigration in common. Later, in his review of the second volume, Hürten found that the focus on elites, the culturally important groups, had brought out another quality, defined by coherence, not by dissimilarity: precisely the phenomenon of the intellectual changes triggered by the large migration movement and made easier to identify in the *Handbuch*’s selection of emigrants.⁶⁹ In spite of the *Handbuch*’s explicit aim to enable accounts of a more generalized range, all these three aspects appear to have been

vital to the *Handbuch*'s perspective of the 1930s emigration to create, or at least bring into sight, an indispensable nexus between the social and the intellectual.⁷⁰ As an encyclopaedia, its 'pre-research information' may be correct down to the smallest detail but still, the *Handbuch* has set a very specific frame for historical research into the 1930s emigration, even if this mostly resides beyond attention.

Notes

- 1 E.g. the thematic issue of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 43/3 on 'Migration and Knowledge', edited by Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg; Peter Burke, *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000* (Waltham: Bradeis University Press, 2017); the thematic issue of *Know*, 3/2 on 'Knowledge and Young Migrants', edited by Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg.
- 2 Frances F. Jacobson, 'Encyclopedias', in R.E. Bopp (ed.), *Reference and Information Services: An Introduction* (Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, 1995): 433. On the nationalizing colouring of encyclopedias and biographic dictionaries see Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012): 192.
- 3 For instance in Johannes Feichtinger, *Wissenschaft zwischen den Kulturen: Österreichische Hochschullehrer in der Emigration 1933–1945* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2001), 19–22.
- 4 E.g. Chris Lorenz, 'Der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg und die deutsche Geschichtsschreibung nach 1945', *Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Niederlande-Studien* 16 (2005): 159–170.
- 5 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', *Handbuch* Vol. I, XIII.
- 6 For instance in George Orwell's review of Franz Borkenau's *The Totalitarian Enemy*: 'one of the most valuable gifts that Hitler has made to England' in the British weekly *Time and Tide*, 4 May 1940.
- 7 On the double perspective and 'deprovincialization', Burke, *Exiles and Expatriates*, 16–33.
- 8 Franz L. Neumann, 'The Social Sciences', in W.R. Crawford (ed.), *The Cultural Migration. The European Scholar in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953): 20.
- 9 Feichtinger, *Wissenschaft*, 19.
- 10 E.g. in 'Vom Staatsrecht zur "political science"? Die Emigration deutscher Wissenschaftler nach 1933, ihr Einfluß auf die Transformation einer Disziplin', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 31/4 (1990).

- 11 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', L-LVI; id., 'Standards for Inclusion, Editorial Policy', *Handbuch* Vol. II, LXXXVII.
- 12 Patrik von zur Mühlen, 'Das Biographische Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933', in Horst Möller & Udo Wengst (eds.), *50 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Eine Bilanz* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1999): 350–352.
- 13 The work of libraries, archives, etc. is described in Jan Hans & Werner Röder, 'Emigrationsforschung', *Akzente. Zeitschrift für Literatur*, 20/6 (1973): 584–585.
- 14 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', L-LI.
- 15 Claus-Dieter Krohn, 'Die Herausforderungen der Exilforschung durch die Akkulturations- und Hybridtheorie' in Doerte Bischoff & Susanne Komfort-Hein (eds.), *Literatur und Exil* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013): 23–31; Mühlen, 'Handbuch', 345.
- 16 Martin Broszat & Curt S. Silberman, 'Geleitworte', *Handbuch* Vol. I, IX-XI.
- 17 Hellmuth Auerbach, 'Die Gründung des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 18/4 (1970): 529–554; Horst Möller, 'Das Institut für Zeitgeschichte und die Entwicklung der Zeitgeschichtsschreibung in Deutschland', in H. Möller & U. Wengst, *50 Jahre*, 7–11, 42, 68.
- 18 Nicolas Berg, *The Holocaust and the West German Historians: Historical Interpretation and Autobiographical Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015): 141–177, quotation 170.
- 19 *Ibid.* 175.
- 20 Martin Broszat, "'Holocaust' und die Geschichtswissenschaft", *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 27/2 (1979): 285–298, here 296. A general examination of Broszat's Holocaust readings requires much more detail; further to this 1979 article, Frank Bösch, 'Versagen der Zeitgeschichtsforschung. Martin Broszat, die westdeutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und die Fernsehserie "Holocaust"', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 6 (2009).
- 21 Broszat & Silberman, 'Geleitworte', IX–X.
- 22 Strauss' biography in the *Handbuch*, Vol II; H.A. Strauss, *In the Eye of the Storm. Growing up Jewish in Germany, 1918–1943* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999).
- 23 Strauss, *Eye of the Storm*, xii, 116.
- 24 The German article in *Emuna. Horizonte zur Diskussion über Israel und das Judentum*, V/1 (1970): 19–36; in English 'The Immigration and Acculturation of the German Jew in the United States of America', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 16/1 (1971): 63–94.
- 25 H.A. Strauss, 'Immigration and Acculturation of the German Jew in the USA—Diskussion', in *Protokoll des II. internationalen Symposiums zur Erforschung des deutschsprachigen Exils nach 1933* (Stockholm: Deutsches Institut der Universität Stockholm, 1972): 329–360, quotation 348.

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- 26 H.A. Strauss, *Essays on the History, Persecution and Emigration of German Jews* (Munich: K.G.Saur, 1987), 14.
- 27 H.A. Strauss, Hans-Peter Krömer, Alfons Söllner & Klaus Fischer, 'Wissenschaftstransfer durch Emigration nach 1933', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 13/1 (1988): 111–121.
- 28 H.A. Strauss, 'At the Crossroads. Postscript' & Curt S. Silberman, 'Introduction' in H.A. Strauss (ed.), *Conference on Acculturation* (New York: AFJCE, 1965): 52–57, 5–6.
- 29 Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: OUP, 1964): 32–34, 70–81.
- 30 Strauss, 'Crossroads', 56.
- 31 H.A. Strauss, 'Introduction: Between Israel and Assimilation', in H.A. Strauss (ed.), *Conference on American-Jewish Dilemmas* (New York: AFJCE, 1971): 7, 13, 15.
- 32 The contexts of contemporary politics and events are left out in this essay even though both the *Lerntage* publications and minutes, correspondence, etc. frequently refer to events such as the Six-Day War and subsequent conflicts, anti-Semitism related to a 1968 school conflict in NY, and the Munich Massacre in September 1972.
- 33 H.A. Strauss, 'Draft Memorandum for Council of Jews from Germany (London—24 August 1969)' & 'Protokoll der Sitzung des Councils of Jews from Germany am 24. August 1969', *CJG Collection AR5890*, 7/5 (Minutes, 1951–70); H.A. Strauss, 'Newsletter 6/1970', *Herbert Strauss Addenda AR25728*, 2/13 (AFJCE-newsletters, 1969–1985); all at Leo Baeck Institute NY.
- 34 Id., 'Newsletter 6/1970'; 'Protokoll der Sitzung des Council of Jews from Germany am 9. Mai 1970', *CJG Collection*, 7/6 (Minutes 1971–80).
- 35 'Protokoll der Sitzung.. 9. Mai 1970'; 'Newsletter 1/1971', *Herbert Strauss Addenda*, 2/13.
- 36 As outlined in H.A. Strauss' letter of 26 April 1973 to Werner Rosenstock and the related correspondence, *CJG Collection*, 4/9 (RFJI, 1973–81). It appears that the *Sammelwerk* was never realized.
- 37 H.A. Strauss, 'Proposal for the preparation of a history of the immigration of Jews from Germany, 1933–1950', *Herbert Strauss Collection AR25252*, Leo Baeck Institute NY, 1/45 (AFJCE, 1969–1974).
- 38 Will Schaber, 'Wer is Wer der Immigration im Entstehen begriffen', *Aufbau*, 1974, 40/4, 24. These were likely the Nobel Prize winners in 1971: the Hungarian-born physicist Dennis Gabor and the German chemist Gerhard Herzberg. Lawrence D. Stokes, 'Canada and an Academic Refugee from Nazi Germany: The Case of Gerhard Herzberg', *Canadian Historical Review*, 57/2 (1976): 150–170; Elisabeth H. Oakes, *A to Z of STS Scientists* (New York: Facts on File, 2002): 111–113.
- 39 Schaber, 'Wer is Wer'.

- 40 Röder's letter of 15 June 1976 to Werner Rosenstock, *CJG Collection*, 4/18. The term is also used in Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', LIV.
- 41 Ibid, LIV-LVI; id., 'Standards for Inclusion'.
- 42 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', LI; id., 'Standards for Inclusion', LXXXVII; Röder, 'Vorbemerkung', *Handbuch* III, V. Of the émigrés included in Vol. II, 28% were younger than 20 years of age at the time of emigration. Strauss, 'Jews in German History: Persecution, Emigration, Acculturation', *Handbuch* Vol. II, XXV.
- 43 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', ibid.; 'Standards for Inclusion', ibid. Imperatively to RFJI, the criterion was set aside to include rabbis and Jewish politicians, community officials, scholars, etc. from Eastern Europe who had remained unacculturated immigrants in Germany and Austria and been forced to emigrate from there together with the local Jewish population.
- 44 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', LI.
- 45 In H.A. Strauss (ed.), *Die Emigration der Wissenschaften nach 1933* (Munich: K.G. Saur Verlag, 1991), 17.
- 46 Strauss, 'Immigration', 70–73.
- 47 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', XXVI.
- 48 For example, ibid., XIII; quotation from Strauss, 'Immigration', 63.
- 49 H.A. Strauss, 'Jewish Emigration in the Nazi Period. Some Aspects of Acculturation', in W.E. Mosse et al. (eds.), *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991): 81.
- 50 Strauss, 'Anpassung', 19.
- 51 Strauss, 'Jewish Emigration', 81.
- 52 Strauss, 'Jews in German History', XI; Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', XIII.
- 53 Strauss, 'Jewish Emigration', 91.
- 54 Strauss, 'Immigration', 91.
- 55 The reaction of German-Jewish emigrants was described similarly in 1980 by Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', XXXII. In 1973, Strauss had called for a rationalizing of the emotion *Germany*, 'My Germany—and yours?', *Sh'ma*, 13 April 1973, 92–94.
- 56 Strauss, 'Immigration', 92.
- 57 Ibid, 77, 90–94.
- 58 Gordon, *Assimilation*, 158, 242–232, 263.
- 59 Strauss, 'Immigration', 72, 75, 93; Strauss, 'Anpassung', 21.
- 60 Strauss, 'Immigration', 82; Strauss, 'Anpassung', 28.
- 61 Schaber, 'Wer is Wer'.
- 62 H.A. Strauss, 'Some Demographic and Occupational Characteristics of Emigrés included in Vol. II of the *Dictionary*', *Handbuch* Vol. II, LXXVIII; Strauss, 'Jews in German History', XXIII.
- 63 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', XXXII.
- 64 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', XXX; detailed in Strauss, *Essays*, 317–335.

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- 65 Strauss, 'Jews in German History', XXV; H.A. Strauss 'The Migration of the Academic Intellectuals', *Handbuch* Vol. II, LXVII-LXXVII.
- 66 Strauss et al., 'Wissenschaftstransfer', 112: 'Durch die Analyse der Wirkung des transferierten wissenschaftlichen Paradigmas auf die Wissenschaften der Niederlassungsländer und die Untersuchung der Wirkung der neuen Umwelt auf die Wissenschaft, die vermittelt und verändert wird.' My translation.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Christhard Hoffmann, 'Zum Begriff der Akkulturation', in C.D. Krohn et al. (eds.), *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration 1933–1945* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1998): 122.
- 69 Heinz Hürten, *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, vol. 8 (1983): 307 & vol. 10 (1985): 305.
- 70 Röder & Strauss, 'Einleitung', LI. See also Alfons Söllner, 'Vom Staatsrech zur "political science"', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 31 (1990), 627 on the difficulty of honouring the abstracting aim.

Objects, interpretants, and public knowledge

The media reception of a Swedish future study

Karl Haikola

While knowledge as a social and public phenomenon often stands at the centre of the history of knowledge, more work needs to be done to specify the meaning of terms such as public knowledge or circulation.¹ This is not only to say that we should invent new concepts of our own, but also that we should be attentive to what is going on in other fields of research. One example of potential interest is the recent article ‘Public Ideas: Their Varieties and Careers’ by Tim Hallett, Orla Stapleton and Michael Sauder.² By focusing on the public life and influence of social science ideas, Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder ask some of the same questions that have been raised in programmatic articles about the history of knowledge in recent years.³ They are not primarily interested in the production of social scientific knowledge but rather in what happens when this knowledge, usually in the form of books or articles, emerges in the public. Consequently, they focus on the role of journalists as mediators between academia and the public, and as active users and interpreters of social science ideas.⁴

Examining how a number of influential works (among them Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations*, Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* and Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class*) have appeared in editorials, articles, reviews and opinion pieces, Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder find that social science ideas generally function either as objects or interpretants. In the first case, the ideas themselves are in focus, as,

for example, in a book review. In the second case, the ideas are applied to other events or phenomena, as may happen, for instance, in an editorial. When functioning as objects, social science ideas are the news; when functioning as interpretants they are used to make sense of other news. What characterizes a public idea, according to the definition presented in the article, is that it is used in both of these respects, ‘in a variety of ways as part of an unfolding career’.⁵

Being sociologists with an aptitude for quantitative method, Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder follow the media reception of social science publications over a period of ten years from their dates of publication, arriving at a typology of different public ‘careers’ (‘object-heavy’, ‘interpretant-heavy’ etc.).⁶ But does their article have anything to offer historians of knowledge focused on a shorter time period or a more limited number of knowledge objects? The present essay attempts to answer this question by relating their perspective to my own field of research, the history of Swedish futures studies. More specifically, the categories objects and interpretants will be applied to the media reception of the future study *Sverige i världen*, published in 1978 under the auspices of the Swedish Secretariat for Futures Studies.⁷ Before discussing the applicability of these categories in this particular case, we need to familiarize ourselves with the future study in question, as well as with its immediate background.

Swedish futures studies and *Sverige i världen*

The government-affiliated Swedish Secretariat for Futures Studies was formed in 1973, following the guidelines drawn up by a working group headed by the social scientist and politician Alva Myrdal. This was in response to an ongoing international trend. What was variously labelled ‘futurology’, ‘futures research’, and ‘futures studies’ had emerged in the early post-war era, first in the US, then elsewhere. Though partly rooted in the high modern faith in scientific and technological progress of the early post-war period, the field took a turn towards emphasizing global risks and environmental and ecological issues in the 1970s. The Club

of Rome's intensely debated *The Limits to Growth* (1972) was decisive in this respect.⁸

The founding of the Secretariat is interesting in relation to Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder's article, since the Myrdal group explicitly intended to create an arena for public ideas and knowledge. As historian Jenny Andersson has shown, the group envisaged Swedish futures studies as a democratic, publicly oriented counterpart to the allegedly elitist and deterministic tendencies prevalent in the international field. They argued that the technocratic futurology of American think tanks like the RAND Corporation, as well as the dystopian forecasts of the Club of Rome, inaccurately depicted future developments as being beyond the scope of ordinary citizens or individual nations. By contrast, in the words of Andersson, Swedish futures studies 'would have to present knowledge and information in such a way that citizens could grasp the difference between alternative futures and the possibility of choice between them'. A related concern for the group was to investigate how a small state such as Sweden would be able to pursue its own model of the future in a world of increasing global dependencies and growing influence of the superpowers and multinational corporations.⁹

Consequently, one of the first large projects launched by the Secretariat bore the title 'Sweden's international conditions'. The purpose was to systematically investigate different ways in which the international system might develop in coming decades, as well as Sweden's chances of influencing and adapting to those developments. Based at Lund University, the project group was headed by history professor Sven Tägil. The other main contributors were the historians Lars Niléhn, Bo Huldt, and Rune Johansson, together with the economist Svante Iger and the political scientist Thomas Hörberg. Apart from the final report *Sverige i världen*, a number of interim reports were published along the way.

The methodological corner stones of *Sverige i världen* were two pairs of variables deemed to be of fundamental importance for future international developments: internationalization and de-internationalization on the one hand, and conflict and cooperation on the other.¹⁰ Put together, these variables made possible four different 'images of the future', described and analysed in four chapters. While Iger, Huldt,

Hörberg, and Johansson wrote one chapter apiece, their scenarios had several common points of departure. They picked the year 2000 as an approximate end point, and they were all global in scope, assuming not a uniform but an interconnected pattern of development across the world. Moreover, the aforementioned interim reports served as a common knowledge base, integrating expertise from other sciences into the project. For example, one report was written by meteorologist Henning Rodhe and dealt with the impact of ecological factors—such as climate change and environmental degradation—on future developments.¹¹ As we shall see, all four scholars included such factors in their scenarios, albeit to varying degrees.

Iger described a future in which economic growth continued relatively undisturbed and capitalism drove the world towards continued internationalization and cooperation, with the US, Japan, and a growing European Economic Community (EEC) dominating the scene at the expense of smaller nations. However, Iger's chapter also included an alternative scenario, in which international cooperation was determined not by the workings of global markets, but by the increasingly catastrophic consequences of global climate change.¹² Huldt's future image postulated a continued internationalization, but also an increased level of international conflict due to dwindling energy sources, frequent economic crises, climate change and proliferation of nuclear weapons.¹³ In Hörberg's future image, de-internationalization and conflict were brought about by economic protectionism coupled with a rapid proliferation of nuclear and biochemical weapons.¹⁴ Johansson, finally, assumed de-internationalization and a general strengthening of nation-states due to a widespread resurgence of nationalism and isolationism. Eventually, though, the increasing urgency of global issues like environmental degradation, climate change and nuclear proliferation would necessitate far-reaching cooperation. Johansson also briefly discussed another, less probable yet possible global development, in which the nation-states themselves fragmented into smaller, self-reliant units, characterized by 'autonomy, diffusion of power, contact between people and a life in harmony with nature'.¹⁵

If there was some sort of general claim uniting these images of the

future, it was thus that uncertainties, threats and crises were looming on the horizon, and that Sweden had to prepare accordingly. This was further underlined in Tägil's concluding chapter. The project leader noted that none of the future images analysed in the report seemed to favour the material standards Swedes had gotten used to in the post-war period, as they all pointed to the likelihood of increased economic instability, resource scarcity, and ecological problems. Thus, in all probability, the paradigmatic faith in growth and consumption of the past two decades would soon be regarded as a curious historical parenthesis. A more just and realistic objective to strive for under present conditions was solidarity, with the developing world as well as with coming generations. This, however, would require profound and general value changes, a process in which the government, the educational system and the media would all have to assume responsibility. As for concrete political measures, Tägil briefly entertained the idea of expanding the Swedish state apparatus with a 'department of consequences' or an 'ombudsman for the future'.¹⁶

In accordance with the idea of futures studies as a source of public knowledge, *Sverige i världen* was sold in ordinary bookshops, and anyone interested could subscribe to the interim reports. Moreover, it was emphasized that the report was not only intended to broaden the basis of political decision-making, but also to generate an informed public debate on the future: Swedish society as a whole was the intended recipient.¹⁷ An important question from the historian's point of view is thus to which extent the project group was successful—did the report achieve the impact on public discussion desired by its authors?

Concerning method

Drawing on Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder's definition of public ideas, I postulate that publicly influential works do not only circulate as objects but also as interpretants. Put differently, they are not only presented as news in themselves in the media, but are also used in order to make sense of other events or phenomena, or as means of arguing for specific stand points.

The empirical study is based on a collection of press clippings in the archive of the Secretariat for Futures Studies, stretching from the publication date of *Sverige i världen* in late October 1978 to mid May 1979. It is possible that this collection is not entirely complete, but the purpose of the present essay is not necessarily to give a full account of everything that was written about the report at the time, but rather to explore how the concepts, objects and interpretants can be applied to the source material available.¹⁸ To be sure, the methodological approach of Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder has certain limitations in this particular context. For one thing, whereas they have followed their works over ten-year periods, my own time span is indeed very brief in comparison, making it difficult to establish whether *Sverige i världen* even had a ‘career’ in their sense of the term. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that what we may call object-oriented articles—such as reviews—are more likely to find their way into a collection of this sort than are articles in which the report functions as an interpretant, that is, in which it is discussed in the context of a different issue.

Nevertheless, I would argue that Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder’s article could be useful in this case. First, as was initially pointed out, they identify the fundamentally active role of journalists and editors in using and interpreting scientific knowledge, noting that ‘once ideas enter the public, social scientists lose control over them’.¹⁹ For the historian of public knowledge, this raises important questions. Which aspects of a particular work get attention and why? To which contexts are they applied, and how? Which aspects go unnoticed? Second, while the distinction between objects and interpretants hardly amounts to a fully fledged operationalization of a concept like circulation, it at least points to two specific ways in which scientific knowledge may circulate and be used in the media. The distinction can thus serve as a point of departure for further discussions, explorations, and refinements.

The following empirical analysis is divided into two sections. The first focuses on articles which presented *Sverige i världen* as an object. Here, I look at how the report as a whole was presented and discussed in the Swedish media. The second section focuses on articles in which the report, by contrast, functioned as an interpretant. These were articles

which either discussed the report in the context of another issue, or had the report as its starting point but discussed it in a selective way in order to highlight a different issue. This section thus emphasizes those specific aspects of the report of which journalists or debaters made active use.

Urgent knowledge, agitation, or just a missed opportunity?

In the vast majority of articles covering *Sverige i världen*, the report figured as an object. These articles were either reviews or, predominantly, news articles, most commonly appearing in close proximity to the report's publication in late October. They can be divided into three categories. First, one category of articles which basically referred the report's content while making relatively few evaluative statements concerning its premises or conclusions. One article was published in a number of different newspapers of varying political colour. By choosing different headlines, these newspapers emphasized different aspects of the report's content. The majority stroke a general alarmist tone: 'Sweden has to start changing now'; 'Hard choices ahead'; 'Swedish society ill-prepared for the future'.²⁰ Some journalists stressed the sombre aspects of the report,²¹ others preferred to highlight the at least partly optimistic message of Tägil's concluding chapter, emphasizing that there was still time to choose between different futures.²² In the socialist weekly *Arbetaren*, Emin Tengström praised *Sverige i världen*, noting that the Secretariat for Futures Studies had proved itself to be one of the most important institutions in the country in terms of making possible 'a democratic debate on the future'.²³ The scientific status of the report was underlined by references to its authors as scholars or 'futurologists' (*framtidforskare*).²⁴ In this way, the report's warnings of oncoming global insecurities and crises were presented as urgent knowledge.

Second, a smaller category of articles in liberal or conservative papers that detected a clear left-wing bias in the report, thereby undermining its status as knowledge. In a strongly dismissive review, the liberal publicist and debater Harald Wigforss labelled it 'political agitation in the guise of science', claiming that the authors pretended to objectively

anticipate certain future developments while in fact advocating them.²⁵ Without going as far as Wigforss, Olle Bolang in *Svenska Dagbladet* criticized Iger's discussion of global capitalism as a zero-sum game.²⁶ The evening paper *Expressen* was similarly critical of Tägil's view that solidarity with the Third World presupposed curbed growth and consumption at home. Such an ideological interpretation of the workings of the global market was a recipe for disaster, for the developing as well as developed countries.²⁷

Third, there were reviewers who complained about the form rather than the content of the report, criticizing it without necessarily questioning its scientific status. The national economist Gunnar Adler-Karlsson expressed sympathy for the intentions of the project group, while also lamenting that the result was essentially a missed opportunity: the failure of the authors to offer clear guidelines for political action, or even to specify which future images were more likely than others, would allow decision-makers to carry on with business as usual. It could thus not be ruled out, he concluded, that the report might simply be a cynical attempt from above to provide intelligent and potentially subversive social scientists with a false sense of purpose, whereas they might otherwise have engaged in truly disclosing 'the short-sighted opportunism of politicians'.²⁸ As this makes clear, politically charged criticism of the report could come in different shapes. Similar objections were also raised by several other commentators in the daily press as well as in more specialized journals, who pointed out that its focus on several different scenarios, combined with its somewhat inaccessible academic prose, would make it difficult for the report to impact either policy or public debate.²⁹ Replying to the criticism, Tägil defended the project group's modus operandi by citing normal scientific procedure. For one thing, he stressed that the use of alternative scenarios served to diminish subjectivity in a field that inevitably involved a large degree of hypothetical reasoning.³⁰

Finally, a more general point is worth making regarding the articles presenting *Sverige i världen* as news. Whether neutral, respectful or critical in their comments, journalists largely tended to exclude and emphasize the same aspects of the report's content. From the point of

view of a historian in 2020, it is noteworthy that the project group's focus on climate change as a potential determinant of future developments was rarely mentioned in the Swedish press. With a few exceptions, Iger's alternative scenario, which particularly stressed this factor, was generally left out when the report was summarized. Conversely, Tägil's concluding chapter got a significant amount of attention, sometimes to the extent of appearing as the main content of the report, despite being by far its shortest contribution.³¹ Lacking the somewhat dense social science jargon of the rest of the report, Tägil's chapter was a comparatively straightforward read. It was also alone in consistently addressing the specific role of Sweden in a future world society, despite the title and stated focus of the report. Moreover, it contained at least a small number of concrete proposals, as well as some memorable neologisms. Tägil's briefly mentioned idea of installing an 'ombudsman for the future' was widely circulated in the press. While in many cases it merely made for a suggestive headline, the proposal also became subject to comments, ranging from positive interest and constructive criticism to outright mockery.³²

The report as an interpretant

Adler-Karlsson and others thus criticized *Sverige i världen* for being abstract and diffuse, doubting that it would achieve its intended influence on public discussion. Yet, in some cases *Sverige i världen* was cited in the Swedish press in order to make sense of a number of different issues. These cases were comparatively few, but are nonetheless worth highlighting.

One example is Rune Johansson's chapter. As we may recall, this included a future resurgence of nationalism and a strengthening of the world's nation-states, who nevertheless ended up cooperating closely on issues of global importance. Peace became the rule rather than the exception. In an alternative, and according to Johansson himself highly speculative scenario, the nation-states themselves were replaced by smaller, autonomous communities.³³ In the liberal *Kristianstadsbladet*, one journalist singled out Johansson's main future image as the most

important one of the book, hoping that it might function as a self-negating prophecy: nationalism and protectionism must be contained at any price, especially in a small and export-dependent country like Sweden.³⁴ The liberal politician Kerstin Anér reached a similar conclusion, discussing Johansson's scenario in an article on global peace. Critically noting that Johansson seemed to be in favour of the scenario he described, Anér remarked that the historical record gave strong reasons to doubt whether a world of nation-states in relative isolation from each other would really be peaceful. On the contrary, durable peace seemed to presuppose a shared cultural and linguistic heritage, economic cooperation, and movement across borders. The EEC, the Nordic countries, and US–Canada were cited as examples.³⁵

Johansson's alternative scenario, on the other hand, resonated with *Svensk Politik*, the official organ of the Swedish Centre Party. In early 1979, following a New Year weekend of severe cold and power cuts in many parts of the country, the monthly publication featured *Sverige i världen* in the first of a series of articles on the theme 'Sårbara Sverige' ('Vulnerable Sweden'). In the 1970s, the Centre Party had made decentralization one of its key issues, and while a large part of the article merely outlined the content of the report, it also applied it to a wider subject: the inherent dangers of modern, centralized societies, and the urgent need for local self-reliance.³⁶ Johansson's alternative future image was thus the one favoured in the article. The message was further strengthened by an interview with Tägil, in which the project leader called for a whole new approach to politics; the existing ideological spectrum was insufficient, fixated as it still was on growth and consumption.³⁷

Tägil's contribution to the report was also cited in several cases. The media's interest in the ombudsman for the future proposal was mentioned in the previous section. It was not only the proposal itself that attracted the attention of journalists, however, but to some extent also the context of which it was part. In his conclusion, Tägil had acknowledged that the long-term approach to policy he advocated might clash with the logic of parliamentary democracy. How, for example, could politicians elected on a three-year mandate be expected to make decisions that were unpopular in the short run, but of vital importance for

coming generations?³⁸ This struck a chord with the liberal politician and peace activist Ingrid Segerstedt Wiberg, who, like Kerstin Anér, included *Sverige i världen* in a series of four articles on the prospects of global peace and disarmament. Following Tägil's reflections, Segerstedt Wiberg accused contemporary democracy of hindering peace and disarmament; indeed, the current parliamentary system 'forced' national politicians as well as world leaders to think in a short-term perspective, rather than promoting long-term goals like justice, solidarity, and understanding.³⁹

In this interpretation, global solidarity was clearly the main message of *Sverige i världen*. It should be noted, though, that others drew quite different conclusions from the report. For example, Max Jakobson, Finland's former ambassador to Sweden, noted that small states like Sweden and Finland needed to cultivate a 'sound national egoism', given the tendencies towards international crises and uncertainties postulated in all four future images.⁴⁰

Tägil's discussion on democracy was also brought up in an article published in three conservative newspapers, as well as the liberal *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* and the Centre Party-affiliated *Södermanlands Nyheter*. The article endorsed the report for addressing a problem of great urgency, namely that modern democracies like Sweden were increasingly dominated by short-sighted, opportunistic vote-baiting. The long-term perspective advocated in the report was badly needed, it was argued, since it would enable citizens to see the negative effects of wage-earner funds, or that the parties on the right, as opposed to the Social Democrats, wanted to preserve 'the open society that we have today'. *Sverige i världen* could thus serve as a valuable contribution to the discussion on the future of democracy, which was not to suggest that all of the ideas expressed therein were reasonable.⁴¹

Concluding remarks

Published towards the end of a crisis-conscious decade, *Sverige i världen* was not the first Swedish study to address global risks and uncertainties, but it was an ambitious study nonetheless. It did not point to *one* future development or argue for a specific course of action. Instead,

being more multi- than interdisciplinary, the report gravitated around four different, internally consistent future images, each coloured to some degree by the research interests of their respective author. For all its intents and purposes of reaching beyond the confinements of academia, it was essentially a scientific report, comprising well over 300 pages, beginning with two chapters on theory and method. With this in mind, the attention that *Sverige i världen* received in the Swedish press in late 1978 and early 1979 was not insignificant.

I shall conclude with three observations on the study findings, while also summarizing the empirical analysis. The first two of these observations are of a general kind, while the third is concerned with Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder's conceptual framework. First of all, *Sverige i världen* was an attempt by professional historians and social scientists, anchored in a university environment, to produce public knowledge, and the media reception of the report partly reflects a dilemma generally associated with such endeavours—one that involves scientific norms on the one hand and an ambition for public influence on the other. This became manifest when some journalists criticized the report for what they perceived to be its disparity, its high level of abstraction and its lack of concrete political guidelines, and members of the project group cited academic procedure to their defence. Arguably, this dilemma affects any scientist eager to reach a wider audience, but it can be handled in different ways and have different consequences for how knowledge circulates. It could thus be a fruitful focal point for other scholars studying the relations between academia and the public, or the media reception of specific scholarly works.

Second, the present essay has pointed to a certain imbalance with regards to how *Sverige i världen* was presented in the Swedish media. The idea of installing an ombudsman for the future, to which Sven Tägil had dedicated exactly one sentence at the very end of the report, was emphasized in many headlines and articles, and sometimes appeared as the central statement of the project group. At the same time, the report's focus on climate change and environmental degradation as determinants of global future developments was largely omitted. Now, it is hardly controversial to state that media coverage in general is selective

by necessity, and often inclined to focus on the concrete or colourful rather than the complex or uncertain. Yet, this imbalance touches on a question of potential importance to any scholar engaged with the public impact of particular works: which aspects of them deserve our attention? In a pioneering article on the history of knowledge, David Larsson Heidenblad has proposed a shift of focus ‘from content to circulation’, meaning an analysis that does not concentrate on the work itself, but rather on those aspects of it that gain public attention in a given context.⁴² However, it may also be relevant to at least spare some analytical energy for that which does *not* circulate, that is, those aspects of a work which are ignored (or actively suppressed, for that matter). Admittedly, such an approach would involve wisdom of hindsight: that the Swedish media largely ignored the knowledge on climate change articulated in *Sverige i världen* in the late 1970s is primarily interesting in relation to the importance attributed to such knowledge today. Still, reflections on why certain forms of knowledge go unnoticed in one temporal context but not in another can, in my view, be both legitimate and essential.

Third, the distinction between objects and interpretants is valuable in that it points to the different ways in which scientific knowledge may circulate in the public. It also allows us to explore which particular aspects of a scientific work get attention in the media, and to which contexts they are applied. The analysis has shown that *Sverige i världen* frequently figured as an object, as news in itself, especially in the first few weeks after its publication, but also that the cases in which the report was used as an interpretant were comparatively few. While the source material, given its previously discussed limitations, does not exactly allow for bold conclusions, one may at least speculate that this tells us something about the character of the report: as we have seen, several critics complained that its multiple scenario focus and its lack of political guidelines made it cumbersome to grasp in its entirety. On the other hand, this disparity also gave the report a certain applicative flexibility, to borrow another term from Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder. In other words, it could be interpreted in different ways, used as a resource by different political factions, and applied to a range of local, national, and international issues.⁴³ For example, whereas two liberal debaters

highlighted Rune Johansson's future image to warn of the dangers of nationalism and protectionism, another commentator cited the report as a justification for a 'sound national egoism'. Whereas some conservative and liberal observers complained about the allegedly leftist tendencies of the report, others thankfully used Tägil's reflections on the limitations of the current political system to land a few symbolic punches on Swedish social democracy. In any case, it is likely that other works appearing in the public display a different pattern altogether: some may go unnoticed for a long period, only to become intensely debated later on; some may be 'interpretant-heavy' rather than 'object-heavy'. Such differences are worth studying.

However, they are also worth *explaining*, and in that respect Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder's conceptual apparatus comes up short. As they emphasize themselves, it is focused on how and when a certain work emerges in the public, but not why. Indeed, they deem it futile to try to explain why some scientific publications receive attention while others do not, as it is 'nearly impossible' to identify 'formulas for success' in this context.⁴⁴ Yet, it is reasonable to assume that many historians of knowledge will have a different point of departure, one that is more modest and more ambitious at the same time. Rather than seeking to explain public influence (or lack thereof) in general terms, we are likely to zoom in on more specific cases of knowledge circulation, making the explicative effort not only highly important but also realizable. As for my own line of research, a study concerned with the influence of Swedish futures studies on public debate would naturally have to consider factors such as personal networks, the relations between 'futuresologists' and the political sphere, and the importance of ideology and culture. There is no escaping the fact, then, that other tools will be required than just the ones provided by Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Andreas W. Daum, 'Varieties of Popular Science and the Transformations of Public Knowledge: Some Historical Reflections', *Isis* 100/ 2 (2009): 319–332; Johan Östling & David Larsson Heidenblad, 'Cirkulation—ett

- kunskapshistoriskt nyckelbegrepp', *Historisk Tidskrift* 137/ 2 (2017): 269–284; Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge. Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018).
- 2 Tim Hallett, Orla Stapleton & Michael Sauder, 'Public Ideas: Their Varieties and Careers', *American Sociological Review* 84/ 3 (2019): 545–576.
 - 3 See, for example, Johan Östling, 'Vad är kunskapshistoria?', *Historisk Tidskrift* 135/ 1 (2015): 109–119; Östling & Larsson Heidenblad, 'Cirkulation'.
 - 4 Hallett, Stapleton & Sauder, 'Public Ideas', 545–546, 549.
 - 5 *Ibid.* 546–547, 554–560, at 547.
 - 6 *Ibid.* 560–568.
 - 7 Bo Huldt, Thomas Hörberg, Svante Iger, Rune Johansson, Lars Niléhn & Sven Tägil, *Sverige i världen—tankar om framtiden. Slutrapport från projektgruppen 'Sveriges internationella villkor'* (Stockholm: Liber Förlag, Sekretariatet för framtidsstudier, 1978). The report was subsequently published in English, see *id.*, *Sweden in World Society. Thoughts about the future* (Oxford/New York/Toronto/Sydney/Paris/Frankfurt: Pergamon Press, 1980).
 - 8 On the history of the international development of futurology and futures studies, see, for example, Elke Seefried, *Zukünfte. Aufstieg und Krise der Zukunftsforschung 1945–1980* (Berlin: de Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015); Jenny Andersson, *The Future of the World. Futurology, Futurists, and the Struggle for the Post-Cold War Imagination* (Oxford: OUP, 2018); Achim Eberspächer, *Das Projekt Futurologie. Über Zukunft und Fortschritt in der Bundesrepublik 1952–1982* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, Brill Deutschland, 2019).
 - 9 Jenny Andersson, 'Choosing Futures: Alva Myrdal and the Construction of Swedish Futures Studies, 1967–1972', *International Review of Social History* 51/ 2 (2006): 283–285, 288, at 288. On Swedish futures studies see also Björn Wittrock, *Möjligheter och gränser. Framtidsstudier i politik och planering* (Stockholm: Liber Förlag, 1980); Joar Tiberg, 'Vart tog framtiden vägen? Framtidsstudiernas uppgång och fall, 1950–1986', *Polhem. Tidskrift för teknikhistoria* 13/ 2 (1995): 160–175; Gustav Holmberg, 'Framtiden. Historikerna blickar framåt', in Gunnar Broberg & David Dunér (eds.), *Beredd till bådadera. Lunds universitet och omvärlden* (Lund: Lunds Universitet, 2017), 279–305; Gustaf Johansson, *När man skär i nuet faller framtiden ut. Den globala krisens bildvärld i Sverige under 1970-talet* (Uppsala: Historiska Institutionen, Uppsala Universitet, 2018), 188–212.
 - 10 Huldt et al., *Sverige i världen*, 28–38.
 - 11 Henning Rodhe, *Ekologiska beroenden. Några aspekter på Sveriges ekologiska beroende av omvärlden* (Stockholm: Projektgruppen Sveriges internationella villkor, Sekretariatet för framtidsstudier, 1976).
 - 12 Huldt et al., *Sverige i världen*, 39–84.
 - 13 *Ibid.* 85–147.

- 14 Ibid. 148–198.
- 15 Ibid. 200–254, at 245.
- 16 Ibid. 255–284, at 281.
- 17 Ibid. 9–10.
- 18 However, I have also conducted a complementary search of four digitalized and two non-digitalized newspapers from the 26th of October 1978 to the 1st of June 1979 (*Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Göteborgs-Posten*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Arbetet*, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet Snällposten*). This did not result in any additional articles of interest.
- 19 Hallett, Stapleton & Sauder, ‘Public Ideas’, 546.
- 20 “Sverige måste börja ändras nu”, *Trelleborgs Allehanda* 27 October 1978; ‘Svåra val förestår’, *Sydöstran* 27 October 1978; ‘Svenska samhället dåligt förberett för framtiden’, *Skaraborgs Läns Annonssblad* 30 October 1978. Some of the articles appearing in the following analysis were published in several different newspapers. With the exception of note 41, reference will be made only to one newspaper in each of these cases.
- 21 Hans Tedin, “Låt en framtidsombudsman bevaka kommande generationers intressen”, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet Snällposten* 26 October 1978; Håkan Boström, ‘Hur blir vår framtid?’, *Göteborgs-Tidningen* 20 January 1979.
- 22 Conny Sjöberg, ‘Ny forskarrapport: “Det är nu vi bestämmer hur framtiden ska se ut”’, *Dagen* 27 October 1978; Ingrid Atterstam-Lundkvist, ‘Forskargrupp föreslår: Framtidsombudsman’, *Arbetet* 27 October 1978; Elisabeth Precht, ‘Politikerna måste tänka på konsekvenserna av besluten’, *Östgöta Correspondenten* 31 October 1978.
- 23 Emin Tengström, ‘Alternativa framtidsbilder’, *Arbetaren* 3 November 1978; see also Ove Nordenmark, ‘Alternativa framtidsbilder’, *Vestmanlands Läns Tidning* 23 January 1979.
- 24 See, for example, ‘Framtidsforskare: Sverige måste snart välja framtidsinriktning’, *Södermanlands Nyheter* 27 October 1978; ‘Forskare varnar Sverige: Slut på balanseringen mellan stormaktsblocken’, *Vestmanlands Läns Tidning* 27 October 1978.
- 25 Harald Wigforss, ‘Ombudsmän för vår framtid’, *Skånska Dagbladet* 13 December 1978; see also ‘Dags att släcka Sverige?’, *Vestmanlands Läns Tidning* 14 December 1978.
- 26 Olle Bolang, ‘Ny framtidsstudie: Styrd u-landspolitik kräver handelskontroll’, *Svenska Dagbladet* 27 October 1978.
- 27 ‘Tveksam framtidsanalys’, *Expressen* 29 October 1978.
- 28 Gunnar Adler-Karlsson, ‘Sverige i framtiden: Utmanande slösaktigt eller symbol för rättvisa’, *Dagens Nyheter* 16 May 1979.
- 29 See, for example, Lars Ramklint, ‘Skapa framtidsombudsman’, *Dagens Nyheter* 27 October 1978; ‘Sverige i världen’, *Affärsvärlden* 1978/47; Håkan Boström,

- ‘Varför så krångligt språk?’, *Göteborgs-Tidningen* 20 January 1979; Bertil Duner, ‘Suddiga framtidsbilder’, *Tiden* 1979/4–5; see also reviews of the report by four different scholars in *Internationella Studier* 1979/1.
- 30 Sven Tägil, ‘Vad kan forskarna veta om framtiden?’, *Internationella Studier* 1979/1, 40–43; see also Bo Huldt’s reply to Harald Wigforss aforementioned criticism: Bo Huldt, ‘Harald Wigforss och “Sverige i världen”’, *Skånska Dagbladet* 3 March 1979.
- 31 See, for example, Erik Berglöf, ‘Tre bilder av ett framtida Sverige’, *Norra Skåne* 12 January 1979.
- 32 Håkan Boström, ‘Hur blir vår framtid?’, *Göteborgs-Tidningen* 20 January 1979; Ingrid Segerstedt Wiberg, ‘Vårt politiska system hinder för solidaritet’, *Göteborgs-Posten* 10 November 1978; Yngve, ‘Spalten’, *Sölvesborgstidningen* 27 October 1978; ‘Ett visionärt (s)amhälle 2000’, *Norrköpings Tidningar* 28 October 1978; Tebe, ‘För dagen’, *Arbetet* 30 October 1978.
- 33 Huldt et al., *Sverige i världen*, 200–254.
- 34 Hj., ‘Utkik’, *Kristianstadbladet* 28 October 1978.
- 35 Kerstin Anér, ‘Storkrig och storfred’, *Borås Tidning* 16 November 1978.
- 36 See, for example, Carl Holmberg, *Längtan till landet. Civilisationskritik och framtidsvisioner i 1970-talets regionalpolitiska debatt* (Gothenburg: Historiska Institutionen, Göteborgs Universitet, 1998).
- 37 ‘Sårbara Sverige’, *Svensk Politik* February 1979.
- 38 Huldt et al., *Sverige i världen*, 281–283.
- 39 Ingrid Segerstedt Wiberg, ‘Vårt politiska system hinder för solidaritet’, *Göteborgs-Posten* 10 November 1978.
- 40 Max Jakobson, ‘Vi behöver sund nationell egoism’, *Svenska Dagbladet* 20 November 1978.
- 41 ‘Sverige i världen en nyttig rapport’, *Skaraborgs Läns Annonssblad* 28 October 1978; ‘Ett nyttigt debattinlägg’, *Gotlands Allehanda* 30 October 1978; ‘Demokrati i framtiden?’, *Mariestads-Tidningen* 30 October 1978; ‘Demokrati i framtiden!’, *Södermanlands Nyheter* 2 November 1978; ‘Demokrati i framtiden!’, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* 3 November 1978.
- 42 David Larsson Heidenblad, ‘From content to circulation. Influential books and the history of knowledge’, in Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge*, 71–81.
- 43 Hallett, Stapleton & Sauder, ‘Public Ideas’, 547, 549, 555–560.
- 44 Ibid. 546.

Standing on whose shoulders?

A critical comment on the history of knowledge

Staffan Bergwik & Linn Holmberg

When in the early 1980s Steven Shapin argued for the viability of SSK, he stated that ‘one can either debate the possibility of the sociology of scientific knowledge or one can do it’.¹ Perhaps we should adopt a similar stance towards the history of knowledge. Let’s do it instead of debating it! Together with other recent studies, the volume *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* demonstrates that an increasing number of scholars want to ‘do it’. In our concluding comments, however, we will stick to debating. The ostensible reason is that we have been invited by the editors to reflect on history of knowledge in general and the present volume in particular, but it also sits well with our belief that critical discussion is vital in all stages of field formation. We hope that our remarks can stimulate scholars to push their arguments as they move from debating history of knowledge to doing it.

The reception of the history of knowledge has generally been marked by a cautious optimism, mixed with criticism. While the field clearly inspires new research and collaborations, it remains uncertain what history of knowledge is and where it might be headed.² Broadly, we share that sentiment. While we welcome new initiatives to understand knowledge historically, we also wish to discuss some potential pitfalls, despite the enthusiasm at taking part in something new—an experience that is clearly manifested in this book. We will thus discuss different ways of thinking and talking about history of knowledge. Is it a ‘new’ field, or rather a convergence of trends found in several disciplines? Does the distinction matter, and if so, why? We will address the vexing

question of analytical language, what *knowledge* might mean, and what degree of conceptual rigour is needed for the history of knowledge to be a coherent undertaking. And finally we will examine how proponents of the field could sharpen their research agenda by engaging with existing scholarship within related disciplines. Our aim is to keep the discussion on a general level, and although examples are drawn from the present volume, we do not summarize or review individual contributions.

How to talk about the history of knowledge?

Efforts to launch and institutionalize history of knowledge as a distinct field are both the background to this book and an outcome. At Lund University, this has had many positive effects, enabling scholars to stake out the terrain for themselves and to generate an infrastructure (including funding) where research careers come to life. The interdisciplinary seminar and workshop series are creative meeting places, infused with the joy of intellectual discovery, and attracting scholars from all over Scandinavia. Taught courses offered at various levels have further contributed to a steady growth of new young scholars joining the enterprise. Against this backdrop, it is right to ask what history of knowledge is and whether it will become a new (sub)discipline, a loosely structured research field, or something in between.

The editors of the present volume have regarded history of knowledge as an ‘intervention’ that integrates various strands of scholarship, thereby aiming to generate new and original research.³ Throughout the volume, however, claims for the integrative, interdisciplinary capacity of history of knowledge collide with claims about its status as a ‘new’ independent field. Accordingly, the volume aspires to engage scholars in multiple fields in conversation, and yet equally it suggests that history of knowledge is a field of its own. Here there is an evident tension between breaking down barriers and building them.

To be fair, this tendency is observable in most instances of field formation. In the early twentieth century, the institutionalization of university disciplines was achieved by the establishment of professorships, educational programmes, and societies. By the turn of the twenty-first

century, scholars in the humanities were instead establishing interdisciplinary ‘fields’ or ‘turns’ at an increasing pace. Examples abound. New cultural history, visual studies, postcolonial studies, gender studies: they are all areas of research driven by topics and analytical perspectives rather than disciplinary boundaries. Such thematic conglomerations have had a profound impact on age-old disciplines such as history, anthropology, and sociology. Indeed, these fields have produced some of the most influential and profound insights in the humanities in the last half century, equipping the humanities to critically engage with questions of immediate societal concern, whether the environment (environmental humanities) or digitalization (digital humanities). The new labels have encouraged scholars to engage in lively discussion that spurs new directions of research. Without doubt, there is power in labelling.

However, there are specific difficulties involved when trying to establish a new field that crosses terrain inhabited by scholars who think of their work as part of an existing field. For this reason, we would argue that it is important to acknowledge different ways of talking about ‘the history of knowledge’. Just as *history* can refer to the totality of past events, studies of such events, or a university discipline, it is useful to distinguish between history of knowledge as (i) knowledge in the past (*knowledge in history*), (ii) studies about past knowledge (*histories of knowledge*),⁴ and (iii) a field in formation since the early 2010s, whose proponents aspire to study past knowledge in a specific or ‘new’ way (*history of knowledge as a field*). We are not arguing that one has priority over the others. By acknowledging the distinctions, however, we believe that some of the misunderstandings that arise about the history of knowledge as a field can be better understood. In what follows we focus on the second and third definitions.

There *is* a difference between using history of knowledge as an umbrella term for multi- and interdisciplinary studies of knowledge in the past, which have intensified in the past two decades, and constructing the history of knowledge as an incipient subdiscipline with a specific character. The general usage might seem vaguer, yet it is geared towards synthesizing existing work: to describing the rise of a global trend, stemming from and visible in several historical fields as well as in

sociology and anthropology. The specific usage tends to be more contested, with proponents of the 'new' field seemingly claiming it as their own terrain. In *What is the History of Knowledge?* (2016), Peter Burke paints a picture that resembles the former definition. The accelerating production of histories of knowledge in his account is a result of broad societal and media-technological changes and parallel developments in the history of science, book history, and global history, which together have fostered a keen interest in the global circulation of information, non-Western forms of knowledge, and artisanal, everyday knowledge.⁵ Seen from this perspective, the history of knowledge not only produces new connections and discussions, but it is already, fundamentally, a product of interdisciplinary crossovers.

Moreover, a line of conflict has materialized between historians of science and proponents of the 'new' history of knowledge as a field. Lorraine Daston has downplayed the idea of the field as essentially new, arguing instead that 'the history of science is becoming, haltingly and hesitatingly, the history of knowledge'.⁶ In short, historians of science, through the continuous broadening of their scope—and repeated efforts to historicize 'science'—have become historians of knowledge. Cautiously opposing such arguments, Sven Dupré and Geert Somsen counter that the history of knowledge is in fact a new endeavour, simply because we live in different times than the period in which the 'relativism of the 1970s' gained currency. Their point is that the history of knowledge is different to the history of science as it includes and emerges from new questions about the 'boundaries, hierarchies, and mutual constitution of different types of knowledge as well as the role and assessment of failure and ignorance in making knowledge'.⁷ The new era that Dupré and Somsen identify—the context that makes any history of knowledge relevant—is the opposite of a 'sacralization of science': it is the eroding of trust in expertise and scientific knowledge.⁸

The present volume does not speak with one voice and consequently never assumes a clear position on the matter. Several contributors approach questions of field identity and novelty claims cautiously and critically. They explore relationships with other fields and disciplines, some identifying as historians of ideas, others as microhistorians, or

book historians, or historians of information. Others maintain that history of knowledge is a new and independent field, and that its proponents have developed their own perspectives, methods, and skills.⁹ The occurrence of such discrepancies in field narration and identity-making is not surprising, but it raises an important question. To what degree are the contributors to this volume engaged in a mutual conversation or venture? Bearing this in mind, we will turn to the related issue of analytical language and objects of study.

Flexible concepts—strength or weakness?

Broadly defined, knowledge can be understood as a phenomenon that permeates every part of human life. Is this a strength or a weakness? Thus far opinions differ. According to the editors of the present volume, the field formation of the history of knowledge has entailed a number of ‘productive disagreements’ about how to define its key concepts.¹⁰ Other commentators have been less optimistic about the productive nature of these disagreements.¹¹

A number of positions have crystallized. Simone Lässig has argued that knowledge should be defined historically—it is simply what at any given time, and in any given context, is considered knowledge.¹² Such a definition, however, has its limits. Martin Mulrow points out that it obscures and excludes collective practices in the past that were not considered knowledge. If the historian instead uses a more inclusive analytical notion of what knowledge is, previously forgotten or marginalized actors, arenas, or practices might be reinterpreted.¹³ On the other hand, as Lorraine Daston remarks, with too broad a definition what cannot be considered knowledge? She has recommended a focus on systematized ideas and skills for the history of knowledge to be productive. Such systematization stipulates what is important enough to be understood as knowledge in a variety of historical contexts.¹⁴

The contributors to *Forms of Knowledge* share a ‘joint commitment to a programmatically broad, and fundamentally historical, conceptualization of knowledge’.¹⁵ The editors argue that while specific studies should be marked by conceptual rigour, the same standard does not need

to apply to the research field as a whole. Consequently, they adhere to the integrative approach that there are ‘no one-size-fits-all definitions that are useful for all the scholars partaking in the venture’.¹⁶ This is a viable argument. Fruitful studies of the history of knowledge might very well see the scholars responsible proceed from vague definitions of knowledge. Surely path-breaking studies in the history of science, history of medicine, or cultural history did not only come about *after* a clear definition of the common object of study?

In the present volume, the concept of knowledge is used with great flexibility and creativity, and the book brings together case studies as separate as late twentieth-century financial life and early modern religious practices. Many contributions (although not all) make a determined attempt at a definition of the form of knowledge they are concerned with. Several authors explore practical, vernacular knowledge and knowing from the perspective of everyday lifeworlds. Cecilia Riving uses the traditional Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* to distinguish between forms of knowing in early twentieth-century psychiatry in Sweden.¹⁷ Björn Lundberg explores the economist John Kenneth Galbraith’s concept of conventional wisdom as a means of understanding the acceptability of new knowledge claims.¹⁸ Several contributions clearly demonstrate that there are productive outcomes of applying knowledge to otherwise well-studied phenomena. A good example is Laura Skouvig’s conceptualization of information and bureaucracy as knowledge, viewing police work not as a part of the history of crime, but rather the history of knowledge. She rereads and reinterprets a well-studied phenomenon, charting how the idea of ‘suspicion’ has much to do with how information becomes knowledge as it is handled, systematized, and recorded in police registers. Indeed, suggests Skouvig, suspicions become a historically produced form of knowledge.¹⁹ Plainly, the business of rereading established historical phenomena through the lens of knowledge can effectively reform ideas about the object of inquiry.

Taking all the contributions together, though, some conceptual uses of ‘knowledge’ seem harder to combine. Peter K. Andersson defines it as ‘something shaped in the mind of the individual—the sum of a person’s received information’.²⁰ For other contributors, knowledge resides out-

side the mind, often in the shape of textual information, narratives or accounts carried by various media forms.²¹ In other chapters, knowledge rather emerges as a process of negotiation, competition, justification, validation, and legitimation—knowledge as *claimed* and not just *gained*.²² For instance, Maria Karlsson demonstrates how change logs and talk pages on Wikipedia are a fascinating source material when studying the real-time processes of intellectual negotiation and competition, and indeed the lively debates about the nature, correctness, and significance of historical knowledge.²³

The term ‘circulation’ is used in an equally flexible way. The historians of knowledge in Lund have previously paid great attention to this concept. In a previous anthology, the editors remarked that circulation has become ‘a common, though rarely theorized, concept’, and even though the contributors could not ‘settle on a common understanding or definition of the concept’, they ‘became confident that it constituted a promising trajectory for developing the history of knowledge’.²⁴ The same conviction informs the present volume, and the term ‘circulation’ pops up everywhere. It is used to describe multi-directional movements and continuous transformations (Brilkman) as well as cases of one-directional disseminations (Bodensten, Ericsson), limited cases of reception (Haikola), and phenomena somehow widely spread (Simonsen). In contrast, Karolina Enquist Källgren develops an analytical language for describing objects of knowledge in circulation, while simultaneously problematizing a knee-jerk equating of circulation and transformation.

The various uses of ‘knowledge’ and ‘circulation’ thus give rise to at least two concerns. The first is analytical clarity and coherence. The flexible use of the two terms threatens to obscure the fact that several researchers actually examine rather different things. When ‘circulation’ is employed to describe every kind of movement an object undertakes, differences and varieties are blurred, and insights of a more precise nature are lost. For instance, what does it do for the understanding of the researcher or the reader to interpret a few reviews in newspapers as ‘public circulation’, when little is known about how these reviews were read or interpreted by a wider audience?²⁵ What operations are actually referred to when an organization or actor is said to be ‘circulating know-

ledge’?²⁶ And in what respect can one claim to study the circulation of knowledge when the sources describe a one-directional dissemination of textual information?²⁷ Is there not a point in distinguishing between informing the public about X through a specific channel, and X becoming unanimously accepted and/or practised among a population?

The second problem, which relates directly to the vagueness of key analytical concepts, pertains to the production of new insights: accumulation. If there is little coherence in the idea of what is studied, to what degree can researchers build on or connect to one another’s results? The critical historicizing of knowledge in fields such as intellectual history, cultural history, and the history of science have left us with an array of empirically rich, detailed case studies. While such studies have contributed to debunking the old positivist master narrative of modern science, they have not been able to form an alternative big-picture narrative.²⁸ In 2004, James A. Secord suggested that the study of knowledge as a continuous process of communication, moving and transforming over time, could be the basis for such a narrative.²⁹ This vision is echoed in the introduction to the present volume. The editors argue that the concept of knowledge can foster an ‘interchronological approach’ and bring together scholars otherwise separated by chronological specialization.³⁰ But does it suffice to gather a series of case studies with different chronological foci in an anthology to succeed with interchronology—or even more so, to create an alternative big-picture narrative? Our impression is that it does not. And the main reason is the conceptual ambiguities.

What would it take for history of knowledge as a field to contribute to a new big-picture narrative, and not just produce more fragmented case studies? Like the editors, we believe that conceptual disagreements can be productive, *if* they are identified, pondered, and then used to further sharpen analytical language and arguments. For future studies, we would like to encourage researchers of the history of knowledge to strive harder to (i) *define* and *position* their analytical concepts in relation to one another, especially across chronological periodization, (ii) *justify* their application to the object of study, and (iii) *integrate* them into more complex terminologies.

First, every effort to understand ‘knowledge’ historically and contex-

tually—as an effect of local and shifting cultural, social, institutional, or political frameworks—still operates according to present-day notions of what should be interpreted as knowledge. Thus, whenever ‘knowledge’ serves to examine, connect or compare ideas and practices in the past (regardless of how they were defined by the historical actors involved), the term functions as an analytical concept. Studies of this kind can be distinguished from research that focuses on what the term ‘knowledge’ (or related words in various languages) meant to an actor or community in a specific time and place. In short, researchers cannot assume they have a shared object of study, or a shared concept, just because they employ the same term.

Second, we believe that history of knowledge as a field in formation would benefit greatly from a profound discussion of what motivates various analytical concepts of knowledge. What does it add to our historical understanding to study carpentry skills—or religious ritual, public opinion, awareness of contemporary events, or the ability to find your way home—as knowledge rather than as ideas, practices, or capacities? When applied to the past, how do ‘knowledge’ and ‘circulation’ alter the reader’s perception?

Third, for the history of knowledge to generate new and original research, one must dare to ask what is gained analytically by replacing ideas, science, mentalities, worldviews, information, beliefs, practices, or opinions with the one word ‘knowledge’. The same applies to ‘circulation’. A more complex analytical terminology of mobility enables an examination of processes on different scales; to zoom in on individuals or zoom out to see whole populations; to follow movements across national and linguistic borders and between societal layers. Considered in a short time span, the best way to describe the movements of a certain text, concept, symbol, artefact, or practice may not always be in terms of ‘circulation’. Some sources only permit us to observe cases of dissemination. In order to study a process of circulation, one might need to add more sources, explore series of connections, or expand the chronological perspective. As Enquist Källgren suggests, if the object in motion itself changes, is ‘circulation’ even the best word to describe the process?

In short, for ‘knowledge’ and ‘circulation’ to be fruitful concepts, they need to be integrated into more complex terminologies in order to describe the processes of creating, disseminating, changing, and denigrating knowledge in the past. In this department, historians of knowledge have everything to win by engaging more actively with what is already known.

Engaging with what is already known

Several contributors to the present volume stress their field’s heritage from social and cultural history, while declaring their ‘otherness’ compared to intellectual history and the history of science. This pattern of disassociation is strategically understandable yet intellectually regrettable. In a recent article, Simone Lässig claims that many historians of science still primarily seek to illuminate advances in scientific knowledge, and that they ‘only recently’ have taken up ‘questions of how scientific knowledge affects society and, conversely, how social processes influence the production of knowledge in science’.³¹ This is debatable. We instead would argue that the history of science has developed fundamental conceptual tools and analytical strategies that go to the very heart of the history of knowledge.

Two points in particular raised by Lorraine Daston deserve to be repeated here. First, what counts as knowledge in a given historical context, and how hierarchies and orderings of knowledge emerge and change, have been basic research questions for historians of science for many decades.³² Second, from the 1960s onwards, historians of science have revolted against linear and teleological conceptualizations of science, developing a clearer ambition to study scientific practices critically. They have sought to provide naturalistic rather than idealized understandings of the historical forms of systematized knowledge. By going against the grain, historians of science have developed powerful tools to study ‘what scientists actually do rather than what they say they do’.³³ These efforts have resulted in a well-calibrated analytical language, including influential concepts such as ‘actor–network’, ‘episteme’, and ‘paradigm’. New generations of historians of science have dismantled

the distinctions between theory and practice, between tacit and systematized knowledge, between knowledge creation, negotiation and communication, and between science and society, using analytical concepts such as ‘immutable mobiles’, ‘context transfer’, ‘boundary-work’, ‘knowledge brokers’, ‘go-betweens’, ‘trading zones’, and many more.³⁴

Judging from the contributions to this volume, the analytical language of the history of science has made little impression on the history of knowledge in Lund, and the critical edge that comes from going against the grain is not immediately evident. Two examples in particular can be addressed: arguments about ‘society at large’ and everyday life. From the first, the editors note that many contributions relate to the question of ‘how various forms of knowledge become important, be it in society at large or in people’s everyday lives’.³⁵ David Larsson Heidenblad goes on to assert that a distinguishing mark of the history of knowledge as a field is the interest in knowledge of high ‘social reach and relevance’.³⁶ Similarly, Björn Lundberg argues that what historians of knowledge can ‘bring to the table is the study of knowledge claims made outside academia’ and ‘the production and circulation of knowledge in relation to society at large’.³⁷ In these and other contributions, ‘society at large’ is spoken of as an undifferentiated entity, *outside* the environments of knowledge-producing elites. Such reasoning tends to homogenize and black box ‘society’, and thus lumps together a plethora of complex phenomena into an all-encompassing notion, establishing a dichotomy between society and academia.

For decades, the very idea of ‘society’ has been thoroughly deconstructed by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians of various sorts. They have convincingly shown that what we commonly talk about as ‘society’ is a complex effect of numerous initiatives, power mechanisms, and exchanges. Indeed, as historians of the social sciences have demonstrated, ‘knowledge’ has been a vital part of generating ideas about ‘society’ as something that exists and is possible to measure, examine, and change.³⁸ In this respect, knowledge and society are co-produced.³⁹ In the end, claims to study how something gains ground in ‘society at large’ might obscure the fact that what actually is studied is a limited number of actors (albeit perhaps not the most famous philosophers,

theologians, scientists, inventors, or authors). In this respect, ‘society at large’ becomes something of an eidolon: it is there to signal a theoretical premise or overall interest, but is rarely what is actually studied.

A closely related theme—and equally important in this book—is the issue of everyday life. When reading the chapters of the present volume, one might have the impression that historians of science have taken very little notice of everyday life in the past.⁴⁰ There is certainly some truth to that—the history of science has long gravitated towards well-known scientists or natural philosophers of the past—yet the image of the current field as still exclusively occupied with the history of the laboratory or ivory tower is simply too narrow. This is especially true of studies of the ancient, medieval, or early modern periods, when *science* (Latin *scientia*) basically meant systematized knowledge, and academia (as we know it) did not exist.⁴¹ Even in the modern period, the arenas and actors of interest to historians of science have widened substantially. While it is certainly true that history of science has not devoted the bulk of its interest to cookbooks or confessional practices, the field has developed numerous conceptual innovations to point to the many ways in which knowledge is produced, claimed, structured, and organized and how it has affected the everyday world. Scholars in the field have studied spatial dimensions of knowledge, mediations of knowledge, personas of knowledge makers and brokers, visual practices, and readerships.⁴² Thus, impulses from social and cultural history have not only been instrumental to the formation of history of knowledge, but for the past three decades they have also played a crucial part in reshaping the history of science that once was.⁴³ In the history of medicine and the history of the social sciences, the relations between knowledge-making and the everyday grow even stronger. Both these fields offer good examples of knowledge-producing actors and networks, not necessarily limited to academic institutions and laboratories.

These critical comments aside, we believe that the history of knowledge has great potential to find the gaps in, and critically broaden, existing scholarship. A continuous focus on everyday life might prove to supply history of knowledge with innovative empirical examples, new contexts for knowledge making and fresh temporal units. In this work, it is still

necessary to ponder how the everyday is systematized, codified, standardized, or shared. By building on the interpretative schemes of the history of science, of the social sciences, and of medicine—rather than overlooking or even dismissing them—historians of knowledge may indeed succeed in generating a deeper understanding of the everyday.

Finally, considering that the present volume is the product of an interdisciplinary environment in Sweden, it is reasonable to consider the relationship between history of knowledge and the Swedish discipline *idéhistoria* (or *idé- och lärdomshistoria*). Although commonly translated as ‘history of ideas’, ‘history of science and ideas’, or ‘intellectual history’, the Swedish *idéhistoria* soon developed a wider and more heterogeneous outlook compared to its continental and Anglo-American siblings. In 1933, Johan Nordström, the holder of the first chair in the subject, pondered the great potential in approaching the history of science and learning as a wider form of ‘history of ideas’. If historians could set out to examine how ideas travelled from one sphere to another and influenced attitudes, mentalities, and practices throughout society, it could pave the way for a deeper understanding of societal change.⁴⁴ In the past eighty years, Swedish historians of ideas have combined influences from intellectual history, cultural history, and the history of science to apply a broad, contextual outlook on every thinkable aspect of human society, may it be the natural or social sciences, the humanities, philosophy, religion, technology, gender, or broader mentalities and cultural practices.⁴⁵

However, as Anton Jansson remarks in a recent article, although *idéhistoria* is an independent discipline, ‘it could be questioned whether it is a field’.⁴⁶ This is a valid point. To be sure, there are plenty of Swedish historians of ideas who do (or could) define their objects of study as some form of knowledge, but many prefer not to. In short, history of ideas as a discipline is not *just* a history of knowledge—it is much more. Ultimately, ‘idea’ might be a vaguer and wider notion than both ‘knowledge’ and ‘science’. For the history of knowledge as a field to be productive and innovative—and not turn into a new history of ideas under another name—the distinction between ‘knowledge’ and ‘idea’ must keep meaning something. If it does, then there will be plenty of

good reasons for many more historians of ideas to join the venture of elaborating on the history of knowledge as an interdisciplinary field.

Conclusions

The present volume adds to the impression that history of knowledge as a field in formation is gradually turning from a phase marked by programmatic texts to a phase of empirical study. This is encouraging. Its quality as a field is then made visible for the work it does rather than the claims about the work it can do. Nevertheless, we must end with a question. How many of the emerging studies in the history of knowledge have really taken upon themselves the arduous task of engaging with the analytical language and empirical results of their neighbours? While knowledge production might not be seen as cumulative in a straightforward way (indeed, the history of science has taught us that ever since the days of Thomas Kuhn), there is a distinct risk that the history of knowledge obscures ground-breaking work in the research fields that borders it. We have suggested that the fundamental question that historians of knowledge must ask themselves is how to ensure their insights into historical forms of knowledge are cumulative. How best to add to the sum of existing scholarship rather than intervene by overlooking hard-won insights? As the editors themselves stress, historians of knowledge may need to ponder the implication of ‘the basic tenet that knowledge is rarely truly original or new’ and what that means for the formation of their own field.⁴⁷ We can only agree.

History of knowledge can offer a platform where scholars from a variety of historical subdisciplines can engage with one another’s work to advance new theories, methods and objects of study pertaining to knowledge in the past.⁴⁸ At the same time, this broad outlook means that historians of knowledge are required to consider more ‘states of the art’ than most. Yet, in the end, standing on the shoulders of predecessors is a good thing. Armed with a well-calibrated analytical language, the history of knowledge has potential to lead a critical discussion about the state of cultural history, constructivism, and other major trends that have shaped scholarship since the late twentieth century, not to men-

tion providing a long-term historical perspective on the globalization, democratization, and increasing mistrust of knowledge.

Notes

- 1 Steven Shapin, 'History of Science and its Sociological Reconstructions', *History of Science* 20 (1982), 157–211 at 157. As noted by David Larsson Heidenblad in the present volume, one of us (Bergwik) used this analogy in a lecture on history of knowledge in Lund in 2017.
- 2 See, for example, Lorraine Daston, 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', *Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1/1 (2017), 131–54; Sven Dupré & Geert Somsen, 'The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 42/2–3 (2019), 186–99; Simone Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016), 29–58; Suzanne Marchand, 'How Much Knowledge is Worth Knowing? An American Intellectual Historian's Thoughts on the *Geschichte des Wissens*', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42/2–3 (2019), 126–49; Martin Mulsow, 'History of Knowledge' and 'Response', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 159–72, 179–88; Hampus Östh Gustafsson, 'Kunskapshistoriens samtidsrelevans', *Historisk tidskrift* 138/4 (2018), 678–87; Staffan Bergwik, 'Kunskapshistoria: Nya insikter?', *Scandia* 82/2 (2018), 86–98.
- 3 Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar, introduction to the present volume.
- 4 A good example of the first and second definitions is Peter Burke's *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000) and *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), in which he uses 'history of knowledge' to refer to past ways of defining, producing, organizing, managing, communicating, and legitimizing knowledge. In his recent work, (for example, *What is the History of Knowledge?* Cambridge: Polity, 2016) he applies the term to an emerging trend or 'turn' in modern academia, as an increasing number of scholars in various disciplines and fields have begun to historicize knowledge.
- 5 Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?*, 6–14.
- 6 Daston, 'History of Science', 132, 142, 145.
- 7 Dupré & Somsen, 'History of Knowledge', 186.
- 8 *Ibid.* 190–1.
- 9 See, for example, Larsson Heidenblad in the present volume.
- 10 Östling, Larsson Heidenblad & Nilsson Hammar, introduction.

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- 11 See, for example, Daston, 'History of Science', 143; Bergwik, 'Kunskapshistoria', 87.
- 12 Lässig, 'History of Knowledge', 39.
- 13 Mulsow, 'History of Knowledge', 161.
- 14 Lorraine Daston, 'History of Knowledge: Comment', in Tamm & Burke, *Debating New Approaches*, 173–8 at 176.
- 15 Östling, Larsson Heidenblad & Nilsson Hammar, introduction.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Cecilia Riving in the present volume.
- 18 Björn Lundberg in the present volume.
- 19 Laura Skouvig in the present volume.
- 20 Andersson in the present volume.
- 21 For example, Erik Bodensten, Maria Simonsen, and Joachim Östlund in the present volume.
- 22 See, for example, Lundberg and Ericsson in the present volume.
- 23 Maria Karlsson in the present volume.
- 24 Johan Östling et al., 'The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge', in Östling et al. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018), 17.
- 25 Haikola in the present volume.
- 26 Simonsen and Bodensten in the present volume.
- 27 For example, Bodensten in the present volume. The author hints at this distinction towards the end, but he still chooses to define his study as concerning 'a societal knowledge breakthrough'.
- 28 Daston, 'History of Science', 149–50; Bergwik, 'Kunskapshistoria', 96; see also Jo Guldi & David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014).
- 29 James A. Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit', *Isis* 95/4 (2004), 654–72.
- 30 Östling, Larsson Heidenblad & Nilsson Hammar, introduction.
- 31 Lässig, 'History of Knowledge', 34–35.
- 32 Daston, 'History of Science', 131.
- 33 Ibid. 139.
- 34 See, for example, Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987); Sven Widmalm, 'A Machine to Work in: The Ultracentrifuge and the Modernist Laboratory Ideal', in Enrico Baraldi, Hjalmar Fors & Anders Houltz (eds.), *The Spatial Contexts of Science, Technology, and Business* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2006); Thomas Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility of the Line* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Kapil Raj et al. (eds.), *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2009); Peter Galison, 'Trading Zone: Coordinating Action and Belief', in Mario Biagioli (ed.), *The Science Studies*

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- Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 137–60. For a useful overview, see Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998)
- 35 Östling, Larsson Heidenblad & Nilsson Hammar, introduction.
- 36 Larsson Heidenblad in the present volume.
- 37 Lundberg in the present volume.
- 38 See, for example, Per Wisselgren et al. (eds.), *Social Science in Context: Historical, Sociological, and Global Perspectives* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2013).
- 39 Sheila Jasanoff, *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and Social Order* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- 40 For example, Larsson Heidenblad in the present volume.
- 41 Peter Dear, 'What is the History of Science the History Of? Early Modern Roots of the Ideology of Modern Science', *Isis* 96/3 (2005), 390–406.
- 42 Daston, 'History of Science', 142; see also Bernard Lightman (ed.), *A Companion to the History of Science* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2016).
- 43 Peter Dear, 'Cultural History of Science: An Overview with Reflections', *Science, Technology and Human Values* 20/2 (1995), 150–170; Jürgen Renn, 'From the History of Science to the History of Knowledge—and Back', *Centaurus* 57/1 (2015), 37–53.
- 44 Johan Nordström, 'Om idé- och lärdoms historia: installationsföreläsning den 4 mars 1933', *Lychnos* (1967–8), 28–9.
- 45 Nils Andersson & Henrick Björck (eds.), *Idéhistoria i tiden: perspektiv på ämnets identitet under sjuttiofem år* (Stockholm: Symposion, 2008); Anders Burman, 'Den stora berättelsen: didaktiska reflektioner kring grundkursen i idéhistoria', in Anders Burman, Ana Graviz, Johan Rönby (eds.), *Tradition och praxis i högre utbildning: tolv ämnesdidaktiska studier* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2010), 191–210 at 194.
- 46 Anton Jansson, 'Things are Different Elsewhere: An Intellectual History of Intellectual History in Sweden', *Global Intellectual History* (2019): DOI: 10.1080/23801883.2019.1657634
- 47 Östling, Larsson Heidenblad & Nilsson Hammar, introduction.
- 48 Östh Gustafsson, 'Kunskapshistoriens samtidsrelevans', 681.

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