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## Knowledge Actors

### Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge

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## KNOWLEDGE ACTORS



# Knowledge Actors

Revisiting Agency in  
the History of Knowledge

Edited by  
Johan Östling,  
David Larsson Heidenblad  
&  
Anna Nilsson Hammar



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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	7
<b>Introduction. Revisiting agency in the history of knowledge</b>	9
<i>Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad</i>	
<i>&amp; Anna Nilsson Hammar</i>	

## I

### ROLES AND COMMUNITIES

<b>1. Art education reforms and the studio glass movement</b>	27
<i>Sven Dupré</i>	
<b>2. Multifaceted knowledge actors</b>	45
<i>Johannes Westberg</i>	
<b>3. Epistemic hierarchies and historical actors</b>	67
<i>Christa Lundberg</i>	
<b>4. Sharing practices, building knowledge</b>	83
<i>Helle Strandgaard Jensen</i>	
<b>5. Personal finance bloggers as knowledge authorities</b>	101
<i>David Larsson Heidenblad &amp; Charlotte Nilsson</i>	

## II

### CAPABILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

<b>6. Marginalized knowledge actors</b>	121
<i>Maria Bach</i>	

<b>7. The capacity to act</b>	139
<i>Anna Nilsson Hammar &amp; Svante Norrhem</i>	
<b>8. Grappling with knowledge actors</b>	159
<i>Lisa Hellman</i>	
<b>9. Telling stories differently</b>	179
<i>Ning de Coninck-Smith</i>	

### III

#### CONDITIONS AND CONNECTIONS

<b>10. Knowledge in the air</b>	201
<i>Joel Barnes</i>	
<b>11. Actors out of sight?</b>	217
<i>Jacob Orrje</i>	
<b>12. Organizing knowledge circulation</b>	233
<i>Thomas Mougey</i>	
<b>13. Scholars as knowledge actors</b>	251
<i>Christa Wirth</i>	
<b>Epilogue. Knowledge – the return of the actor</b>	269
<i>Peter Burke</i>	
<b>About the authors</b>	279

# Acknowledgements

This is the third and final volume of our trilogy on the history of knowledge, which began with *Circulation of Knowledge* (2018) and continued with *Forms of Knowledge* (2020). In all three volumes, our ambition has been to contribute to the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual development of the history of knowledge, while at the same time demonstrating how empirical research into the history of knowledge can be carried out.

The two previous volumes centred on our Nordic networks of historians of knowledge. In this book, the geographical scope has been broadened, and we have invited a number of early career researchers and established scholars in our international networks to contribute. We are very grateful that they have accepted the opportunity to consider knowledge actors in history. Special thanks go to Peter Burke, the doyen of the historians of knowledge, who agreed to read all the essays and write a concluding reflection.

We owe a debt of thanks to the funding bodies that have supported our research in recent years and thereby helped us to develop the Lund Centre for the History of Knowledge (LUCK): the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, the Swedish Research Council, the Crafoord Foundation, the LMK Foundation, and the Erik Philip-Sørensen Foundation.

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This final volume of our trilogy is dedicated to the late Erling Sandmo (1963–2020), a friend and colleague who instilled a sense of wonderment in the history of knowledge.

Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad,  
and Anna Nilsson Hammar

Lund, in springtime 2023

## INTRODUCTION

# Revisiting agency in the history of knowledge

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

This is the third and final book in our trilogy on the history of knowledge. The first volume, *Circulation of Knowledge* (2018), explored knowledge in motion and how it potentially changed as it moved between genres, geographies, and social contexts. In the new field of the history of knowledge, emerging as it did in the 2010s, the circulation of knowledge became a popular concept, but it was used with different meanings and risked becoming a vague buzzword. Our ambition with the book was to show how circulation could be a fruitful analytical framework, opening a broader understanding of the different processes of knowledge. In the second volume, *Forms of Knowledge* (2020), our aim was to expand the concept of knowledge itself. We showed how various forms of knowledge played a fundamental role in society and in people's lives throughout history. Systematic, scientific, and rational knowledge had been crucial in many settings, but so had many other forms of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

In our previous volumes on the history of knowledge, questions related to actors and agency have been of indirect analytical importance, more because of the perspective we adopted than otherwise. The concept of circulation, for example, could help uncover the full extent of knowledge processes and point us at types of actors not usually ascribed significance. In a similar way, the broadening of the concept of knowledge in our second volume brought new groups

and individuals into focus. Knowledge actors have so far been an important but unarticulated analytical category in our work on the history of knowledge.

In this third volume, we bring knowledge actors to the fore. Gathering researchers with diverse backgrounds and expertise, the guiding questions in this book centre on agency. Who were knowledge actors in different historical settings? What did it mean to be knowledgeable, to use or have knowledge, to produce or circulate it? Who contributed to knowledge processes and how—and what have the obstacles and constraints been?

### Actors in the history of knowledge

Every country, every era has its share of biographies of eminent scientists, intellectuals, and educational reformers. Still, it is not misleading to claim in very general terms that the theoretical traditions that have left their mark on historical and sociological studies of knowledge have long emphasized structures over actors, collectives over individuals. In its first phase, in the interwar period, this was true of the pioneering studies by Ludwik Fleck, Karl Mannheim, and several Marxist scholars. In a second phase, in the post-war decades, various versions of structuralism were suggested by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault, Juri Lotman, and others. In the final decades of the twentieth century, influential new concepts and frameworks were introduced by theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Donna Haraway, and Bruno Latour.<sup>2</sup>

Since the history of knowledge draws on these traditions, it risks becoming faceless if individual people are not put centre stage. Suzanne Marchand is among those who have expressed this concern. She has criticized the legacy of what she calls ‘Foucauldian structuralism’ in the history of knowledge and science, with ‘its erasure of individual biographies and intentions’. Marchand asks, ‘is there room in the history of knowledge for an approach that privileges not the knowledge making as such but the wider context and the peculiarities of the knowers?’<sup>3</sup>

We want to believe that is the case. The history of knowledge, as we have pursued it at the Lund Centre for the History of Knowledge (LUCK), owes much to several scholarly sources. For us, the new cultural history and its further development have been at least as important as the leading names in the post-war history and sociology of science.<sup>4</sup> The currents that swept through historical scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s, often summed up as cultural or linguistic turns, have taken different approaches to agency in the past. There has been a strong orientation towards linguistic patterns or cognitive structures in history—analysed in terms of concepts, discourses, mentalities, experiences, or memories. While actors have been present in these scholarly traditions, they have held secondary roles as ‘prisms’ or ‘examples’, shedding light on more general trends or phenomena.

However, recent decades have seen other movements within the broad church of cultural history. Stressing particularities and informed by idiographic approaches, they were a rebellion against the primacy of structures. This could be seen in a famous microhistorical study of a seemingly wayward Italian miller in the sixteenth century, or in many anthropologically or ethnologically grounded investigations into the lives of ordinary men and women. The return of actors, however, is a wider phenomenon than this. Since the early 2000s, there has been talk of a ‘biographical renaissance’ in the humanities: once regarded as dusty and old-fashioned, the biography has been ‘reborn’ to emerge as a dynamic scholarly genre, capable of combining sophisticated analytical approaches with the art of vivid storytelling.<sup>5</sup> Even in traditionally structural fields, such as the study of organizations and institutions, actors have been brought to the centre of attention. Within the new framework of ‘institutional work’, scholars have shifted their focus from anonymous processes to examine how individuals’ active agency has affected institutions.<sup>6</sup>

In the new field of the history of knowledge, the role, functions, and manifestations of historical actors have often been discussed. In the first programmatic texts on the history of knowledge in the 2010s, the importance of actors was already underlined. In Philipp Sarasin’s seminal article ‘Was ist Wissensgeschichte?’ (2011), knowledge actors

(*Akteure des Wissens*) are singled out as one of the main analytical orientations in the history of knowledge. According to Sarasin, a knowledge actor can be studied from a social-historical viewpoint, for example by analysing their social position and different forms of capital, but there are relatively many studies of this type and the risk is that we end up in a sociological reductionism if the research stops at that. ‘The roles of the various actors and agents of knowledge cannot be determined according to the old social-historical grid, but on the basis of an idea of the production and circulation of knowledge and the tasks and functions involved’, Sarasin argues. He further stresses that the study of knowledge actors should include the content and form of knowledge. In this way, a person’s ability and competence to act as a knowledge actor also depends on the theoretical and practical knowledge they possess or impart.<sup>7</sup>

Even though we share Sarasin’s general points about knowledge actors, we find it necessary to formulate a somewhat more precise definition. In this book, a knowledge actor is an analytical category that consists of those who, within a given historical context, contributed to the production and/or circulation of knowledge. Under certain circumstances, it is also reasonable to include different audiences in the actor concept; they then become co-creators in the knowledge process. Further, we consider it crucial to underline that cooperation between several actors is required for knowledge to be set in motion. The individuals or groups involved may vary from one epoch to another, and for historians of knowledge it is a matter of examining what these specific role distributions and constellations have looked like. Finally, it is important to explore what kind of identities and self-understandings that have been connected to these roles, and in what ways the knowledge actors understood their own positions.

## Expanding agency

How to analyse knowledge actors? In this venture, historians of knowledge need not start from scratch. Even though historical actors have been somewhat overshadowed by structural approaches, there are rich traditions of scholarship to draw on.

For example, discussions about the circulation of knowledge have highlighted the need for an expanded understanding of actors and agency. In this respect, Lissa Roberts has emphasized that circulation should not be understood as something moving from a centre to a local context and then returning to its starting point. She argues that instead it should be used to get away from 'privileged positions taken for granted', such as European metropolises and learned associations.<sup>8</sup> In the same spirit, Kapil Raj has underlined that the strength of the circulation perspective is that it gives agency to everyone involved in a knowledge process. By this, he by no means implies that the power and opportunities of the historical actors were evenly distributed, but he stresses that a circulation analysis is a fruitful way to empirically examine these power relationships, rather than assuming there was a certain dominance relationship and that these consistently expressed themselves in certain specific ways.<sup>9</sup>

Raj and other scholars have developed a vocabulary for analysing a wider repertoire of actors. With concepts such as 'go-betweens', 'intermediaries', and 'knowledge brokers', they have been able to capture the dynamics and hierarchies in various knowledge processes.<sup>10</sup> Their starting point has often been colonial connections; their ambition, to problematize the relationship between alleged centres and peripheries. However, the concepts can also be used in other contexts, for example to show the diversity of actors involved in the production and circulation of knowledge.

The roles of go-betweens and translators of knowledge have been discussed by other historians. Simone Lässig has emphasized the role of young people and children as knowledge actors when investigating immigrant communities in the US. She has pointed out that children, who were often 'comfortable in multiple cultural contexts, were able

to translate between cultures and, what is more, to produce new knowledge'.<sup>11</sup> Having to acquire social knowledge and adapting to multiple social milieus, Lässig writes, the knowledge strategies and practices of migrant groups ought to be studied further. In a similar fashion, Björn Lundberg has argued that pupils must be regarded as important actors when it came to creating an awareness of global issues in the 1960s. He shows how school campaigns contributed by setting knowledge in motion.<sup>12</sup>

In many historical studies of knowledge actors, the power perspective is central. Within the history of science, for example, there has been a feminist current for several decades. Researchers such as Susan Leigh Star and Margaret Rossiter were among those who took an early interest in what gender structures looked like among academics. Several gender historical studies have since shown how the traditional male professor has depended on other knowledge actors to carry out his work, often virtually invisible women. In the natural sciences, typical examples were laboratory assistants who assisted the male professor, but who were not mentioned once the epoch-making scientific publication was released.<sup>13</sup> A particular variant of this social order, common well into the post-war period, was 'the scientific family'. Within the framework of marriage, the man and woman could perform a scientific teamwork, but there was no doubt about who was superior and enjoyed the prestige, although the woman often also had a solid academic education. For a long time, there was also an expectation that a professor's wife would not only help her husband as an assistant or secretary, but also take on the role of hostess at dinners and other representative functions in the home.<sup>14</sup> Donna Haraway's tenets, emphasizing the situated, embodied nature of knowledge, draw further attention to the need to critically engage with the subjugated when claiming that 'there is good reason to believe vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful'.<sup>15</sup>

These approaches and frameworks are just a few examples of how knowledge actors can be studied; in reality, there is a plethora of other possible analytical options and directions, as this book will show.

Our goal here is to foster a larger discussion among historians of knowledge about the role of knowledge actors. Do we want individuals and networks to take centre stage in our research and our narratives? And if so, which ones do we want to highlight and how are we to conduct our research? What are the potential blind spots and pitfalls of pursuing this actor-centric trajectory? Questions such as these will never find a definite answer. However, we believe that by gathering a diverse group of scholars to reflect on them from the vantage point of their own research, we can move the discussion forward and lay a common foundation for better and more informed research.

In general historiographical terms, we are convinced that the time is ripe for re-engaging with historical actors and the action they took in the past. New digital methods and OCR-searchable archives have strengthened a current in contemporary historiography of emphasizing linguistic and conceptual change rather than scrutinizing and situating the doings of individual historical actors. Distant reading and topic modelling enables new lines of research, but it hardly makes traditional methods and perspectives obsolete. As several digital historians have pointed out, if one wants to explain and understand how people changed the course of history by their actions, word clouds and big data will not suffice.<sup>16</sup>

This volume is divided into three parts. The first part centres on ‘Roles and communities’, in which the essays shed light on the social networks of knowledge and the multifaceted ways knowledge actors engage with others. The second part, ‘Capabilities and constraints’, explores the possibilities and hindrances which knowledge actors face. In the third part, ‘Conditions and connections’, the essays address the prerequisites for producing and circulating knowledge, including the historian’s own situated practice and methodological challenges.

### Roles and communities

The first group of essays shows knowledge actors in a multitude of roles, their activities embedded in various communities. To produce and circulate knowledge, no knowledge actor is an island. This inter-



connectedness is on display in studies of experimental glass artists, nineteenth-century primary schoolteachers, late medieval theologians, post-war children's television producers, and contemporary personal finance bloggers. This broad chronological range points to the trans-historical relevance of studying knowledge actors as embedded in—and shaping—larger social contexts.

In the first essay, Sven Dupré considers the diversity of artistic identities in relation to the plurality of artisanal epistemologies. He focuses on the tension inherent in artists' self-identification and self-denial as knowledge actors. On the one hand, artists self-identified with a diversity of techniques, comparable to how 'method' is an important quality in the literature on scholarly personae in the history of the humanities. Yet artists—sometimes the same artists—resisted the identity of knowledge actor. Dupré investigates this tension and the question of why artists self-identified and denied the knowledge actor label by discussing the case of the post-Second World War studio glass movement originating in the US. Members of the studio glass movement self-identified as saviours of lost knowledge who also prided themselves on openly sharing knowledge; and they also resisted the label of knowledge actors, being purposefully 'experimental'.

Johannes Westberg addresses nineteenth- and early twentieth-century primary schoolteachers. Examining them as multifaceted knowledge actors, this essay examines the roles in knowledge production and distribution that their training and social position enabled them to take. Using the concept of knowledge broker as a conceptual key, he suggests a preliminary typology of four roles that teachers took as knowledge actors outside the classroom: the teacher as (i) private lecturer and teacher; (ii) author, researcher, and journalist; (iii) administrative assistant; and (iv) politician. Although these roles have remained neglected in contrast to teachers' work in classrooms, this essay further inspires studies examining the multiple roles of knowledge actors. Teachers were not the only profession to combine their main employment with that of author, researcher, administrator, or politician.

Christa Lundberg explores how a history of knowledge focused on identifying structures—such as hierarchies, systems, and cartographies—squares with the study of individual knowers. One way of bringing these together, she suggests, is to consider epistemic hierarchies from the individual viewpoint. She tests this approach on Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c.1460–1536) by investigating his relationship to the epistemic hierarchies of early sixteenth-century Paris. She argues that Lefèvre disagreed with the dominant epistemic model in this environment, the curriculum of the University of Paris, and challenged it in his own teaching, philosophical writings, and editorial work. Lefèvre thus played a curatorial function in relation to epistemic hierarchies, subtly reshaping them in the way he selected and presented texts. Lundberg concludes that studying 'curators of knowledge'—a category that can comprise actors from librarians to teachers and healthcare workers—adds a useful complementary perspective to large-scale cartographic projects in the history of knowledge.

Helle Strandgaard Jensen focuses on the formation of knowledge in a transnational community of television producers. In 1968, 1970, and 1972, a European Broadcasting Union's subcommittee for children's programmes held workshops where representatives from member states helped promote a highly interactive, engaged sharing of knowledge about their various national production practices. The essay uses a history of knowledge approach to challenge the existing literature on television productions for children in two ways. In contrast to existing work that has focused on national institutions and individuals, it explores the impact of children's television history on knowledge formation among an entire community of knowledge actors that went beyond national borders.

David Larsson Heidenblad and Charlotte Nilsson engage with how lay actors position themselves as knowledge authorities in relation to existing institutions and competing knowledge claims. Their study zooms in on the intricate dynamics of the personal finance blogosphere by analysing Sweden's largest platform, RikaTillsammans ('Rich Together'), run by the married couple Jan and Caroline Bolmeson. The essay shows knowledge actors in this digital sphere of popular

capitalism build legitimacy, credibility, and engagement not by their formal qualifications but by showing they are everyman investors—like their followers. They form a ‘neoliberal community’ with their audience that is sceptical of established financial institutions and arrangements, yet deeply committed to financial markets and the business world as the basis for individual safety and freedom.

### Capabilities and constraints

The essays in the second part of the book grapple with what knowledge actors could and could not do, and the extent to which they got scholarly recognition as active agents. By adopting a global gaze, inequalities, marginalization, migration, and differing knowledge systems come to the fore. Yet, the essays also shed light on that many groups and individuals—such as servants, slaves, non-western economists, and female scholars—have had more agency than is commonly assumed. In this way, the essays problematize and challenge what a knowledge actor is.

Maria Bach questions the boundaries that define who a knowledge actor can be. She uncovers marginalized actors who are seldom analysed—the individuals who were part of dialogues and produced speeches or texts, but were largely ignored in their time and often after. Bach provides an empirical example from the first generation of modern Indian economists, who worked within an imperial setting and were treated as inferior, while their audience, who were mainly British, were considered superior. As marginalized knowledge actors in the ongoing debates around Indian progress and development, the Indian economists of the late nineteenth century were often labelled as copiers of existing economic knowledge from Western Europe and North America (and indeed still are). Bach’s intervention offers a new perspective on the history of development economics and identifies several examples of redefinition, refraction, or hybrid theories in Indian economics.

Anna Nilsson Hammar and Svante Norrhem consider phronetic knowledge using the example of employees on aristocratic estates in

seventeenth-century Sweden. Using petitions written to their master, these employees negotiated their positions, possible advantages, and their conditions within a complex organization comprising many estates, and a system for compensation built around deferred wages and long-term credit relationships. The examples show that employees had an extensive knowledge of the system in which they were forced to work. They carefully tailored their demands, suggestions, and pleas for help within this context, revealing their knowledge of how to keep track of spending, taxes, and credit relationships, in certain cases spanning generations. More than anything, Nilsson Hammar and Norrhem show that employees did in fact act to solve immanent problems or to secure prospects for themselves and their families and relatives, and that both knowledge and practical judgement was used to strengthen their arguments.

Lisa Hellman discusses the history of knowledge in light of the global turn. Inviting other perspectives and case studies than those already centre stage, there is potential friction in combining the two fields. In her essay, Hellman considers the actor-centred perspective, the concept of circulation, and the concept of knowledge. When the history of knowledge includes actors from various regions of the world, it must be careful not to lose sight of the power dynamics in knowledge-making. This point is even more apparent when considering circulation and its relationship to ideas of agency and choice. Here Hellman underlines the importance of taking coerced actors into account. She raises the question of how to keep coherence and stringency within the bounds of the history of knowledge while taking seriously non-European—and possibly conflicting—conceptualizations of knowledge.

Ning de Coninck-Smith explores in microhistorical and biographical detail the academic journeys of two Danish women, Grethe Hjort (1903–1967) and Johanne Stochholm (1894–1976). She shows how material mediators, such as women-only colleges, personal networks, and testimonials, matched with immaterial mediators such as aspirations and affections, helped the circulation of knowledge about academic positions across continents. The essay makes

use of an imaginative archive, which according to Clare Hemmings ‘seeks to tell the unsayable and imagine what cannot be retrieved’ in reflecting on the many questions about the entanglement of private and professional lives.

### Conditions and connections

The third group of essays engages with the underlying conditions for producing and circulating knowledge in the past and in the present. By investigating connections between local practices and larger scientific enterprises—such as academies, conferences, journals, and professionally shared knowledge—the section shows how knowledge actors and institutions facilitated knowledge exchange and historical change. The essays point up the methodological issues, notably the employment of digital tools and the virtues of self-reflective practices for historians of knowledge.

Joel Barnes examines relations between the circulation of knowledge, knowledge actors and knowledge arenas, by considering counterpart categories in the history of the ‘multiple discovery’ in the natural sciences. Multiple discovery—long a preoccupation of historians and sociologists of science—is when two or more researchers are said to have simultaneously made a discovery or devised an invention. Throughout the twentieth century, multiple discovery was typically explained in terms of competing social theories that emphasized either knowledge circulation or the agency of scientific actors. Only in recent decades have historians of science shifted attention to publishing and communication technologies and practices—what historians of knowledge would consider the ‘arenas’ of scientific knowledge. The essay shows how histories of the theorization of categories closely comparable to circulation, actors, and arenas in adjacent fields can contribute to understandings of those categories in the history of knowledge.

Jacob Orrje discusses the use of digital methods in actor-centric histories of knowledge. Using two examples, he considers how different digital approaches have implications for history writing.

Distant reading seems to promise automatization and an opportunity to write history using big data; however, such statistically based methods encourage a more structuralist approach to history, where words become the object of enquiry, and they are thus often difficult to reconcile with the research practices of actor-centric historians. Historians of knowledge might thus benefit more from qualitative digital methods that enable the reconstruction of detailed contexts using annotated sources and interactive maps—consisting, for example, of itineraries, power relationships, or the movement of concepts. Orrje also argues for a less monolithic approach to digital history and that historians should be mindful of how diverse digital approaches integrate with their way of writing history.

Thomas Mougey explores the role of conference organizers as facilitators of knowledge circulation. Focusing on the work of Charles-Marie Gariel, the director of the *Service des Congrès* for the Paris Expositions Universelles of 1889 and 1900, he highlights a category of actor who was not engaged in the actual act of knowledge circulation, but rather engineered the conditions enabling it. Mougey shows how Gariel tried to reconfigure, strengthen, and routinize the burgeoning practice of international conferencing as an arena of knowledge circulation. He shows infrastructure to be less an external context than a set of purposefully produced conditions of circulation, which mould the knowledge being circulated as much as the actors involved. By retrieving the agenda undergirding Gariel's guidelines, this essay also contributes to highlight the politics of knowledge circulation.

Christa Wirth suggests that historians of knowledge should reflect on their roles as knowledge actors. Historians of knowledge not only study knowledge actors in the past, but they are also knowledge actors themselves. Taking her cue from programmatic texts that come out of the history of knowledge, Wirth charts how scholars located themselves as knowledge actors to contribute to open, democratic, and pluralist societies. These knowledge actors go on to shape epistemologies, praxis, and institutions in specific ways. Wirth contends that against the current backdrop of a global pandemic and the erosion of democracy, the whole business of agnostic historians reporting on the ebb and

flow of knowledge regimes in the past without having a stake in them is not only ethically problematic, but epistemologically naive.

## The conversation continues

This third and final volume of the LUCK trilogy on the history of knowledge ends with an essay by Peter Burke, a historian whose career spans the birth of the new cultural history in the 1970s to the emergence of the history of knowledge in the early 2000s and beyond. Drawing on his immense erudition, he situates the twelve essays of the present volume and their call to revisit actors in historical scholarship. By connecting ongoing trends to larger historiographical currents, Burke brings a breadth and depth to the dynamic discussions among the growing international community of historians of knowledge. The conversation continues.

## Notes

- 1 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); Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar (eds.), *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020).
- 2 An overview is provided in Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).
- 3 Suzanne Marchand, 'Weighing Context and Practices: Theodor Mommsen and the Many Dimensions of Nineteenth-Century Humanistic Knowledge', *History & Theory* 59/4 (2020), 144–5.
- 4 Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar, 'Introduction: Developing the History of Knowledge', in eid. (eds.), *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020).
- 5 Henrik Rosengren & Johan Östling (eds.), *Med livet som insats: Biografen som humanistisk genre* (Lund: Sekel, 2007); Bernhard Fetz & Wilhelm Hemecker (eds.), *Theorie der Biographie: Grundlagentexte und Kommentar* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); Birgitte Possing, *Understanding Biographies: On Biographies in History and Stories in Biography* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2017).
- 6 Thomas B. Lawrence, Roy Suddaby & Bernard Leca Lawrence (eds.), *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009); Raoul Beunen & James J. Patterson, 'Analysing Institutional Change in Environmental Governance: Exploring the Concept of "Institutional Work"',

- Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 62/1 (2019); Ronald L. Jepperson & John W. Meyer, *Institutional Theory: The Cultural Construction of Organizations, States, and Identities* (Cambridge: CUP, 2021).
- 7 Philipp Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?' *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte in der deutschen Literatur* 36/1 (2011), 169–70; see also Johan Östling, 'Vad är kunskaphistoria?' *Historisk Tidskrift* 135/1 (2015); Simone Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016); Philipp Sarasin, 'More Than Just Another Speciality: On the Prospects for the History of Knowledge', *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1/1 (2020).
  - 8 Lissa Roberts, 'Situating Science in Global History: Local Exchanges and Networks of Circulation', *Itinerario* 33/1 (2009), 18.
  - 9 Kapil Raj, 'Beyond Postcolonialism ... and Postpositivism: Circulation and the Global History of Science', *Isis* 104/2 (2013).
  - 10 Kapil Raj, 'Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators', in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *A Companion to the History of Science* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2016); Paula Findlen (ed.), *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
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  - 12 Björn Lundberg, 'Youth Activism and Global Awareness: The Emergence of the Operation "Dagsverke" Campaign in 1960s Sweden', *Contemporary European History* 1–15 (2022).
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I  
ROLES AND COMMUNITIES



# Art education reforms and the studio glass movement

## Artists' ambivalent self-representation as actors of lost knowledge

*Sven Dupré*

This essay focuses on the tension of artists' self-identification and self-denial as knowledge actors. Artists past and present self-identify with a diversity of skills and epistemologies and thus as knowledge actors. But artists—and sometimes the *same* artists—resist the identity of knowledge actor. This essay investigates this tension and asks why artists self-identified and denied the knowledge actor label by discussing the case of the post-Second World War studio glass movement, which originated in the US. Protagonists of the studio glass movement self-identified as saviours of lost knowledge and prided themselves on openly sharing knowledge, but they also resisted the label of knowledge actor, being purposefully 'experimental'.

### Scholarly personae and artistic identities

My premise is that artists' self-identification with a diversity of techniques is comparable to how method is an important quality in the historiography of scholarly personae in science and the humanities. Lorraine Daston and Otto Sibum have introduced 'persona' to the history of science, defining a scientific persona as 'a cultural identity that simultaneously shapes the individual in body and mind and

creates a collective with a shared and recognizable physiognomy'.<sup>1</sup> In their conception, *personae* are broadly shared models that define what it means to be a scholar or a scientist in the *longue durée*, well beyond the micro level of individual biographies. More recently, Herman Paul has argued that to value contextual variation in the history of the humanities, scholarly *personae* should be studied at the meso level, not the macro level where Daston and Sibum situated them. According to Paul, at this intermediate level 'scholars relate (positively or negatively) to models (real or imaginary) that they believe to embody habits, virtues, skills or competencies required for being a good scholar'.<sup>2</sup> Historians should study how scholars draw upon general models of scholarly *personae* and adapt them to suit specific local circumstances and historical contexts.

Paul's research on the history of nineteenth-century German historical studies situates scholarly *personae* at the intersection of biography, methodology, institutions such as universities and professional organizations, and historical religious and political conflict. Scholarly *personae* for him are

models of how to be a historian that were upheld to aspiring historians (especially in educational contexts), codified in methodology manuals (with 'methods' sometimes being near-synonymous to 'virtues'), institutionally propagated by, for instance, source-editing projects that helped define the marks of a good historian by hiring only philologically virtuous historians, and often fiercely debated on moral, political, and/or religious grounds.<sup>3</sup>

Paul develops a specific understanding of scholarly *personae* as 'a set of discipline-specific virtues and skills that disciplinary formations enact as necessary for one to work and to be recognized as an academic historian'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, this essay raises the question of what skills and techniques it took to achieve recognition as an artist.

However, I would suggest we should go further in this analysis. For Paul, scholarly *personae* turned on the validation of knowledge—and the recognition of historians as producers of reliable knowledge.

His assumption is that historians, because of processes including socialization, always desired to be seen as knowledge producers. In this essay I consider cases where artists have rejected the label of knowledge actor. Suzanne Marchand is informative here, and especially her discussion of the nineteenth-century Roman historian Theodor Mommsen. While acknowledging the fruitfulness of Paul's conceptual framework of scholarly personae, virtues, and markers of devotion, Marchand vehemently argues that we should treat 'Mommsen as a nineteenth-century writer and actor *before* treating him as a maker of knowledge'.<sup>5</sup> She sets out to shed light on Mommsen's scholarly practices as a producer of reliable knowledge; yet, she argues, in doing so the historian of knowledge is better served by not treating Mommsen primarily as a knower but instead as a writer and political activist. I share Marchand's concern that the history of knowledge's disciplinary lens can blind us to historical actors not being primarily knowledge actors. However, while Marchand uses this caveat to plead for a return to intellectual biography, I consider it important that historians of knowledge recognize that historical actors are not primarily knowers and sometimes even resist being labelled as knowledge actors. This essay focuses on artists resisting this label. I maintain that it is important for historians of knowledge to study the rejection of the label, because understanding why artists refused to be knowledge actors can illuminate their artistic practices as epistemic practices as well as their identities as knowledge actors.

Historians of science, especially of the early modern period, have done extensive work on art and science, or making and knowing. Pamela Smith in *The Body of the Artisan* (2004) and most recently in *From Lived Experience to the Written Word* (2022) argues for the significance of artisanal epistemology—that knowledge is created by physical engagement with matter and that artisans are experts in nature—in the intellectual transformations of the early modern period.<sup>6</sup> According to Smith, artisans—artists developed a 'material imaginary', defined as 'a system of knowledge that provides flexible parameters within which the exploration of material properties and behavior is undertaken', for example, the material imaginary

of blood, gold, sulphur, vermilion, lizards, and gold.<sup>7</sup> The concept of the material imaginary replaces the earlier term of choice, the vernacular science of matter, which Smith argues could be misleading because it anachronistically suggests that craftsmen developed a sort of protoscience which could be clearly expressed in words. In the absence of a better term, Smith uses *Kunst* for craft knowledge which is unverbilized and multisensory; it is knowledge of the particulars, which in modern parlance refers to the skill that permits the expert practitioner to intuit and improvise despite the contingencies of materials and environment.

Rather than situating artisanal epistemology in relation to science, Smith primarily defines practical knowledge on its own terms, more in line with approaches in the history of knowledge than the history of science. Such approaches recognize that artisanal epistemologies are in fact plural.<sup>8</sup> Scrutinizing the languages of making, historians and art historians of different stripes have shown the diversity of skills with which artisans and artists self-identified and the richness of the vocabularies they used to grasp the forms of (practical) knowledge they produced. Christine Göttler and I have surveyed early modern texts for words related to judgement and discernment, while Alexander Marr and others have scrutinized the languages of ingenuity.<sup>9</sup> Connected to ingenuity is wit and *esprit*, which Paola Bertucci touches on when formulating the distinctiveness of the eighteenth-century *artistes'* epistemology, as opposed 'artisans' subservience to rules ... derived from the classical definition of art, and in particular of the mechanical arts, as *techne*.<sup>10</sup> Bertucci argues that the French Enlightenment *artistes* did not argue for a way of knowing typical for all artisans, but instead claimed that their epistemology differed from that of other practitioners of the arts. Looking at this differentiation between artisans and artists, and craft and art, Marieke Hendriksen and I have mapped the shifting meanings of the term technique in the arts from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> Since the term does not exist in early modern European vernaculars, we have turned to other terms used to grasp the processes of making and knowing, such as 'method'. Interestingly, artisans' and artists' self-identification

with method is comparable to method's importance as a quality in the literature on scholarly personae in the history of the humanities.

For all the talk of artisanal epistemologies, though, it remains unclear who the artisans were and whose artisanal epistemologies historians have been interested in. Remarkably, most historians of science working on artisanal epistemologies have clustered the actors of artisanal knowledge into general categories such as 'superior engineers' (Edgar Zilsel), 'author-practitioners' (Pamela Smith) or 'hybrid experts' (Ursula Klein), thus privileging specific crafts, media, and methods as more epistemic than others.<sup>12</sup> What about all those artisans who never wrote anything down? Are they excluded as actors of artisanal knowledge? I would argue that historians of science, interested as they are in how artisanal knowledge is important for developing science, have been slow to notice the diversity of artisans and artists that the historiography of knowledge requires. From a history of knowledge perspective, we must recognize this diversity of artisanal identities and set it against the plurality of artisanal epistemologies, including those forms of knowledge not directly connected to the knowledge of nature.

This is not to say that historians of science have not studied how artisanal identities were fashioned in specific contexts. Recently, Bertucci has shown how the Ancien Régime's Académie des Sciences and Société des Arts came to differentiate between artisan and *artiste* on the basis of their methods and qualities of mind (wit, ingenuity).<sup>13</sup> Here we could also draw on art history's considerable literature on artistic identity and self-representation, because art historians have extensively studied the processes of differentiation between art and craft.<sup>14</sup> However, as historians of knowledge we must acknowledge that not all artists self-identified as knowledge actors, and that some artists even flatly refused to be seen as knowledgeable or skilful. Why then did some artists self-identify as knowledge actors and under which conditions did others reject the label? The early modern period, the era of choice for scholars of artisanal epistemologies, is rich in answers, yet any time and place will lend itself to such a study, because the tension of artists' self-identification and self-denial as knowledge actors has



been a constant throughout history, even if subject to the vagaries of local circumstance. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks for early modern artisanal epistemologies, I thus explore the tension between artists' self-identification and self-denial as knowledge actors in the studio glass movement that originated in the US in the post-war period.

### The studio glass movement

Started by Harvey Littleton, who set up the first course about studio glass at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the founding moment of the movement was the pioneering glass workshop held at the Toledo Museum of Art in March 1962.<sup>15</sup> Strikingly, many of the artists involved in the studio glass movement, including Littleton himself, were potters or sculptors without prior knowledge of glassmaking. Still, through his family history, Littleton was intimately connected to glass science and industrial production, and he spent his childhood years in one of the twentieth-century world centres of glassmaking, Corning in upstate New York. Trained as a physicist, Harvey's father J. T. Littleton was lured away from the University of Michigan and hired as a researcher at the Corning Glass Works. At Corning, his research into the physical properties of glass led to the invention of tempered glass. In the 1880s the Jena-based chemist and entrepreneur Otto Schott had developed special laboratory glassware, but Schott's borosilicate glass, which would dominate the global market for decades to come, relied on global supply chains because borax, which was not locally available, was a key ingredient determining its quality.<sup>16</sup> The interruption of the flow of borax to Jena in the First World War marked the end of Schott's global market dominance, while in 1915, Corning Glass Works presented its own borosilicate glass developed by Littleton, *père*, which, branded as Pyrex, soon became ubiquitous—even more in home kitchens than in scientific laboratories. In response, in the interwar period the Schott company adapted its specialty glass and collaborated with Bauhaus and Deutscher Werkbund designers to develop kitchen glassware.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 1.1. Erwin Eisch, *Eight Heads of Harvey Littleton*, 1976. CMoG 76.3.32  
A-H. Courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY  
([www.cmog.org](http://www.cmog.org)).

When Harvey graduated from the University of Michigan in 1947 with a degree in industrial design, his father encouraged him to submit a proposal to the Corning Glass Works to establish an experimental studio open to all departments at the factory to develop new ideas. The Corning Glass Works turned down the proposal. Harvey's reflections on their reasons indicate his thinking about design and the importance of material knowledge.

They [Corning Glass Works] believed that architects made the best designers, where you made your designs on paper and didn't fool around with the material. Whereas I thought form was born in the material and in the hands of the artist, and that a pencil was a pretty damned poor substitute and that it only results in a very obvious and simplistic solution.<sup>18</sup>

His words go to the heart of his Bauhaus-inspired teaching philosophy as he articulated it when developing the first glass course at the University of Wisconsin: 'What we wanted to do was to investigate

the material, like the painters were investigating paint, and not with the thought of making anything ... just as the original experimental course in the Bauhaus took all kinds of materials and investigated them'.<sup>19</sup> In his teaching, Littleton emphasized experimentation over the acquisition of skills.

While Littleton had access to glass science and industrial production facilities, he was not trained in glassmaking and so needed to find technical expertise elsewhere. In the late 1950s he turned to Samuel Scholes's *Handbook of the Glass Industry*, from which he selected the simplest recipes for lead glass, using potters' flint as a source of silica, and experimenting with other alternative materials as he had them at hand in his potter's studio.<sup>20</sup> For the 1962 Toledo workshop he brought in Dominick Labino, a glass scientist at the Johns-Manville Corporation, who developed a small, portable furnace for glass artists to blow glass on their own. Labino made the glass workshop possible by providing glass marbles which, melted at a relatively low temperature, produced glass that was malleable enough to blow, from his employer. In 1964 Littleton took the small, portable furnace to the First World Congress of Craftsmen at Columbia University, New York, to set up glass workshops in which the European artists Erwin Eisch and Sybren Valkema participated. Equipped with this knowledge, they took the studio glass movement to Europe. Glass artists hail the sharing of knowledge about furnaces, breaking with a tradition of secrecy in the craft of glass, as a defining feature of the studio glass movement. In an interview with Joan Falconer Byrd in March 2001, Littleton compared his teaching to the apprenticeship system in which 'the children were sold to the master as indentured servants for seven years. If they left that servitude, the sheriff and the dogs were sent after them, just like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. They were slaves. What kind of freedom do you have as a slave?'<sup>21</sup>

In the same interview, Littleton suggested the studio glass movement took off in the US because, unlike Europe with its centuries-old glass-making tradition, art education in the US was based in universities.

You see the American art student is trained as a researcher and as a trained hand. The *Kunstfachschnule* trains the hand, but not the mind. We were very impressed. That's why we created the Fulbright. We were very impressed with the skills in Europe, so by sending people there and by bringing teachers from there here, we fertilized our art with greater technique, and we married our restless spirit and our ability to research.<sup>22</sup>

However, Littleton had no intention of downplaying the importance of material knowledge. In a paper for the Eighth International Congress on Glass, held in London in the summer of 1968 (where he met the celebrated glass designer Andries Dirk Copier, vice-president and artistic director of the Royal Dutch Glassworks in Leerdam), he proclaimed experimental material knowledge to be a defining trait of the studio glass movement: 'An intimate working knowledge of many materials is characteristic of the modern artist, especially in America ... and the search for new materials and techniques is not only part of the scene, but may be one of the driving forces.'<sup>23</sup>

Two strands of argumentation came together in his paper which would define the legacy of the studio glass movement. As the title of the paper had it, the studio glass movement was about the appropriation of knowledge and techniques from the industry, which in the eyes of the movement's advocates would liberate the industry-enslaved glass artist. But they expressed a clear desire to experiment with materials rather than simply apply industry-based knowledge. That should be seen in the context of their ever-awkward self-identification as art and craft—or was it art *or* craft, as per the title of the symposium and exhibition *Glass Today—Art or Craft?* which brought artists from across Europe and the US to Zurich in June 1972 and played a key role in the spread of studio glass on the Continent.<sup>24</sup>

This was the context for Littleton's radical pronouncement that autumn at the National Sculpture Society's annual conference: 'Technique is cheap'.<sup>25</sup> This saying, associated with him ever since, was an obvious extension of his initial teaching philosophy that experimentation with materials was more important than the acquisition

of skills. Yet it also speaks to his conviction that technique was only valuable if married with aesthetic judgement. He lamented the refusal to countenance highly skilled glassmakers in the industry exercising aesthetic judgement—something Littleton had experienced himself in his childhood years at the Corning Glass Works—and strongly opposed it with his ‘Technique is cheap’ slogan.

In Europe, Littleton found a kindred spirit in the Dutch artist and educator Sybren Valkema.<sup>26</sup> The two met in 1964 at the First World Congress of Craftsmen, where Littleton first demonstrated the small, portable furnace, which attracted a great deal of attention. Valkema was mesmerized; for the first time he handled a blowpipe himself, despite having worked over two decades at the Royal Dutch Glassworks in Leerdam in the Netherlands. In 1968 Littleton invited Valkema to spend a term in Madison to teach European glass techniques at the University of Wisconsin. Valkema and Littleton also spent considerable time in Harvey’s studio, experimenting with materials, recipes, and glassmaking techniques, including the instructions for lost wax casting which Littleton had received from Frederick Carder at Corning’s Steuben Division.<sup>27</sup> They also travelled to the Bay Area to attend the first Great California Glass Symposium, organized by Marvin Lipofsky, one of Littleton’s early students and initiator of glass art programmes at Berkeley and the California College of Arts and Crafts. Valkema credited his experience of the teaching and art education system in the US as instrumental in his introduction of a glass programme at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam in 1969.

In conjunction with the inauguration of Workgroup Glass (as the programme at the Rietveld Academy was called), Littleton travelled to Amsterdam to participate, along with Eisch and Lipofsky, in the exhibition *Free Glass* that Valkema had organized. Valkema preferred ‘free glass’ to ‘studio glass’ in line with his assertion that Workgroup Glass embodied ‘the freedom the individual artist has got to work this glass totally independent from the factory situation as it was for centuries’.<sup>28</sup> Valkema’s opinion reflected his career and more particularly his teaching experience. In 1943 he had been hired as a teacher at the Glass School, closely linked to the Glass Works in

Leerdam. Inspired in part by Bauhaus, the artistic director Copier had founded the school in 1940 to provide the glass craftsmen with better design training and to improve the quality of what the factory produced.<sup>29</sup> In the war, Valkema had also lectured at the Instituut voor Kunstnijverheidsonderwijs (the Institute for Applied Arts Education), which would become the Rietveld Academy in the 1960s. Under the directorship of Mart Stam, a programme of education inspired by Bauhaus was put in place. It underscored the importance of industrial design, drawing lessons, and a knowledge of materials. It also entailed workshops at which students could more freely experiment, and classes by guest lecturers—all innovations which profoundly shaped Valkema's teaching philosophy as articulated in later years.<sup>30</sup>

At the Leerdam glassworks the artists remained vulnerable despite Copier's efforts. They relied on the furnaces and equipment at the factory for the execution of their designs, and their artistic aspirations were severely constrained by commercial interests. Valkema, like Littleton, saw in the small, portable furnace an opportunity for artists to work independently, and he acted on it by building one for his students in Amsterdam. The first generation of students had backgrounds in ceramics or sculpture, and along with Valkema they had to learn how to build a furnace from scratch, how to blow glass, how to mix and melt glass, and how to colour glass by experimentation.<sup>31</sup> Valkema allowed them to play with the material to see how it behaved and how best to work with it, while they were only taught techniques at their request. This teaching philosophy—which like Littleton's was more geared towards experimentation with materials than the acquisition of skills—translated into the Workgroup Glass students' work, which was experimental, sometimes even clumsy, and far removed from the technical perfection of factory glass. Almost overnight, the Rietveld Academy became an internationally renowned centre for studio glass, attracting students from across Europe and the US and, on Valkema's invitation, guest lecturers such as Littleton and Lipofsky.

In the 1960s and 1970s Valkema was deeply involved in the development of art education reform policies, in which he remained inspired

by his own teaching experience with Littleton in the US and the glass programme at the Rietveld Academy.<sup>32</sup> He advocated for the establishment of workshops, fully equipped with technology, materials, and technical expertise, to serve as interdisciplinary meeting places for students, true to the Bauhaus-inspired philosophy he encountered when he taught at the Institute for Applied Arts Education under Mart Stam in the 1940s.

### Artists as knowledge actors?

While the small, portable furnace became an icon of the studio glass movement, equally important was their search for knowledge about historical glass colours, which has received much less attention. Labino had made the Toledo glass workshop possible by providing coloured glass marbles from his employer, the Johns-Manville Corporation. However, the reliance on industrially sourced colour materials constrained artistic freedom and was at odds with the studio glass movement's self-representation—embodied by the small, portable furnace—as liberating the artist from the glass industry. Artists sought out glass colour knowledge from company recipe books and other historical sources going back to the early modern period. Littleton's and Valkema's experimentation with the historical recipes they received from Carder at the Steuben Division glassworks is one example of the search for technical expertise.

The case of the studio glass movement speaks to a specific form of knowledge, lost knowledge, and the idea of vanished technologies. Benjamin Olshin has argued that we encounter this idea throughout history, whenever artisans claimed to reinvent a forgotten technology and reactivate lost knowledge.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes the vanished technology is attributed to a long-lost civilization, a rhetorical tool based on a cyclical model of history. One example was the malleable, unbreakable glass which figured prominently in Renaissance lists of lost ancient inventions.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes the writings about technology that have come down to us were not written to safeguard precarious knowledge from disappearing, but were reinventions on paper of already lost

technologies, such as eighteenth-century writings about stained glass.<sup>35</sup> Valkema's archive, with its wealth of colour recipes, glassmaking instructions, and descriptions of equipment, techniques, and furnace designs, collected as he set up the glass programme at the Rietveld Academy, was one such reinvention on paper.<sup>36</sup>

This search for colour knowledge was part of the broader interest in the history of glass, culminating in Dominick Labino's *Visual Art in Glass* in 1968, a book which he was invited to write for the Art Horizons series.<sup>37</sup> In surveying two thousand years of glass history, Labino identified a decline in the development of glass colour knowledge and pointed to automation as an important factor, the broader context of industrialization thus necessitating his retrieval of lost historical colour knowledge. 'While modern technology has made much progress in glass compositions, and the refinement of materials has produced the clearest of crystal', Labino wrote in the introduction, 'there has been a decline in the development of color, and color variation. Therefore it is in this area that the artist-craftsman has a challenge and an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the visual beauty of glass.'<sup>38</sup> This decline of colour knowledge was due to the requirements of standardization in the industry following the nineteenth-century colour revolution.<sup>39</sup>

The art-glass plants, large or small, must duplicate pattern and colour, and sell at a profit in competition with imports of good design and excellent craftsmanship, produced at low labour costs. On the other hand, the studio-craftsman in glass has freedom to create forms of his own expression in colours that focus on the inherent beauty of glass itself.<sup>40</sup>

Labino focused on colour, the invention of new colours, or the reinvention of lost colours because it was his belief that colour dictates form.

Labino concluded his book by looking at the studio glass movement and the Toledo workshops of 1962. He included images of his tools, furnaces, and glassmaker's bench as part of his discussion of the equipment in his studio. However, the majority of the book was devoted



to the history of glass, from the earliest glassmaking centres in Egypt and the sand-core technique, via the invention of the blowpipe and the rise of Venice in the early modern period, to twentieth-century production, all with an eye to the retrieval of colour knowledge which Labino considered in decline. Labino's interest in the history of glass was mirrored in Littleton's own book, first published in hardback in 1971.<sup>41</sup> While the publishers, Van Nostrand Reinhold, envisaged it as a how-to manual, Littleton resisted the label and thought of it more as a 'manifesto' than a manual for glassblowing courses. He proclaimed glass art to be a search for form and so illustrated the book with nineteenth and early twentieth-century glass by Frederick Carder, Emile Gallé, Maurice Marinot, and others whom he admired along with work by Labino, his friend Erwin Eisch, and other European glass artists and makers.

Interestingly, then, studio glass movement artists' self-representation as knowledge actors was ambivalent, being bound up with their ambivalence towards the history of glass and their self-representation as artists. On the one hand, they searched for contemporary glass science and technology and reactivated lost historical knowledge. Their ethos was one of openly sharing this knowledge through training and education, starting university courses in North America and glass programmes at European academies (such as the Rietveld Academy) and attending world craft conferences and other gatherings and meetings. On the other hand, for all the historical continuity between historical glass knowledge and the studio glass movement, the small, portable furnace represented a break with the past—when the labour of glassmaking in historical glass workshops had been divided among several workers—because it was explicitly meant to help the individual glass artist. Despite the ethos of openly sharing knowledge at world craft conferences, the self-representation of the protagonists of the studio glass movement was as artists, and not as craftsmen, to whom they attributed an ethos of secrecy. And for all their reliance on technical knowledge, Littleton famously argued that 'technique is cheap', devaluing technique (that is, one form of knowledge) in his artistic work.

## Reluctant knowledge actors

Adopting the framework of scientific or scholarly personae developed by historians of science and the humanities raises the question what skills and techniques it takes to be recognized as a good artist. As the case of the studio glass movement shows, knowledge is sometimes constructed as lost and in need of being reinvented, partly by turning to historical writings. While Labino's was a history of glass colour knowledge in decline, the members of the studio glass movement self-identified as actors—knowledge saviours who prided themselves on freely sharing knowledge. Their self-identification as knowledge actors, mastering techniques, was tied up with status, as much as their self-denial as knowledge actors, being purposefully experimental in the spirit of Littleton's 'technique is cheap', was meant to boost their status above craft. The tension between self-representation as knowledge actors and rejection of the label stemmed from the differentiation between art and industry and between artists and artisans, which had been ongoing since the early modern period. It is important for historians of knowledge to study the rejection of the label, because understanding why artists refused to be knowledge actors can illuminate their artistic practices as epistemic practices as well as their identities as knowledge actors. In the case of the studio glass movement, it explains why they were so invested in art education reforms and curriculum development, and especially why their teaching philosophy focused on playful experimentation with materials rather than the acquisition of skills, thus allowing for the student-driven development of material knowledge.

What then does this case have to say about knowledge actors? The assumption of historians of science and the humanities is that actors always desired to be seen as knowledge producers; yet, given the framework of scientific or scholarly personae, it is equally evident that actors could resist self-representation as knowledge actors. This resistance was entangled in the processes of differentiation between art and craft: the group of artists studied here went to considerable lengths to distance themselves from being knowledgeable or skilful in

order to represent themselves as artists. Thus we should acknowledge that historical personae rejected the label of knowledge actor whenever it clashed with other identities of choice or preference. The tensions or clashes between identities—knowledge actor being one among many identities to which historical personae aspired—are what the history of knowledge (beyond the history of science or the history of humanities) should embrace. Such a perspective shows how fruitful joining forces in art history and the history of knowledge can be. It is refreshing to look at a long-standing issue such as art versus craft through the lens of specific forms of knowledge: practical knowledge and lost knowledge. When the downplaying or even rejection of the identity of knowledge actor is acknowledged, it points to the importance of ignorance (or not knowing), which is at the forefront of studies in the history of knowledge. Similarly, I would argue for the significance of the history of education to the history of knowledge. It is precisely in the investigation of teaching practices, philosophies, and policies that we can connect the micro to the macro level. Much as the framework of scholarly personae focuses on processes of socialization, virtues, and methods embodied and codified in methodology manuals and enacted in historical teaching practices.

## Notes

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- 3 Ibid. 11.
- 4 Kirsti Niskanen & Michael J. Barany, 'Introduction: The Scholar Incarnate', in Ibid. (eds.), *Gender, Embodiment, and the History of Scholarly Personae: Incarnations and Contestations* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 4.
- 5 Suzanne Marchand, 'Weighing Context and Practices: Theodor Mommsen and the Many Dimensions of Nineteenth-Century Humanistic Knowledge', *History & Theory* 58 (2020), 148.
- 6 Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Pamela H. Smith, *From Lived Experience to the Written Word: Reconstructing Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

- 7 Ibid. 45.
- 8 Hannah Murphy, 'Artisanal "Histories" in Early Modern Nuremberg', in Bert De Munck & Antonella Romano (eds.), *Knowledge and the Early Modern City: A History of Entanglements* (New York: Routledge, 2019).
- 9 Sven Dupré & Christine Göttler, *Knowledge and Discernment in the Early Modern Arts* (London: Routledge, 2017); Alexander Marr, Raphaële Garrod, José Ramón Marcaida & Richard J. Oosterhoff, *Logodaedalus: Word Histories of Ingenuity in Early Modern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019); Richard J. Oosterhoff, José Ramón Marcaida & Alexander Marr, *Ingenuity in the Making: Matter and Technique in Early Modern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021).
- 10 Paolo Bertucci, *Artisanal Enlightenment: Science and the Mechanical Arts in Old Regime France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.
- 11 Sven Dupré & Marieke Hendriksen (eds.), *The Making of Technique in the Arts: Theories and Practice from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023).
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# Multifaceted knowledge actors

## Nineteenth-century teachers as authors, researchers, administrators, and politicians

*Johannes Westberg*

The role of teachers in the rise of mass schooling is obvious and fundamental. They were the ones who taught children and performed the socialization and qualification tasks expected of schools. As such, historians of education have examined teachers as agents of the state who promoted nation-building processes in the classroom, not only by the knowledge they instilled, but as moral agents through the power of their personality.<sup>1</sup> In this context, teachers have been assigned a broad variety of roles in (potentially) amending the social and economic problems of society, promoting ideals such as humanity, justice, and peace. Although earlier religious aims have gradually faded, the salvific hopes linked to teachers' agency in the classroom have remained in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I explore what a history of knowledge framework might add to this historiography of teachers. What if the history of teachers were written not as a history of education, focusing on teaching, teachers' life, wages, and profession, but rather as a history of knowledge? My intention is consequently, to paraphrase Simone Lässig, to analyse and comprehend teachers' dissemination of knowledge *in* society and *in* culture.<sup>3</sup> Here I argue that such examinations of teachers as a knowledge actor broaden the historical investigation to include their role in sharing and producing knowledge outside the

classroom and outside their profession, to include other institutions, spaces, and cultures of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Based on a pilot project on nineteenth-century educational journals and a project addressing the local history of schooling, I will explore teachers as knowledge actors by focusing on primary schoolteachers in Sweden in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup> I present, first, the social and economic features of these actors and, second, the roles in knowledge production and distribution that their training and position enabled them to take. I will suggest a preliminary typology of four roles that teachers adopted as knowledge actors outside the classroom: *(i)* private lecturer and teacher; *(ii)* author, researcher, and journalist; *(iii)* administrator and administrative assistant; and *(iv)* politician. Although these roles have been neglected compared to teachers' work in the classroom, I will argue they represent a promising line of research for those wishing to examine teachers as knowledge actors.

Besides building on the existing literature on the history of teachers, I also address two questions of more general significance for the field of the history of knowledge. The first is the recurring question of what a history of knowledge approach might bring to other fields of historical research.<sup>6</sup> As this essay shows, the history of knowledge has a lot to offer historians of education. The second question concerns the nature of knowledge actors. This essay highlights the importance of considering the multiple roles that knowledge actors such as teachers, but also authors, priests, politicians, and scientists can play in specific historical contexts.

### From teachers to knowledge brokers

In the history of education, teachers are most often examined either as teachers of children or as part of a profession. The literature explores what they taught, and how they taught. Using Gert Biesta's typology, such research has examined how teachers provide children with knowledge and skills (qualifications) while transmitting norms and values (socialization).<sup>7</sup> When considering teachers as part of a profes-

sion, historians of education have also examined their political and professional struggles to promote their expertise, strengthen their status, and improve their wages and working conditions.<sup>8</sup> Starting from an interest in wages, livelihoods, and professionalization processes, such studies have also on occasion broadened our understanding of teachers to include their secondary occupations and their interactions with the local community.<sup>9</sup> I draw on primarily these latter strands of research to investigate teachers as knowledge actors.

To examine teachers as knowledge actors—highlighting how they contributed to the societal circulation of knowledge—I use the concept of the knowledge broker, known from fields such as education and healthcare. Instead of focusing on one specific role in the classroom or in the professional struggle, this concept is useful since it highlights how knowledge actors can play several, varying roles depending on context, and how they can support the flow of knowledge, ideas, and practices across social borders and distinctions. According to this conceptualization, a knowledge broker shares, connects, combines, and translates ideas from one group to another. As such, teachers can function as gatekeepers or information managers, deciding what information individuals can access. But they can also have an active role in facilitating exchange by translating and adapting different perspectives to one another.<sup>10</sup>

This conceptualization of knowledge actors is useful since it allows for an exploration of the multiple roles such actors might have. A knowledge broker may communicate scientific evidence, or promote communication between researchers and practitioners. There is consequently a wide range of questions to ask about why the knowledge broker disseminates knowledge, whose knowledge is being shared, what type of knowledge, and how.<sup>11</sup> These questions of why, what and how are useful when considering the main roles teachers played in the circulation of knowledge in society.



## Teachers' social and economic position

Primary schoolteachers are interesting as knowledge actors because of their sheer numbers: they became a sizeable profession in the nineteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, however, primary schoolteachers were few in many European countries. In Sweden in 1839, only 1,500 primary schoolteachers were identified in the statistics. Following the School Act of 1842, which required parishes to organize school districts with at least one primary school per district, the number of teachers grew. In 1890, there were 13,508 primary schoolteachers distributed across Sweden's 2,300 or so school districts, compared to the 1,108 teachers working at grammar schools (*läroverken*) in 1890, and the mere 256 professors and hired lecturers at higher education institutions (Lund, Uppsala, and Karolinska Institutet) in 1891–95.<sup>12</sup> While most individual teachers remained comparatively unknown, primary schoolteachers as a group became an important knowledge actor in the nineteenth century.

When examining teachers as knowledge actors, their sheer numbers are important. It meant they were found not only in urban centres, but across Sweden. In largely rural nineteenth-century Sweden, this also meant that teachers often had a background among farmers and non-skilled workers. Kerstin Skog-Östlin has shown that 31 per cent of primary schoolteacher students in the early twentieth century had at least one parent working in the agricultural sector. Public statistics indicate that 40 per cent of students at the male teacher training colleges in 1901–1910 had parents who were landowning farmers.<sup>13</sup>

There were nevertheless significant differences, not least between different types of primary schoolteachers. Apart from the regular primary schoolteachers (*folkskollärare*), there were junior schoolteachers (*småskollärare*) and teachers at minor primary schools (*mindre folkskolor*). The role of junior schools and minor primary schools varied, but, as the terminology indicated, they were often smaller schools placed in small villages, and junior schools were also intended to cater to younger children.<sup>14</sup> In the 1880s, the minimum wage of a junior schoolteacher was one-third of a primary schoolteacher's, and

while teacher training colleges were set up for junior schoolteachers from the 1860s onwards, neither junior schools nor minor primary schools required teaching qualifications of their staff.<sup>15</sup>

The composition of the teaching profession varied across these categories. Although the proportion of female teachers increased from the mid nineteenth century on, feminization was uneven. In 1887, over 90 per cent of the junior schoolteachers were female, while only less than one-third of the regular primary schoolteachers were women.<sup>16</sup> Their social background also varied. According to Emil Marklund's study of northern Sweden, junior schoolteachers (regardless of gender) often came from farming families; 53 per cent came from such households, while only 27 per cent of the primary schoolteachers had such a background. Similarly, 24 per cent of primary schoolteachers had a managerial or professional family background, while that was true for only 12.5 per cent of the junior schoolteachers.<sup>17</sup>

The primary schoolteachers' position thus remained ambivalent. In his classic study *School Teacher*, Dan Lortie describes teachers as 'special but shadowed'. Teachers are usually admired for their public service, but their competence and ability have often been questioned. The playwright George Bernard Shaw famously formulated this position in 1905 as 'Those who can, do; those who can't, teach.' Teachers are described using the rhetoric of professionalism but are often perceived as underpaid.<sup>18</sup> In addition, they enjoyed a higher education that in the nineteenth century was set at the secondary level, but were rarely considered as academics. In countries such as Sweden and Germany, teachers were thus described as half-educated (Swe. *halvbildning*, Ger. *Halbbildung*).<sup>19</sup> Yet, the social and cultural impact of teachers has been recognized. Their homes have been described as 'cultural centres' with 'selectively bred plants of the intellect'.<sup>20</sup> Examining teachers as knowledge brokers will allow me to pose questions about what these conceptualizations of half-education and cultural centres actually may have meant.

In this ambivalent position with the number of teachers expanding, teachers organized themselves in various ways to improve their wages and strengthen their social standing. The most important professional

association was Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollära rförening (Primary Schoolteachers of Sweden), which surpassed 10,000 members in 1905, and its magazine *Svensk Läraretidning* ('Swedish Teachers' Journal').<sup>21</sup> This socioeconomic context of an expanding, trained profession struggling to improve their position in a largely rural society provided the conditions that shaped how teachers functioned as knowledge actors in Sweden.

These conditions of the teaching profession provide plenty of opportunities for the historian. Apart from producing significant quantities of source materials—preserved because of their ability to organize in associations, and the excellent condition of the church archives that hold the primary school archives—the large group of teachers provide interesting opportunities to study a history of knowledge from below. That is, a kind of grassroots history of knowledge that does not focus on those whose status and knowledge was self-evidently recognized, but those knowledge actors who were often questioned—a history that does not mainly deal with pioneers, innovators, and dominant figures, but instead highlights subordinate standpoints and peripheral perspectives.<sup>22</sup>

Since teachers were distributed across Sweden, from the cities to the most sparsely populated parishes in the far north, they are also a rewarding object of study for those engaging with the local history of knowledge, and those hoping to retreat from urban histories of knowledge to the most rural regions of Sweden. Although this has not necessarily been the case in the history of knowledge, there has been a tendency in political history and the history of education to focus on the national level.<sup>23</sup> Here, the history of teachers provides an excellent opportunity to examine the history of knowledge in small towns such as Herrljunga, Nyköping, and Mariestad—the locations of three teachers' meetings in the winter of 1859–1860.<sup>24</sup>

## Mister Know-it-all

In the context presented above, teachers occupied various roles. Their main task was, obviously, that of teacher. As teachers of children, they played a key role as disseminators of knowledge. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Swedish children (who since the reading campaign in the eighteenth century had been able to read to some level) now also were able to write.<sup>25</sup> In that sense, teachers took on the role of gatekeeper, deciding what knowledge to impart to their pupils. Their role and agency—especially against the background of parents' protests against an education above the minimum level as defined by the School Act of 1842—warrants further study.<sup>26</sup>

Nineteenth-century teachers were, however, not only teachers in the strict sense of teaching children. They were knowledge brokers in a broader sense who promoted the production, sharing, and use of knowledge in Swedish society, not only for children, but also for other individuals. This was linked to their socioeconomic position. They were trained, but received only a modest wage for an occupation which moreover did not occupy all their time. In the late nineteenth century, the standard teacher contract stipulated 8 months of work a year, and since teaching children was a daytime job, their working hours were limited.<sup>27</sup>

Having time to spend on other tasks, and the financial reasons to do so, some teachers functioned as knowledge brokers, meaning they facilitated the sharing of knowledge in various contexts and social groups. While seldom acknowledged today, teachers' multiple roles were a well-known, much-debated fact in the nineteenth century. In the influential newspaper *Aftonbladet*, an author complained in 1857 that both the School Act of 1842 and the local community influenced teachers to become something else than the teachers of children they ought to be. The School Act required them to be singers, gymnasts, and gardeners. And in addition, the author lamented there were politicians that wanted teachers to become agronomists, and others who wanted to train teachers to help medical doctors with vaccinations and bloodletting, or enable them to serve as members of parliament

or parish clerks. Add the practical requirements that often faced teachers in the local community, who needed sextons and organists, and the result was teachers who did literally anything but teach: a 'mister know-it-all, singer, physical educator, gardener, agronomist, vaccinator, bloodletter, and quack, politician, parish clerk, sexton, and organist!'<sup>28</sup>

While exaggerated, this complaint is informative since it summarizes the possible roles that teachers could take in producing and sharing their knowledge in a variety of social contexts. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, it remained common for teachers to combine their profession either with being a sexton (*klockare*) or an organist. The percentage of teachers who combined these occupations increased from 21 per cent in 1847 to 23 per cent in 1859. In 1882, 33 per cent of all male primary schoolteachers also worked as sextons.<sup>29</sup> Sextons had far-reaching responsibilities, which indicates the many roles that teachers could take as knowledge brokers. Besides helping the parish priest at services, sextons had a range of administrative duties, including running the postal service and providing medical services such as vaccinations and bloodletting.<sup>30</sup> Since such tasks were demanding, the School Act of 1842 also noted that teachers working as sextons should have the expertise required for that position.<sup>31</sup>

Teachers also had a range of other tasks. Of particular interest is a report on 2,992 public schoolteachers in 1896. Although it was based on responses from the chairmen of school boards, who probably did not have full insight into what teachers actually did when not teaching, the report showed that fully 57 per cent of rural teachers had a second job. Teachers commonly worked as sextons and/or organists (31 per cent), but this survey showed that their secondary occupations ranged from librarian and bookbinder to trichinella inspector.<sup>32</sup> While teachers taught children, such reports also indicate that their roles as knowledge actors was much more multifaceted than that.

Teachers' many roles may have been related to contemporary criticism of primary schoolteachers as half-educated, possessing broad but incomplete, shallow knowledge, and the presentation of their households as cultural centres.<sup>33</sup> Both descriptions lack precision, however,

and fail to acknowledge the scope of teachers' knowledge-brokering. Examining teachers as knowledge actors outside the classroom, a useful preliminary categorization would instead include teachers as (i) private lecturer and teacher, (ii) author, writer, and journalist, (iii) administrator and administrative assistant, and (iv) politician. Such a typology highlights the work teachers did across communities and social distinctions and the forms of knowledge they produced, shared, and distributed. Teachers not only shared knowledge as popularizers, but also used their expertise to produce fiction and scientific or quasi-scientific knowledge and to put policies into practice.

The gendered dimension of teachers as knowledge actors is not the focus of this essay, but it should be noted that the teacher training and the teaching profession offered female teachers opportunities as knowledge actors beyond the classroom. Christina Florin has noted female primary schoolteachers' political activity in the temperance and peace associations, and female teachers were to be found elsewhere too.<sup>34</sup> Thyra Freding (b.1879), for example, also worked in popular education, disseminating knowledge about old Nordic games and dances, while Frida Åslund (b.1879) published country house novels (*herrgårdsromaner*), autobiographical novels, and children's books, while working as a primary schoolteacher in the province of Dalarna. Elna Persson (b.1866) was as board member for various business associations and Erica Falkman (b.1874) used her teaching degree as a public lecturer and as a member of a municipal council and various associations.<sup>35</sup> While outside the scope of this essay, the similarities and differences between male and female primary schoolteachers as knowledge actors certainly deserves further investigation.

### Speaker, author, researcher, and private teacher

Closely linked to their profession as primary schoolteachers, teachers disseminated knowledge as lecturers and private teachers. Thanks to their educational skills and content knowledge, they could provide private education to children or adults outside school hours and find additional teaching at evening schools or Sunday schools.<sup>36</sup> Like the

influential educator Carl Kastman, Nils Hejde noted in his handbook on teachers' secondary occupations that private education was suitable for teachers. Teaching outside school was never as exhausting as teaching in school, and some private education was more financially rewarding than others—according to Hejde, that included teaching musical instruments, sloyd, and modern languages.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, teachers could pick up work as guest speakers or lecturers talking about their area of expertise or interest. In the nineteenth century, teaching journals were filled with news items about talks given by teachers, often on the topic of education. Thus, teachers could act as knowledge brokers who shared knowledge with other groups in society. The journal *Svensk Läraretidning* indicates, for example, that in 1893 the primary schoolteacher K. J. Leksell gave a talk in Lugnås for parents about upbringing, obedience, and truthfulness, while Axel Jonsson lectured workers on 'Raising practical men and women' in Kungsör in 1894.<sup>38</sup> This is the role of teachers as popular educators, disseminating knowledge by popularization or by translating it for their audience.<sup>39</sup>

Some teachers cast their net wider as educators to produce textbooks. As teachers, they thus contributed to the selection, classification, and transmission of knowledge that this implied, and that curriculum research has explored.<sup>40</sup> Although it was not uncontroversial—there were complaints that school boards would not buy textbooks authored by teachers—primary schoolteachers' textbooks dominated in some school subjects such as science.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, teachers have even been described as the main drivers in developing science textbooks, both in terms of content and educational presentation.<sup>42</sup> Some of the textbooks achieved remarkable success: the primary schoolteacher Jonas Bäckman (1832–1906) did, for example, publish a wide range of textbooks, including one about Bible history that in 1914 reached its 41st edition.<sup>43</sup> In a period when textbooks largely equated to the curriculum, teachers' roles as textbook authors is worthy of further study by historians of knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

Besides textbooks, teachers published texts as authors, writers, and journalists more generally. While textbooks implied a dissemination

of knowledge within the teachers' own sphere, these efforts meant stepping across social and professional boundaries. These included authoring children's books, like Cyrus Granér (1870–1937) who for his contemporaries was best known for his now forgotten books about Burre Busse.<sup>45</sup> Some went further to produce research publications addressed to the academic sphere. Their works indicate the importance of differentiating between the ways teachers shared knowledge, that is between the popularization that public lectures implied, the selection and transmission of knowledge in textbooks, and the production of (intended) academic knowledge via research. The latter type of knowledge actor included the primary schoolteacher and ethnologist Olof Petter Petterson (1859–1944), the collector and historian of education Bror Rudolf Hall (1876–1950), the teacher, landowner, musician, and folklorist Anders Olof Berglund (1857–1939), and the teacher and folklorist Karl Jacob Nilsson (1844–1926). How these individuals' positions as teachers affected their work as researchers is, again, an interesting question to pursue further.

As folklorists, Anders Berglund and Karl Nilsson are interesting examples of not only the opportunities the teaching profession offered to produce and distribute knowledge, but also the challenges teachers faced when they lacked the education, social networks, and academic credentials that some scientific and literary fields expected. Publishing under the pseudonym Tobias, Berglund (Figure 2.1) wrote about the culture, songs, and memories of his home province of Medelpad: a task he himself described as for his own pleasure, rather than for financial gain.<sup>46</sup> In Nilsson's case, his unwillingness to conform to the scientific standards of the day, his preference for what he called a written 'modified dialect', and his attempts to make money out of his publications, stalled the distribution of his findings in more prestigious publications.<sup>47</sup>

Other teachers participated in less ambitious publications. Taking on smaller writing tasks was in line with Hejde's recommendations. He acknowledged that teachers' social and cultural position created challenges when they approached book publishers. In the terms used here, teachers were not necessarily knowledge brokers with the legitimacy





Figure 2.1. Anders Olof Berglund, here in his flat in Bredsjö primary school (in Medelpad), held multiple roles as a knowledge broker, reaching across social boundaries as a landowner, teacher, musician, and folklorist. Source: Ljustorps hembygdsförenings bildarkiv, Bildnr: 10422.

to bridge the gap to the publishing world. According to Hejde, it was too difficult for unknown teachers to get book manuscripts accepted by big publishing houses, and if accepted, an unknown author could not expect significant sales. Instead, Hejde recommended that teachers write articles and news reports for magazines and newspapers. He argued that lucidly written pieces about local and regional news would always be in demand. And while each news item did not pay much, a steady flow of shorter news text would make for a decent income.<sup>48</sup> Teachers' work as knowledge actors was in such cases primarily a matter of distributing factual information.

### Administrator, assistant, and politician

Besides moving into private education, writing, research, or journalism, teachers also took jobs as administrators, assistants, and politicians. In these roles, teachers did not facilitate the sharing of knowledge between communities or across social distinctions in ways that might be described as knowledge dissemination or popularization, but rather by applying their knowledge and literacy skills in other ways.

These fields included practical administrative work or writing. Teachers' training created certain possibilities for them in rural contexts. As Anders Nilsson has noted, the Swedish rural population's limited reading and writing ability meant that they needed help when, for example, formal contracts were to be signed.<sup>49</sup> Some of these tasks were more formal. Teachers could work as accountants, number examiners (*siffergranskare*), property surveyors, or tax officers.<sup>50</sup> The above mentioned schoolteacher Bäckman, for example, wrote a handbook on this topic, *Den lilla affärsboken* ('The Little Book of Business') dedicated to the primary schools and country people of Sweden. He said writing skills had become widespread in the late 1860s, but the ability to apply this to specific tasks still remained limited. Bäckman wrote his handbook as a how-to guide when doing bookkeeping or drawing up deeds of sale, wills, estate records, probate records, deeds of guardianship, and so forth (see Figure 2.2).<sup>51</sup>

		Januari månad år 1868.		Inkomster.		Utgifter.	
1868.		Rdr	öre.	Rdr	öre.	Rdr	öre.
Jan.	1	Kassabehållning från förra året . . . . .	30				
»	3	Köpt 10 L $\overline{\text{t}}$ mjöl à 1 Rdr 25 öre . . . . .				12	50
»	5	Betalt en auktionsräkning med . . . . .				13	75
»	15	För upphuggning af 20 famnar ved à 75 öre . . . . .	15				
»	»	Försålt ett ungnöt för . . . . .	36	75			
»	17	Betalt en skuld till Jöns Olsson i Berg . . . . .				40	—
»	21	Till skräddaren Andersson för syning . . . . .				9	75
»	»	Försålt 8 $\overline{\text{t}}$ ull à 1 Rdr 30 öre . . . . .	10	40			
»	»	Dito 15 $\overline{\text{t}}$ smör à 55 öre . . . . .	8	25			
»	31	Diverse utgifter för hushållet . . . . .				17	50
»	»	Kassabehållning till nästa månad . . . . .				....	...
		Summa Rdr Rmt	100	40	100	40	

Figure 2.2. Proper accounting according to Bäckman. Source: Bäckman, *Den lilla affärsboken* (Hernösand 1868), 4.

These efforts in helping the local community could also take the form of simple writing tasks. The diaries left by the teacher Lars Jansson (1810–1886), who worked in the Bergslagen mining district, show his range—and how busy he was. He drafted purchase orders, wrote minutes, composed wedding verses, and helped parishioners write letters to America. He himself estimated that he in total wrote 372 congratulation cards, produced 82 dice games, wrote 49 coffin plates, and compiled 68 probate records.<sup>52</sup>

Others tried local or national politics. The step into national politics was the steepest. Even so, by 1906 13 primary schoolteachers were members of the second chamber of the Swedish Parliament.<sup>53</sup> There, some had exceptional success, like the ministers of education and ecclesiastical affairs Fridjuv Berg (1851–1916) and Verner Rydén (1878–1930). While the history of such prominent individuals has

been written, the more general history of teachers in national politics remains to be explored.

While only a select few took part in national politics, it was more common that teachers used their expertise in local politics. Of 40 students from the teacher training college in Linköping who finalized training in 1882, most held significant positions at the local municipal level, either in politics or as an official.<sup>54</sup> In a report compiled in 1898 on teachers' living conditions, they were also found serving as directors of poorhouses, tax officers, chairs of local councils, or chairs of fire insurance boards.<sup>55</sup> The teaching journal *Svensk Läraretidning* occasionally published lists of teachers in senior local authority positions. On 14 January 1891, it noted that a 'very large number' of teachers had been elected as accountants for municipal, church, or school bodies or as members of fire insurance committees—too many to be mentioned in print. Instead, the journal merely listed five teachers who were elected as chair of the municipal board (*kommunalstämma*), thirteen teachers elected as vice-chair, one teacher as chair of a poor relief board, and three tax officers. On 7 January the same year, the journal had also noted that several teachers had been elected as chairs or members of the municipal committee (*kommunalnämnd*), despite this being illegal.<sup>56</sup> Teachers' roles in such contexts remain to be explored further, however.

In these instances, a teacher's function as a knowledge broker was again far from that of disseminator or popularizer of scientific or factual knowledge. Instead, teachers supported the implementation of local policies and practices, or helped develop them. A striking example was the primary schoolteacher Per Borgh (1860–1941), who combined his teaching position in Lekaryd in the province of Småland with a wide range of municipal tasks. Apart from pursuing progressive reforms via the local peace movement, the temperance movement, and Primary Schoolteachers of Sweden, he held in total some twenty positions of trust in Lekaryd. These included vice-chair of the school board and the church board and chair of the school building committee and church restoration committee.<sup>57</sup> The answer to how Borgh shared and used his knowledge in these various contexts could shed further

light on the role of teachers as knowledge brokers at the local and national level.

Such brokering was not without its challenges. In Borgh's case, his promotion of progressive politics combined with several positions on the municipal level, and his involvement in an insurance company and bicycle sales spawned a series of controversies. While his expertise could be an asset to both his public and private duties, his political opponents referred to him sneeringly as an insurance man. And while the knowledge he amassed thanks to his involvement in the peace movement, the temperance movement, and the teachers' association would have equipped him with useful expertise for his work in the municipality, this did not extend to a political career at the national level. He was never elected to Parliament. Instead, the local newspaper *Smålandsposten* made fun of his ambitious attempts as a mere teacher and insurance salesman to make such wide-ranging contributions to society. The newspaper jokingly claimed that Borgh could easily solve the complex political situation of late nineteenth-century Europe just by having a brisk chat with Bismarck.<sup>58</sup>

The challenges facing teachers working outside the teaching sphere were noted by contemporaries. Kastman felt that such tasks in many cases could contribute to their professional and social standing. These included positions unrelated to school and local government: director of a meteorological station, say, or chairman of a land reclamation association, controller at a sugar mill, or positions at savings banks or fire insurance companies. Teachers could make important contributions while at the same time reaping the benefits, both financially and otherwise. Still, Kastman argued that not all uses of the teachers' acquired skills were suitable. It was not easy to combine teaching with being director of a fire station, let alone managing the conflicts that might arise from working as a police officer or a court assistant. While Kastman acknowledged the important role teachers could fill, organizing probate records, inheritance, and auctions, he also advised against it because he saw the potential for conflicts with pupils' parents and the local community.<sup>59</sup>

## In conclusion

This essay offers a preliminary mapping of primary schoolteachers' main roles as knowledge actors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As evident from above, primary schoolteachers did not only work in their own classrooms, but they also occupied roles ranging from private lecturer and teacher, author, researcher, and journalist to administrator, administrative assistant, and politician. Teachers' multiple roles as knowledge actors can be explained by their profession. They had an academic training on the level of secondary education, a relatively small workload, and a similarly limited wage. This both enabled and promoted teachers' work outside school. The role of the combination of academic training, low wages, and relatively short working hours in stimulating knowledge circulation should probably not be underestimated, whether teachers or other knowledge actors.

The preliminary typology of teachers' roles as knowledge actors presented in this essay adds precision and nuance to the then widespread notion of teachers as either half-educated or as centres of culture. First, teachers were not only one kind of knowledge actor, but several, ranging from the specialisms of amateur researchers to multitasking local government administrators. Second, teachers applied and disseminated different kinds of knowledge. As researchers, they attempted to produce new knowledge; as lecturers they popularized academic knowledge; as textbook authors they selected and classified knowledge, and in the municipal organization, they used their skills to develop and implement local policies. Third, the teachers' history shows the usefulness of knowledge-brokering as a concept. It reminds us that teachers shared different kinds of knowledge in different ways, for a wide range of purposes. It also encourages further explorations of the multiple roles of other knowledge actors such as authors, journalists, priests, politicians, and scientists.

By examining teachers as knowledge actors, this essay has also indicated the potential for further collaborations between the history of education and the history of knowledge. History of education certainly offers interesting and important topics. Consider only Sweden's 13,500

primary schoolteachers in 1890, with the likes of teacher–public speaker Axel Jonsson, teacher–author Jonas Bäckman, teacher–researcher Karl Nilsson, and teacher–salesman–administrator–politician Per Borgh. As I have argued in this essay, their history as fiction and textbook authors, researchers, administrators, and politicians remains promising as topics for future research. But there is more. Teachers’ foreign travels is another rather neglected topic, as well as the teacher training colleges, and their role in knowledge circulation.

In addition, the history of knowledge has much to offer historians of education. By shifting focus from education in the classroom to knowledge in society, we are presented with a framework that enables us to explore how teachers not only taught children, but also disseminated knowledge as guest lecturers, journalists, local officials, and national politicians. This lesson from the history of knowledge need not be restricted to teachers, for it encourages us to consider the role of schools, school buildings, principals, teacher training, and teacher educators in the dissemination of knowledge in society and culture. In particular, the teacher training colleges deserve further attention. These include the *Högre lärarinneseminariet* (‘Female Teachers’ Higher Teacher Training College’), counting the likes of Selma Lagerlöf, Jeanna Oterdahl, Anna Sandström and Alice Tegnér among its notable students.<sup>60</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Daniel Tröhler, ‘Tracking the Educationalization of the World: Prospects for an Emancipated History of Education’, *Pedagogika* 67/4 (2017): 355–57.
- 2 Sun Young Lee & Jil Winandy, ‘Scientization of Professional Teacher Knowledges and Construction of Teaching Methods’, *Paedagogica Historica* (2021).
- 3 Philipp Sarasin, ‘Was ist Wissensgeschichte?’ *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 36/1 (2011), 165; Simone Lässig, ‘The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda’, *Bulletin of the GHI Washington* 59 (2016), 158.
- 4 The concepts are discussed as part of the history of knowledge framework posited in Johan Östling, ‘Vad är Kunskapshistoria?’ *Historisk Tidskrift* 135/1 (2015), 112–14.
- 5 The projects are Digitalization of Educational Journals (Helge Ax:son Johnsons stiftelse, 2009), and The Rise of Mass Schooling in France, Italy, Spain and Sweden 1840–1940 (Swedish Science Research Council, 2016).

- 6 See, for example, Staffan Bergwik & Linn Holmberg, 'Standing on Whose Shoulders? A Critical Comment on the History of Knowledge', in Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar (eds.), *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020) and works cited there.
- 7 Gert Biesta, 'Good Education in an Age of Measurement: On the Need to Reconnect with the Question of Purpose in Education', *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability* 21/1 (2009), 39–40.
- 8 A classic example of the Swedish literature is Christina Florin, *Kampen om katedern: Feminiserings- och professionaliseringsprocessen inom den svenska folkskolans lärarkår 1860–1906* (Umeå: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987).
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- 10 See, for example, Roman Kislov, Damian Hodgson & Ruth Boaden, 'Professionals as Knowledge Brokers: The Limits of Authority in Healthcare Collaboration: Professionals as Knowledge Brokers', *Public Administration* 94/2 (2016); Joel Malin & Chris Brown (eds.), *The Role of Knowledge Brokers in Education: Connecting the Dots between Research and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2020); Cristina Boari & Federico Riboldazzi, 'How Knowledge Brokers Emerge and Evolve: The Role of Actors' Behaviour', *Research Policy* 43/4 (2014).
- 11 Malin & Brown, *Role of Knowledge Brokers*, 7.
- 12 BiSOS, *Bidrag till Sveriges officiella statistik: P, undervisningsväsendet*, xxviii: *Berättelse om folkskolorna för år 1890* (Stockholm: Centraltryckeriet, 1899); BiSOS, *Bidrag till Sveriges officiella statistik: P, undervisningsväsendet*, xx: *Berättelse om statens allmänna läroverk för gossar, läsåret 1890–91* (Stockholm: Centraltryckeriet, 1894), 12.
- 13 Kerstin Skog-Östlin, *Pedagogisk kontroll och auktoritet: En studie av den statliga lärarutbildningens uppgifter enligt offentliga dokument kring folkskollärarutbildningen, läroverkslärarutbildningen och lärarhögskolan* (Malmö: LiberFörlag/Gleerup, 1984), 65; Carl Olof Arcadius & Clas Gustafsson, *Folkundervisningskommitténs betänkande 1 folkskoleseminarierna*, iii: *Bilagor: Historik och statistiska utredningar* (Stockholm: Nordiska bokhandeln, 1912), 386.
- 14 These categories of school are detailed in Johannes Westberg, 'Were There National School Systems in the Nineteenth Century? The Construction of a Regionalised Primary School System in Sweden', *History of Education* 51/2 (2022), 184–206.
- 15 Westberg, 'National School Systems', 194, 197; Margaretha Mellberg, *Pedagogen och det skrivna ordet: Skrivkonst och folkskollärare 1870–1920* (Gothenburg: Historiska institutionen, 1996), 128.
- 16 BiSOS, *Bidrag till Sveriges officiella statistik: P, undervisningsväsendet*, xxv: *Berättelse om folkskolorna för år 1887* (Stockholm: Centraltryckeriet, 1898), tab. 2.



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- 18 Dan Clement Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 6–13, quote at 12.
- 19 Nils Runeby, "'Varken fågel eller fisk": Om den farliga halvbildningen', in Tore Frängsmyr, Magnus von Platen, Sten Lindroth & Gunnar Eriksson (eds.), *Vetenskapens träd: Idéhistoriska studier tillägnade Sten Lindroth* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1974); Jesper Eckhardt Larsen, 'Nordic Elementary Schoolteachers: Organic Intellectuals, Agents of a Colonising State, Emancipatory Groups, or All of These?' in Jesper Eckhardt Larsen, Barbara Schulte & Fredrik W. Thue (eds.), *Schoolteachers and the Nordic Model* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 37.
- 20 Sten Carlsson, *Svensk ståndscirkulation 1680–1950* (Uppsala: Lindblads, 1950), 126: 'kulturhårdar'; Anna Sörensen, *Svenska folkskolans historia*, iii: *Det svenska folkundervisningsväsendet 1860–1900* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1942), 308: 'intellektuella förädlingsväxter'.
- 21 Florin, *Kampen om katedern*, 87.
- 22 Eric Hobsbawm, 'History from Below: Some Reflections', in Frederick Krantz (ed.), *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 13–27; Franziska Primus & Christian Lundahl, 'The Peripherals at the Core of Androcentric Knowledge Production: An Analysis of the Managing Editor's Knowledge Work in the International Encyclopedia of Education (1985)', *Paedagogica Historica* 57/6 (2020), 625–6.
- 23 For this characterization of political history, see, for example, Erik Nydahl, *I fyrkens tid: Politisk kultur i två ångermanländska landskommuner 1860–1930* (Sundsvall: Mid Sweden University, 2010), 30–1.
- 24 *Föreningen: Tidskrift för folkskolans och kyrkomusikens vänner* 1860.
- 25 For statistical estimates of this development, see, for example, Egil Johansson, 'The History of Literacy in Sweden', in Harvey J. Graff, Alison Mackinnon, Bengt Sandin & Ian Winchester (eds.), *Understanding Literacy in Its Historical Contexts: Socio-Cultural History and the Legacy of Egil Johansson* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2009), 56. In the 1890s, with a few exceptions all recruits to the Swedish army were able to write.
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- 28 *Aftonbladet* (23 Feb. 1857).
- 29 Westberg, 'How Did Teachers', 35.
- 30 Hilmer Wentz, *Klockaren i helg och söcken: Från medeltid till nutid* (Lund: Ekstrand, 1980), pt. 1.
- 31 SFS 1842:19, *Kongl. Maj:ts nådiga stadga angående folkunderwisningen i riket: Gifven Stockholms slott den 18 juni 1842* (Stockholm, 1842), 6 [legislation].
- 32 Westberg, 'How Did Teachers', 36.
- 33 Runeby, 'Varken fågel eller fisk', 1974, 162–5; Carlsson, *Svensk ståndscirkulation*, 126.

- 34 Florin, *Kampen om katedern*, 143.
- 35 For a collective biography of 1,250 women in Stockholm, see *Formering för offentlighet: En kollektivbiografi över Stockholmskvinnor 1880–1920* (Uppsala universitet, 2019).
- 36 Florin, *Kampen om katedern*, 90.
- 37 Nils Hejde, *Biförtjänster för folkskollärare: Några råd och anvisningar att i väsentlig mån höja sin årsinkomst* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1891), 5–7; see also Carl Kastman, 'Om folkskolelärares bisysselsättningar', *Tidskrift för Folkundervisningen* 17 (1898), 15.
- 38 'Skolmöte hölls den 6 d:s i Svärdsjö', *Svensk Läraretidning* 13/42 (1894), 538; 'Föräldramöte hölls den 1 d:s i Lugnås öfre skola', *Svensk Läraretidning* 12/41 (1893), 503.
- 39 See, for example, C. Larsen, 'Peasant Among Peasants', 68–79.
- 40 For classic formulations of such perspectives, see Ulf P. Lundgren, 'Utbildningspolitik och utbildningskoder: Förändringar i svensk utbildningspolitik', *Uddannelseshistorie* 40 (2006), 60.
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- 45 *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon (SBL)*, s.v. 'Cyrus T. Granér', by Gösta Lundström, sok. riksarkivet.se/sbl/.
- 46 From the preface of Anders Berglund, *Små visor i folkton af Tobias jämte ett par de populäraste spöksagor i bygden* (Sundsvall: n.p., 1919).
- 47 *SBL*, s.v. 'Karl J. Nilsson', by Gösta Berg. For the role of teachers in folklore and folklore studies, see Ana Carolina Arias, 'Folklore, Teachers, and Collective Knowledge in Argentina in the Early Twentieth Century', in Charlotte A. Lerg, Johan Östling & Jana Weiß (eds.), *History of Intellectual Culture: International Yearbook of Knowledge and Society* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022).
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- 51 Jonas Bäckman, *Den lilla affärsboken. Innehållande anvisning om bokhålleri eller räkenskapsföring...till allmogens och folkskolornas tjänst* (Hernösand: n.p., 1868).
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- 56 'Förtroendeuppdrag', *Svensk Läraretidning* 10/1 (1891), 3; 'Förtroendeuppdrag', *Svensk Läraretidning* 10/2 (1891), 13.
- 57 'Per Borgh 70 År', *Svensk Läraretidning* 49/33 (1930), 770; Lennart Johansson, 'Folkskolläraren Per Borgh: En liberal visionär i det "mörkaste Småland"', in Ann-Kristin Högman, Lars Petterson & Sune Åkerman (eds.), *Samhällsbyggare i närmiljön: Kvinnliga och manliga folkskollärares insatser i det lokala samhällslivet 1860–1960* (Uppsala: Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria, 2010), 197.
- 58 *Smålandsposten* (24 July 1888).
- 59 Kastman, 'Folkskolelärares bisysselsättningar'.
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# Epistemic hierarchies and historical actors

## Reframing Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples

*Christa Lundberg*

Many programmatic texts about the history of knowledge propose a focus on epistemic hierarchies. They suggest we should study the boundaries and relationships between different kinds of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> One criticism of this plan concerns the status of individual knowers. Faced with abstract 'knowledge systems', 'orders of knowledge', and 'epistemic hierarchies', some historians suspect that the history of knowledge, or at least some versions of it, does away with the living, breathing, thinking subject of knowledge. In this essay, I consider whether attention to epistemic hierarchies excludes studies of individual knowledge actors or, conversely, enhances them.

I shall begin with two historians who both defend the value of the individual viewpoint. Suzanne Marchand argues that historians of knowledge risk abandoning the attention to individual thinkers characteristic of intellectual history. Marchand raises several important points in favour of biographically oriented studies. First, this genre invites us to contextualize authors in their political and social realities.<sup>2</sup> Biographies are more relatable to readers than histories of discourses.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, she argues that a focus on systems of knowledge—particularly in their more Foucauldian versions—fits badly with how most people think about knowledge.<sup>4</sup> As she asks, 'do we really believe that we too simply are part of a discourse whose rules dictate, more or less, what we say, and in which curiosity, creativity,

and compassion are mere illusions, while only power is real?<sup>5</sup> If knowledge involves these things, we need to take individual personality and biography seriously.

Martin Mulsow raises partly different concerns in an exchange with Lorraine Daston. Daston has argued that historians of knowledge should seek to uncover an ‘epistemological hierarchy (often intertwined with a social hierarchy) of which kinds of knowledge are more or less valued, by whom, and why’, which ‘also rank[s] knowers and the epistemic virtues they are expected to display’.<sup>6</sup> In his reply, Mulsow agrees that historians of knowledge need an analytical framework, but questions whether epistemic cultures were as rigid as Daston suggests. Were many actors not simply immersed in their own practices without reference to a larger structure? Might we need to contend with ‘loose conglomerates of knowledge’ rather than hierarchies?<sup>7</sup> Like Marchand, Mulsow thus questions whether actors operated in epistemic hierarchies and argues that this focus risks distorting our view of the past.

To interrogate this matter further, Mulsow proposes that one might study a certain category of knowers: the actor, ‘who, within a given knowledge culture, understands the hierarchies and dynamics of different forms of knowledge’.<sup>8</sup> Mulsow does not enlarge on how this approach might allow us to identify a historically grounded approach to epistemic hierarchies. This is where the present essay picks up the thread. I shall attempt what Mulsow suggested and consult a knowledge actor in the epistemic landscape of early sixteenth-century Paris.

My guide is Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (c.1460–1536), without doubt one of the most versatile scholars of his generation. For overlapping periods, Lefèvre was a philosophy teacher at the University of Paris, an editor of printed books, and a religious reformer. He had access to a variety of epistemic milieux, moving between academic, aristocratic, and monastic circles. Moreover, he was actively involved in reshaping philosophical and theological education. This versatility has made Lefèvre difficult to pin down in historical research—he was not quite an academic, not quite a publisher, nor a typical Reformer. This quality, however, provides excellent material for thinking about the nature

of epistemic hierarchies in early sixteenth-century Paris. Indeed, I suggest that the history of knowledge, through this analytical tool, offers something new even to our understanding of actors explored by historians of French religious thought, humanism, and ideas. To ground this argument, though, we will need a brief historiographical account.<sup>9</sup>

### The historiography of a knowledge actor

The modern historiography of Lefèvre developed in a deeply confessional context and focused on his theological views. Reformed historians explored questions raised already during Lefèvre's lifetime. Was he secretly a Lutheran? Had he influenced John Calvin? Had his vernacular translations of the Bible contributed to the spread of reformed ideas in France? Besides the obvious confessional significance of these questions, they also expressed a nationalistic ambition of describing a distinctly *French* Reformation different from, and perhaps even the precursor of, the German one. While there was no obvious candidate for a French Luther, Lefèvre was compared to Melanchthon.<sup>10</sup>

From the First World War onwards, historians of humanism took a different approach. They explored Lefèvre's role at the University of Paris, highlighting his teaching and Aristotelian commentaries. Augustin Renaudet's *Préréforme et humanisme* (1916), based on meticulous and still valuable archival research, also dived into the intellectual context of Lefèvre's religious ideas. Renaudet argues that the 'sterility' of the contemporary Faculty of Theology, especially their nominalism, explains why Lefèvre's generation sought new impulses from humanist and mystical traditions.<sup>11</sup> Renaudet's investigation of how Lefèvre's humanist perspective differed from scholastic theology prompted other historians to explore Lefèvre's views about the relationship between Aristotle and Christianity, the role of eloquence in erudition, and the interpretation of the Bible.<sup>12</sup> This research aspired to capture ways in which Lefèvre's approach to knowledge differed from that of his predecessors in Paris by focusing on his methodology and influences.

Contributions in recent decades have brought new perspectives on Lefèvre's collaborative and wide-ranging activities that reflect ongoing trends in intellectual history. Studies have situated Lefèvre as an agent in academic and religious networks. For example, Jonathan Reid interprets Lefèvre's contribution to religious reform in France by mapping the activities of a network whose central node was Marguerite de Navarre.<sup>13</sup> Focusing on Lefèvre's earlier years at the University of Paris, Richard Oosterhoff shows how Lefèvre brought his academic network into the printing workshop and how his students underwent an apprenticeship in bookmaking. Oosterhoff's arguments resonate with the turn in intellectual history to the study of a wider range of knowledge types, particularly artisanal skill.<sup>14</sup> Attention to practices, such as editorial techniques, is similarly a key component of my own work on the theological books produced by Lefèvre's circle.<sup>15</sup>

Recent research about Lefèvre, although conducted in the general field of intellectual history, thus fits well with the central aims of the history of knowledge to explore the circulation and mediality of knowledge. However, there has not yet been any attempt to take an approach explicitly guided by concepts from the history of knowledge. To investigate what we can add by thinking about epistemic hierarchies, I use this notion to parse Lefèvre's relationship with the University of Paris and his confusing status as an independent theologian without affiliation to the powerful institutional system of the Faculty of Theology.

### Epistemic hierarchies as context

The University of Paris provides the institutional framework for the most obvious and clearly delineated epistemic hierarchy in Lefèvre's surroundings. The university arranged knowledge into categories in its curricula in arts—from logic to natural philosophy, metaphysics, and ethics—and in the higher faculties of medicine, canon law, and theology. This institution moreover played an important role in certifying the knowledge of students by examination. Exams mattered because degrees had legal implications: for example, a Master of

Arts was eligible for certain ecclesiastical benefices. The university provided a time-tested structure for acquiring learning that fed into wider social structures and hierarchies.

Lefèvre first encountered this structure as a student at the Faculty of Arts. We know little about this part of his life, other than that he went on to teach philosophy in Paris. Yet he must have had a somewhat complex relationship with the university. Considering his well-documented theological interests, it is puzzling that he did not at the same time pursue a degree in the Faculty of Theology, as so many teachers of philosophy did. As James Farge shows, the doctorate in theology was a long, demanding education, but one that conferred a great deal of social status and influence.<sup>16</sup> ‘Theologian’ was a protected title and studying at the Faculty of Theology would have been the natural choice for a young man with strong religious leanings and an evident propensity for study.<sup>17</sup>

Lefèvre’s status as an outsider to the Faculty of Theology, apparently self-imposed, is a problem that the earlier historiography has done little to address. This is in part due to a lack of sources. Barring the discovery of some text in which Lefèvre credibly explains his decision, we know nothing about his personal reasons. This means we are relieved of the burden of debating with Philipp Sarasin whether Lefèvre’s state of mind, psychology, and intention are of historical interest and consequence.<sup>18</sup> If we want to dig deeper into this as a historical problem, our only option is to follow Sarasin’s preference and investigate the ‘semiotic structures, processes, and discourses’ that help explain Lefèvre’s actions.<sup>19</sup> To understand his rejection of academic theology, we need to look to the networks, discourses, and roles offering alternatives to a doctorate in theology.

This search must go beyond the academic milieu itself and locate alternative epistemic discourses and hierarchies. I shall here focus on one such alternative to which we find references in one of Lefèvre’s earliest publications: a textbook on metaphysics from 1494. Lefèvre’s textbook introduced the first six books of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which was part of the arts curriculum. However, Lefèvre advertised metaphysics as the ‘theology of the philosophers’ and represented



Aristotle as an example of Christian piety. We shall return to Lefèvre's unusual conception of the relationship between metaphysics and theology later. For now, let us focus on the dedication of this textbook to his aristocratic patron, Germain de Ganay.

Eugene Rice shows that Lefèvre's most important patrons, such as the brothers Jean and Germain de Ganay, were recent additions to the French nobility. The patronage of humanists was part of consolidating their newly won social status.<sup>20</sup> However, the pattern of their support also reveals that members of this recently formed elite had specific intellectual interests. For example, Germain was an Italophile, being the author of a short unpublished treatise about Italy, reputedly the host of Fra Giovanni Giocondo da Verona's lectures on Vitruvius in Paris, and a correspondent of the Florentine Platonist Marsilio Ficino.<sup>21</sup> In an era of heightened French political interest in Italy, aristocrats developed a keen interest in their neighbours' intellectual culture.

Lefèvre's relationship with Germain shaped his intellectual output from the early 1490s; for example, on Germain's request he wrote a treatise on natural magic.<sup>22</sup> For his earliest patristic publication—his edition of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* from 1499—he selected a text that Germain owned and eagerly studied in Ficino's translation.<sup>23</sup> To return to the textbook on metaphysics, Lefèvre's paratexts clearly echoed ideas about *prisca theologia* that Germain encountered in works by Ficino—the idea that ancient philosophers had some understanding of Christian truths. Considering these overlaps, we see that Germain's network and discourses about natural magic, natural theology, and apostolic theology were important for Lefèvre in so far as they offered alternatives to university's institutionalized epistemic hierarchy.

With the textbook on metaphysics, we can take the analysis further. This publication illustrates well the phenomenon noted by Mulsow: Lefèvre was someone who was acutely aware of the priorities and values of different groups of knowers. The textbook shows how Lefèvre appealed to two audiences simultaneously, his Italophile patron and students of philosophy. The dual character of the book furthermore indicates he was not content to participate in two separate epistemic discourses but sought to integrate them. By emphasizing the theological

potential of metaphysics—an idea consistent with certain Italian trends but at odds with the official view of the university—Lefèvre made space for theology in the arts faculty.

### Theorizing epistemic hierarchies

So far, I have worked with the concept of epistemic hierarchy in roughly the sense used by Daston and Mulsow. But to continue exploring the individual viewpoint, let us now turn to actor's categories. Did Lefèvre even think of knowledge as something that comes in degrees? As it happens, Lefèvre was in conversation with several traditions that promoted hierarchical perspectives. One of these emerged from Aristotle's *De anima*, which Lefèvre taught at the Collège du Cardinal Lemoine. Lefèvre embraced Aristotle's empirical model that 'all knowledge begins in the senses'. However, he was most interested in the subsequent stages of the process, when the mind develops increasingly abstract and universal notions—better knowledge, from Lefèvre's viewpoint.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, Lefèvre read Platonist authors and agreed with aspects of their teachings. He was interested in ideas about intellectual vision and contemplation, which according to this tradition represented higher forms of cognition even further removed from the material world and the senses.<sup>25</sup> For Lefèvre, this tradition of philosophical contemplation was closely related to a Christian project of gaining knowledge of God through contemplative practices. This concept of theology was largely inspired by the writings of the Platonizing theologian Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and prescribed a progression from positive theology to negative theology, to the potential *visio Dei*. If sensory knowledge was on one end of the epistemic spectrum, divine knowledge was at the other end.

In reconciling Aristotelian, Platonist, and Christian approaches to knowledge, Lefèvre was part of an already venerable late antique and medieval philosophical tradition. More original than his ideas were perhaps the ways in which he forged these separate approaches together. One example is a compendium that weaves together Aristotelian psychology with the pursuit of divine knowledge through

analogy. Aristotle often proposed analogies involving eyes and vision to explain human cognition. In his compendium, Lefèvre argued that the analogies from *De anima* were not only useful for understanding cognition, but also for gaining an understanding of God.<sup>26</sup> This bewilderingly self-referential work highlights the parallels between sensory and divine knowledge and the harmony between Aristotelian and Christian perspectives.

This very brief summary of Lefèvre's epistemology suggests striking discrepancies with how Daston and other historians of knowledge conceptualize epistemic hierarchies. Lefèvre's version notably has nothing to say about the relationship between different knowledge systems. For Lefèvre, the very core of knowledge is its universality. Yet the religious worldview underlying his notion of knowledge and its distribution is of some genealogical interest. The conceptual history of 'hierarchy' is closely related to the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, whose theology so Lefèvre enthusiastically defended. For Pseudo-Dionysius, 'hierarchy' described the structures through which knowledge of God emanates and spreads to humans through ranks of angels and church officials. According to this perspective, each level of the hierarchy strives to know God, but does so in a different way depending on its capacity.<sup>27</sup>

While Lefèvre's ideas about knowledge are not directly aligned with Daston's epistemic hierarchy, bringing their perspectives together is productive. I discussed above how Lefèvre brought theological themes into his teaching at the Faculty of Arts in a way that challenged contemporary practice. In theorizing knowledge and particularly the continuity between philosophy and theology, he justified this move. In this way, Lefèvre's theorizing about knowledge was directly related to his position at the University of Paris. This was especially clear in another of his textbooks, in which Lefèvre outlined a seamless transition between Aristotelian studies and theological ones, as students gradually developed the intellectual and moral capacity for the latter type of understanding. After studying natural philosophy and metaphysics, students could move on to reading Scripture and patristics, developing the reverence and virtuous living essential to

intellectual progress. The end point, for Lefèvre, was theological contemplation.<sup>28</sup> According to this way of thinking about knowledge, the division between the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Theology was an artificial one.

Another connection between both notions of epistemic hierarchy relates to Lefèvre's critique of scholastic methods in philosophy. He suggested that the scholastic philosophers, by focusing exclusively on rational argument, remained limited to a lower cognitive level. Lefèvre promoted a turn from *rational* to *intellectual* philosophy. The latter would be a more intuitive and supposedly more excellent practice, which inched closer to religious insight.<sup>29</sup> We thus see that Lefèvre's theorizing about knowledge was bound up with polemic against the reigning epistemic system. His way of thinking about degrees of knowledge, which combined Aristotelian empiricism with explanations for the emanation of divine knowledge, was only superficially consistent with the epistemic hierarchy embraced by the University of Paris.

### Manipulating epistemic hierarchies

I have argued that Lefèvre's textbook on metaphysics and, more generally, his effort to introduce theological themes at the Faculty of Arts can be characterized as attempts to influence or change existing epistemic hierarchies. Next, I shall turn to Lefèvre's most significant mode of acting on epistemic hierarchies—as an editor of printed books. Lefèvre's case, I shall suggest, is helpful for exploring, with Philipp Sarasin, under what conditions, how, and through what relationship to the self (*Selbstverhältnis*) this role was shaped.<sup>30</sup>

The professional editor came to prominence with the development of printing workshops in fifteenth-century Europe, when textual correction became a commercial concern. Printing required someone to pay attention to the condition of texts and fix old or new mistakes, since blatant errors diminished the value of the printed output—particularly when it came to scholarly books. As Anthony Grafton shows, editors approached this task in different ways depending on

their skill and willingness to interfere with the text. Yet they generally shared the aim of making books attractive and marketable—which was why printers employed students and scholars.<sup>31</sup> Although there is no indication that Lefèvre asked to be paid for his work, some of his students were paid or at least housed by printers in return for their services as correctors at the press.<sup>32</sup>

Contemporary evidence suggests that some saw Lefèvre as a corrector of the kind just described: someone who played a limited albeit important role in improving texts. A bio-bibliographical handbook printed in Paris in 1512 described Lefèvre as a ‘great ornament and help’ to theologians. His editions, commentaries, and translations ‘made the implicit explicit, illuminated the obscure, and repaired mangled and mutilated passages’.<sup>33</sup> According to the anonymous author of this note, Lefèvre’s efforts awarded him a status as an assistant to theologians—a capable and celebrated corrector.

Editing could be about more than correction, however. Lefèvre told an origin story of his career in publishing that emphasized its religious significance. It was after encountering the work of the contemplative theologian Ramon Lull in 1491 that Lefèvre first considered joining a monastery but then settled on becoming an editor. His mission was to publish books that ‘shape souls for piety’.<sup>34</sup> For Lefèvre, publishing the right texts was an important part of improving the state of religion. As this story suggests, Lefèvre took the curatorial function of editing seriously. Working with various printers in Paris, he contributed to the publication of a large number of titles in philosophy and theology. Besides publishing his own writings and those of his students, he also located manuscripts through correspondence or by travelling to libraries.

Lefèvre also wrote introductions to many editions, advocating for authors he valued and providing guidance on how to read them. Besides promoting pious books to a general, learned audience, he also published titles that could be used at the Faculty of Theology. This is especially clear in his translation of *De fide orthodoxa* by John of Damascus: in an introduction to the edition, Lefèvre suggested that the faculty might use this as a textbook. In suggesting that the

theologians study John of Damascus instead of Peter the Lombard, Lefèvre promoted Greek over Latin theology and more ancient texts over recent ones.<sup>35</sup>

Lefèvre's editorial activities were thus connected with an epistemic agenda beyond improving the state of individual texts. He grasped that the medium of print offered opportunities for disrupting the curriculum, which had long developed according to the conditions of manuscript transmission. The printing workshop—small, commercial, and unregulated—could change an institution like the University of Paris. Even if this did not happen through the simple substitution of texts suggested by Lefèvre, his impulse is significant. Editors were not simply improvers of texts but agents promoting specific kinds of knowledge.

### Curators of knowledge

The present volume provides ample evidence that historians of knowledge are willing to make space for knowers in their studies. Yet one may ask whether this interest does not primarily extend to groups, such as networks, and relevant professions or roles. This essay set out to investigate how a history of knowledge focused on identifying structures—such as hierarchies, systems, and cartographies—squares with the study of individual knowers. I suggested that a productive strategy for combining these perspectives is to explore epistemic hierarchies from an individual viewpoint by focusing on the historical actors who navigated and reshaped such systems.

The case of Lefèvre illustrates how this approach can help us to reframe inaccurate labels used in the earlier historiography, such as 'theologian' or 'educational reformer'. Those functions, as we have seen, must be qualified against the background of Lefèvre's oppositional relationship with parts of the University of Paris. By mapping epistemic hierarchies in connection with the university, we can follow in Lefèvre's footsteps and explore options to the academic system and the professional roles that allowed him to promote an alternative approach to theological knowledge.

Analysing Lefèvre's contributions to printing, I have touched on the underappreciated curatorial function of editors, who not only correct but also select and introduce texts. Curatorship, more generally, sums up key aspects of Mulsow's proposal that we study actors who understand the 'hierarchies and dynamics of different forms of knowledge'.<sup>36</sup> Such overview is an essential feature of curatorship, with its traditional function being to care for repositories of knowledge, including museums and libraries. Curators select and present knowledge—interacting with the epistemic hierarchies they serve. Editors, librarians, and bibliographers all work this way. So do teachers when selecting how to interpret and convey a set curriculum, and healthcare workers when advising patients, the public, or policymakers.<sup>37</sup> The concept of 'curators of knowledge' thus highlights the capacity of a variety of individuals to actively engage with epistemic systems.

Studies of curators of knowledge reveal the contours of epistemic hierarchies as they appeared in people's lives and thoughts. By taking this dimension into account, we can promote an approach to epistemic hierarchies truer to our own experiences as knowledge actors. This approach moreover incorporates the insights that such structures differ from one another, for example by being more or less formalized, and that individual historical actors relate to them in more or less involved ways. The study of curators of knowledge therefore has the potential to play an important complementary function in relation to large-scale cartographic projects in the history of knowledge.

## Notes

\* I am grateful to Abraham de Maupeou and the editors of this volume for their comments. Helge Ax:son Johnsons Stiftelse generously supported my work on this essay.

1 Lorraine Daston, 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', *Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1/1 (2017); Sven Dupré & Geert Somsen, 'The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42/2–3 (2019); Lukas M. Verburgt, 'The History of Knowledge and the Future History of Ignorance', *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 4/1 (2020).

- 2 Suzanne Marchand, 'Weighing Context and Practices: Theodor Mommsen and the Many Dimensions of Nineteenth-Century Humanistic Knowledge', *History & Theory* 59/4 (2020).
- 3 Marchand, 'Weighing Context', 166.
- 4 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), 129. For a fuller and very effective response to Michel Foucault's notion of episteme, see Ian Maclean, 'Foucault's Renaissance Episteme Reassessed: An Aristotelian Counterblast', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59/1 (1998). For the argument in favour of developing the history of knowledge with inspiration from Foucault's theories, see Philipp Sarasin, 'More Than Just Another Specialty: On the Prospects for the History of Knowledge', *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1/1 (2020).
- 5 Marchand, 'How Much Knowledge', 143. Intellectual historians continue to wrestle with the question of authorial agency, see Annabel Brett, 'What Is Intellectual History Now?' in David Cannadine (ed.), *What Is History Now?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 120–4.
- 6 Lorraine Daston, 'Comment', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 176; see also Daston, 'History of Science'.
- 7 Martin Mulsow, 'Response', in Tamm & Burke, *Debating New Approaches*, 180–1.
- 8 *Ibid.* 180.
- 9 I cannot agree with Philipp Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?' *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur (IASL)* 36/1 (2011), 169 that the tradition of 'älteren geistesgeschichtlichen Untersuchungen zu Gelehrten und Intellektuellen' should be passed over in a historiography of knowledge actors.
- 10 For this historiography, see Christoph Schönau, *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples und die Reformation* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2017), 26–37.
- 11 Augustin Renaudet, *Pré-*ré*forme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie (1494–1517)* (Paris: E. Champion, 1916). The arguments against the focus on a 'French Reformation' are best summed up by Renaudet's friend and colleague Lucien Febvre in his 'Une question mal posée: Les origines de la réforme française et le problème général des causes de la réforme', *Revue Historique* 161/1 (1929).
- 12 Most important are Eugene F. Rice, 'The Humanist Idea of Christian Antiquity: Lefèvre d'Étaples and his Circle', *Studies in the Renaissance* 9 (1962); Eugene F. Rice (ed.), *The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Related Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); and Guy Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Étaples et l'intelligence des Écritures* (Geneva: Droz, 1976).
- 13 Jonathan A. Reid, *King's Sister, Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549) and Her Evangelical Network* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
- 14 Richard J. Oosterhoff, *Making Mathematical Culture: University and Print in the Circle of Lefèvre d'Étaples* (Oxford: OUP, 2018); Richard J. Oosterhoff, 'Apprenticeship in the Renaissance University: Student Authorship and Craft Knowledge', *Science in Context* 32/2 (2019). These studies are excellent examples of how the history of craftsmen's skills and the history of erudition can be closely related and are not 'incompatible research programs', see Daston, 'History of Science', 143.



- 15 I am currently preparing a book based on my PhD thesis, Christa Lundberg, 'Apostolic Theology and Humanism in the University of Paris, 1490–1540' (University of Cambridge, 2022).
- 16 James K. Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France: The Faculty of Theology of Paris, 1500–1543* (Leiden: Brill, 1985).
- 17 In a very different context, this exemplifies the usefulness of thinking about knowledge actors by distinguishing between their educational status, professions, and roles, see Johan Östling, Anton Jansson & Ragni Svensson Stringberg, *Humanister i offentligheten: Kunskapens aktörer och arenor under efterkrigstiden* (Gothenburg: Makadam, 2022). For students with humanist interests and skills at the Faculty of Theology, see Christa Lundberg, 'Humanists and Scholastics in Early Sixteenth-Century Paris: New Sources from the Faculty of Theology', *Intellectual History Review* (published online and in press).
- 18 Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?', 164 argues that the subjective state of consciousness is a historical *explanandum* rather than an *explanans*.
- 19 *Ibid.* 164.
- 20 Eugene F. Rice, 'The Patrons of French Humanism, 1490–1520', in Anthony Molho & John A. Tedeschi (eds.), *Renaissance: Studies in Honor of Hans Baron* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971).
- 21 Rice, *Prefatory Epistles*, 20. Ganay's short treatise about Italy survives in a Latin translation, see Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek (Thuringian University and State Library), Jena, Ms.Bud.q.58. For Giocondo's lectures, see Oosterhoff, *Making Mathematical Culture*, 224; see also Sebastiano Gentile, 'Giano Lascaris, Germain de Ganay e la "prisca theologia" in Francia', *Rinascimento* 26 (1986).
- 22 Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, *La magie naturelle*, i: *L'Influence des astres*, tr. Jean-Marc Mandosio (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2018).
- 23 Stéphane Toussaint, 'L'influence de Ficin à Paris et le Pseudo-Denys des humanistes: Traversari, Cusain, Lefèvre d'Étaples: Suivi d'un passage inédit de Marsile Ficin', *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 5/2 (1999).
- 24 Spruit Leen, *Species intelligibilis: From Perception to Knowledge*, ii (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 38–41. For degrees of certainty in Aristotle and his Renaissance commentators, see also Maclean, 'Foucault's Renaissance', 161.
- 25 For Lefèvre's complex relationship with Platonist philosophy, see Richard J. Oosterhoff, 'Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Charles de Bovelles on Platonism, Theurgy, and Intellectual Difficulty', in Stephen H. Gersh (ed.), *Plotinus' Legacy: The Transformation of Platonism from the Renaissance to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: CUP, 2019).
- 26 Bibliothèque humaniste (Humanist Library), Sélestat, ms 58, fols. 206v–216v, 'Iacobi Fabri Stapulensis De libros de Anima: analogiarum Compendium'. For Lefèvre's notion of analogy, see Oosterhoff, *Making Mathematical Culture*, 78–85.
- 27 For the role of Pseudo-Dionysius in the conceptual history of hierarchy (from Gr. ἱεράρχης, high priest) see Joseph Stiglmayr, 'Über die Termini Hierarch und Hierarchie', *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 22/1 (1898), 180–7; Dimitrios A. Vasilakis, 'On the Meaning of Hierarchy in Dionysius the Areopagite', in Panagiotis G. Pavlos, Lars Fredrik Janby, Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson & Torstein Theodor Tollefsen (eds.), *Platonism and Christian Thought in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2019).

- 28 For this summary of Lefèvre's ideas about the curriculum and moral development, see Aristotle, *Politicorum libri octo*, ed. Lefèvre d'Étapes (Paris: Henri Estienne, 1506), 123v–124, translation cited in Rice, *Prefatory Epistles*, xvi.
- 29 For rational and intellectual philosophy, see Rice, *Prefatory Epistles*, 94–6. For different levels of theology, see *ibid.* 224–7.
- 30 Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?', 170; see also Östling et al., *Humanister i offentligheten*, 305–307.
- 31 Anthony Grafton, *The Culture of Correction in Renaissance Europe* (London: British Library, 2011).
- 32 Oosterhoff, 'Apprenticeship'.
- 33 The entry is edited in Rice, *Prefatory Epistles*, 287–90.
- 34 Rice, *Prefatory Epistles*, 142: 'Quapropter ad priores artes revolutus ... libenter emissioni librorum (qui ad pietatem formant animos) operam do'.
- 35 Rice, *Prefatory Epistles*, 161–3.
- 36 Mulsow, 'Response', 180.
- 37 In a modern context, the potential benefits of reconceptualizing healthcare workers as 'curators of knowledge' are discussed in Nigel Crisp et al., 'Health Workers as Agents of Change and Curators of Knowledge', *The Lancet* 400/10350 (2022), 417–18.



# Sharing practices, building knowledge

## On collective knowledge formation in European children's television, 1968–1972

*Helle Strandgaard Jensen*

In the mid-1960s, Western Europe saw a significant change in television productions for children.<sup>1</sup> Until that point, the focus of children's programmes had been providing enculturation into existing norms related to the family and educational spheres. Now children were increasingly portrayed as individuals with their own interests and somewhat independent relationships with society more broadly. As part of this change, television producers increasingly sought out knowledge about children's lives and worldviews and represented these in new child-centred programmes, making their work part of a larger change in the relationship between children, media, and society. But how did such a shift happen? How did views of the knowledge needed to produce 'good' children's television change across Western Europe? And what actors were part of bringing it about?

In this essay, I will explore knowledge formation in a transnational community of broadcasters. In doing so, I will discuss the importance of investigating the making and influence of knowledge that cannot only be attributed to named individuals or single institutions. The case study will be three workshops initiated by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) which took place in 1968, 1970, and 1972. These workshops brought together a community of agents: European producers

of children's television. By doing so, the EBU consolidated itself as a space for particular types of knowledge built on the practical, hands-on experience of television producers and their insight into the worlds of their young viewers. I will investigate how the organization of the workshops, the participants' backgrounds, and the topics discussed cultivated the new knowledge that changed children's television—and, in turn, heightened the value of the participant's knowledge as it transformed them into a resourceful community of knowledge actors.

I will analyse how the changes in ideas of what constituted appropriate knowledge when producing children's television came about by focusing on four aspects: (i) how the knowledge produced at the EBU workshops differed from what had been foregrounded previously; (ii) the reasons the EBU saw a need for these seminars and the knowledge they produced; (iii) how the seminars' organization as group work and practical exercises underpinned a particular type of knowledge formation; and (iv) whom the knowledge the seminars produced were thought to benefit. I will use a focus on knowledge production and valuation to discuss possible reasons the European television landscape gave rise to the insights produced at these workshops, how it legitimized them, and how this lent authority to a certain community of agents, namely television producers.

The focus on knowledge formation among members of a community of practitioners answers a call to focus on other forms of knowledge than science and scholarship, as in the existing literature on the history of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Taking a close look at international workshops for practitioners enables the analysis to speak to a range of other issues within the literature on the history of knowledge, including the production and transfer of knowledge in communities outside national spheres. Existing scholarship on television history, albeit mainly focused on national contexts, allows us to contextualize knowledge production within wider sociocultural views, as called for by Suzanne Marchand.<sup>3</sup> However, contrary to Marchand, I will not focus on individuals but on a particular community of actors and their place in a broader broadcasting landscape. Where individuals, such as academics, would represent themselves as individual knowledge

producers when giving talks, writing papers, and doing consultancy work, television producers mainly represented their institutions and a community of shared practices, not promoting their own work. This not only made their knowledge production different because it was constituted by a shared experience, it also changes how we can write about them as knowledge actors: the difficulty of identifying individual contributions to the workshops turns the spotlight away from single participants onto the community of actors and their collective dynamics.

The focus on uncovering and capturing the experience of children and young people was a new idea in television production when the EBU workshops took place, and so was the focus on improving production practices. Media historians have pointed out how, in the 1950s and early 1960s, the understanding of children as ‘becomings’, incomplete adults in the making, led television productions to focus on how viewers could be helped in adjusting to society’s established cultural and social norms.<sup>4</sup> This meant that knowledge of children held by educators, psychologists, and the cultural elite about children’s needs and wants was foregrounded. The mainly nationally focused historiographies have also described how this changed in individual countries in the mid-1960s, with European broadcasters becoming more focused on children as a cultural and social group, seeing them as ‘beings’ whose interests should be taken seriously in their own right.

Explanations for this change are often anchored in national contexts such as youth rebellions and counterculture, the expansion of welfare state institutions and more general cultural shifts related to family patterns, gender roles, and budding individualism. Or it is explained by pointing to specific individuals who have had a significant impact on a broadcasting institution.<sup>5</sup> The combination of these broad structural and narrowly agent-focused claims overlooks the workings of cultural changes produced by communities of actors and institutions, especially on a transnational level. This flaw can be remedied by taking a history of knowledge approach, where the focus on specific productions of knowledge on a community level is paired with the broader explanations in the existing historiography. With such an

approach, we can see how the television producers who met at the EBU workshops were largely producing, sharing, and discussing how to make television for children not based on academic texts, but on their practical experiences in national broadcasting institutions. A transnational focus can shed light on why the changes in views of childhood and production practices happened in multiple countries simultaneously.

### Facilitating knowledge exchange

Seven songs. Three by Bob Dylan, two by Joni Mitchell, and one each by the Mothers of Invention and the folk-rock group Crosby, Stills & Nash. Could the messages of these seven songs, all beloved by youths in 1970, be made into television programmes that would capture the same audience in similar ways, speaking to their hearts, hopes, and dreams as the rock stars did? This question was presented as a practical challenge that had to be solved by 40 television producers from 19 countries at a workshop held by the EBU in Stockholm, Sweden, in February 1970. The exercise was presented by Ralph Garry, a professor of education invited to give a talk and lead participants in a hands-on exercise. This practical task was typical for the three workshops held by the EBU's Study Group for Children's Programmes in 1968, 1970, and 1972. Rather than focus on policy questions or the one-way delivery of academic knowledge, the EBU had specifically asked that broadcasters not send management representatives, and the few academics who were invited to the workshops had been asked to facilitate small exercises that the participants could work on, present, and discuss rather than focus on abstract academic questions.<sup>6</sup> This made knowledge about children's television that came from hands-on work with production the most important thing at these workshops. The practicalities and possibilities of television production took centre stage as discussions focused on how public service broadcasters' experiences of producing television for children and young people could be shared, to the benefit of all the EBU's members.



Figure 4.1. The 1972 meeting of the European Broadcasting Union's subcommittee for Children and Young People's Programs. Source: Box 1, 8017503291, Series '1965–1981 Internationalt,' Børne- og Ungdomsafdelingen, Danmarks Radio 1187, The Danish National Archives.

The EBU had been founded in 1950 as a hub for programme and knowledge exchange between European public service broadcasters.<sup>7</sup> It had several subcommittees, the 'study groups' where producers and other broadcasting staff met for programme screenings and discussions. Among its four study groups was the Study Group for Children's Programmes, a group dedicated to out-of-school programmes. It helped with the exchange of ideas and programmes among members and arranged screening sessions, a vital function as it was hard to come by foreign productions.<sup>8</sup> The EBU's initiatives regarding knowledge exchange as it related to children and young people's television were not unique, though. Europe had seen an increasing interest in television production for the young in the 1960s. The children's television festival *Prix Jeunesse* and its associated research centre was



started in the West German state of Bavaria in 1964, and was soon a popular meeting place for television producers.<sup>9</sup> Annual television trade fairs in Cannes also included children's television. It was in this environment of increased international attention to children's television that the EBU used its status as a transnational organization to hold workshops that boosted its members' knowledge of the practical necessities related to television production.

At meetings in Copenhagen in 1965 and Rome in 1966, the EBU's Study Group for Children's Programmes discussed the activities of one of the EBU's other groups: the one on school and adult educational broadcasting. The Study Group for Teaching by Television had been working on the practical improvement of programme quality at its Basel Seminars.<sup>10</sup> Due to the success of the seminars, the group working on leisure-time offers for children wanted to copy the workshops dedicated to the 'theory and practice' of programme production.<sup>11</sup> The primary focus of the workshops was 'to improve the practical work and understanding of producers and those responsible for such programmes'.<sup>12</sup> Because most of the European activities in children's television were located in Switzerland, West Germany, and Italy, it was agreed the British Broadcasting Corporation should host a workshop in 1968. The number of participants and the general outline of the programme were modelled on experiences from the education group's workshops, including the mixture of talks, group work, and plenary discussions.

It was clear from the beginning that the workshops were to be exclusively for producers and directors of television programmes for children and young people. This group of professionals were also to be the main beneficiaries of the workshops' outcomes. One problem the workshops set out to tackle was the isolated nature of children's television production. Senior management and colleagues working in television (and radio) for adults were thought unaware of what children's producers did, how well they did it, or the responsibility of producing programmes for young audiences. The possibility for knowledge exchange, recognition, and support in national settings was identified to be minimal, a shortcoming for which the workshops

would try to compensate. Bringing together producers, the EBU thus helped create a community of actors across national boundaries to strengthen their sense of importance and heighten possibilities for the consolidation and circulation of knowledge in children's television productions.

The first workshop was held at the BBC Television Training School and lasted a week.<sup>13</sup> It was decided that the workshop outcomes should be published in a booklet to be distributed amongst all the organizations that were members of the EBU. It should be a set of recommendations that 'should constitute the theoretical basis on which the practical work should be founded'.<sup>14</sup> The knowledge produced at these workshops was thus not only meant for the participants, but also for the many people in the EBU who might be interested but could not participate in the workshops because places were limited. In line with the respect for national producers' own expertise, the recommendations were not seen as the main outcome of the seminars but as a source of inspiration:

The book will not be a television bible for our colleagues who are not here. It will be a source for some guidelines, some thoughts from this specialist working group—thoughts and suggestions for solutions to problems which come up every day when a producer or director is planning a programme.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time the booklet strengthened the sense of community among the producers of children's television, emphasizing the importance of their skills and knowledge, and showed respect for the differences practitioners would face in their home environments.

Because the workshops were conceived as a space for the formation and exchange of practical experiences, the number of participants was kept to around 45. To represent the maximum number of EBU membership countries, 2 places were offered to each member of the study group. Also, no observers were invited, possibly to keep the number of participants down, but perhaps also to make the workshop's discussions livelier—the regular Study Group meetings had a

reputation for being frank.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the EBU organizing committee decided that the first workshop in 1968 should be concerned with programmes for children up to the age of 12, the next for young people aged 12–15, and the last for children under 7.

Great care was taken in the planning phase to ensure practice remained the focus of the workshops. First, only two academics were invited per workshop, and they were asked to prepare practical exercises for all the participants, underpinning the focus on practical rather than theoretical knowledge. This meant that besides a brief talk, academics would also facilitate these exercises and chair a final plenary discussion.<sup>17</sup> To facilitate the sharing of practical knowledge, an elaborate scheme was introduced for the first workshop in 1968: two themes were agreed, and four broadcasters had to produce programmes that matched them; the eight programmes would then be screened at the workshop (four for each theme) and form the centre of a general discussion. At the two later workshops, in 1970 and 1972, this was abandoned, and instead the broadcasters submitted excerpts from programmes that fitted the chosen themes, not produced for the occasion but which had been part of their regular schedule. These screenings were to be accompanied by group work and plenary discussions. Additional plenary sessions were timetabled to address specific problems related to a range of issues, from the difficulty of programme exchange amongst EBU members to the challenges of using children on-screen in children's programmes. Group work and group discussions were thus a big part of the workshops, making them a space where knowledge could be discussed and shared by participants on an equal footing. Working in groups emphasized the shared nature of the knowledge produced at the workshops: it was not the work of one individual, but shared wisdom derived (ideally) from the participants' practical experiences.

## The formation of shared knowledge

The documents from the workshops bear witness to intense work by the participants (and several cocktail parties). At the first workshop, the planning committee's intentions to encourage discussions about programmes seemed to have worked. There was ample time to discuss a BBC magazine-style entertainment programme *Blue Peter* and an exercise based on the programme planned by Professor Halloran, a British scholar of mass communication. There were also plenary discussions and group work in relation to a screening of four productions of *The Tin Soldier* (based on Hans Christian Andersen's original story), four programmes on the concept of money, and three programmes with puppets and animated cartoons as central elements. The discussions must have been a success as group work featured even more prominently in the programmes in the two subsequent workshops.

At both the 1970 and 1972 workshops, all participants were divided into smaller groups (by preferred language) where they had to solve tasks. An example from the 1970 workshop was when participants were asked to discuss whether they believed it was important to inform children of current affairs; what they thought of a specific segment on the My Lai massacre produced for a Danish news programme for children; if they believed children's and news departments should collaborate, etc. In addition, they had to write a synopsis for a programme that explained (monetary) devaluation for children and discuss their experiences making (or wanting to make) news programmes about international affairs for children.<sup>18</sup> At the 1972 workshop about programmes for children under 7, participants discussed questions related to the facilities and elements they thought essential when producing programmes for this age group; what they thought of co-viewing with older siblings or mothers; and whether programmes should strive to change children's behaviour. The findings from these tasks and group discussions made up the majority of the booklets published by the EBU to distribute the summarized knowledge to all its members.<sup>19</sup>

The seminar discussions were aided by an EBU Study Group pamphlet with guidelines for how to discuss children's television programmes.<sup>20</sup> The guidelines aimed to stimulate critical constructive discussion and an exchange of experiences and ideas to help improve programmes and increase their exchange (one of EBU's primary aims). They were a complex mixture of vague and challenging questions about elusive things such as 'quality' and 'high standards' and specific demands such as the point where audiences had to find programmes highly relevant and attractive. Given the somewhat different standards for 'appropriate' youth and children's culture across Europe they are likely to have been essential to find a common starting point for the discussions.<sup>21</sup> Their open-ended nature meant that the ideas and experiences prompted all participants to share their opinions, indicating that their take on children's television production was valued in this forum.

The guidelines stated that programmes had to be liked by children, enrich and capture their imaginations, and be judged on their ability to provide children with unfamiliar experiences (television was seen as suited to this purpose). The guidelines also urged producers to strive to produce 'the best of its kind providing children with standards higher than the familiar, to which they can aspire', but take great care that programmes would capture its audience by 'catering for children of to-day who accept space travel and other modern developments as part of their environment'. Children's programmes should also cater to the many, not the few, which was to be achieved by knowing what made audiences 'tick today'.<sup>22</sup> The attention to audience tastes and interests was underlined by a statement in the guidelines:

All programmes are capable of improvement and programmes for children most of all because they are too dependent on adults gauging children's needs and interests. Children's true reactions to programmes made specially for them need to be studied.<sup>23</sup>

With their emphasis on catering to their audience's interest, the guidelines steered discussions at the workshops in a child-centred direction, meaning that arguments had to take children's reactions and perspectives into account. The EBU were concerned that children should like the programmes, and producers had to acquire the knowledge about their audience's interest needed to make this assessment.

In stressing children's interests, the EBU was echoing a new direction in the Northern European children's media tradition that grew strong in the late 1960s. Inspired by the cultural turbulence and progressive educational ideas of the day, those who created children's content had incorporated progressive ideas of childhood, which meant a greater focus on children's interests and breaking down the hierarchies between children and adults.<sup>24</sup> This meant that far more than in the 1950s and early 1960s, children's television producers focused on their audience as a distinct sociocultural group with their own interests and norms—a new public they had to serve. This task was closely related to the knowledge production happening at the three EBU workshops which urged producers to investigate children's interests and world views.

The guidelines singled out the EBU members present at screenings and workshops as the experts on children's television production: they had to make judgements about what 'appropriate' children's television the pamphlet might help. Rather than, for example, teachers, psychologists, or parents, they should judge and discuss whether programmes would satisfy their viewers' needs, and they were the ones to assess those needs. They should be knowledgeable about what made children 'tick', what their lives were like, and what kinds of experiences television could provide that they would not have otherwise. This way of framing producers as those who knew best (or should know best) was part of a long European public service tradition. The audience ratings did not dictate the television schedules, and psychologists and educators did not have a monopoly on knowing what was best for children.<sup>25</sup>

## Evaluating (academic) knowledge

The workshops' focus on knowledge rooted in practice was underpinned by a sociological focus on children, which dominated the workshops. Even if talks and research by academics were not supposed to take up much time at the workshops, one academic, Professor James Halloran from the University of Leicester Centre for Mass Communication Research, who was present at the first two workshops, made a big impression. A mass media researcher with a strong grounding in sociology and British cultural studies, Halloran was already a fixture in the European community for children's television because of his work for the Prix Jeunesse Foundation's research centre.<sup>26</sup> He was paid by the EBU to collect data and conduct research that would support discussions at the workshops. For the first workshop, he prepared a short monograph that let attendees compare their work to that of other television producers: how many hours they produced, for which age groups, their technical facilities, their general policies, and what programmes they would like to produce more or less of. Many questions focused on how they viewed their national audience and what their understanding of children's needs and wishes was. This work was supposed to support the research and assessment of out-of-school programmes. For the second workshop, he did a detailed study of news production for children at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation.

At the 1968 workshop, Halloran talked about the cooperation between producers and researchers in mass media research. He promoted research that focused on the conceptual framework of the producers, their ideas, and their intentions—and how they related to various understandings of the audience. In Halloran's research, the producers' professionalism was understood as the driving force.

Academics from other fields, such as psychologists, were also present at the European workshops. In 1968 psychologist Paul Frankard was an expert alongside Halloran; in 1970 the psychologists Åke Edfeldt and Ralph Garry were invited; and in 1972 the psychologists Paul Osterrieth and Mary Waddington gave talks. These were, neverthe-

less, a particular kind of psychologists who, even if they spoke in general terms of child development, not only emphasized cognitive and emotional growth, but also spoke about social structures and their importance in children's lives, and they did not talk about the impact of television in behaviouristic terms.<sup>27</sup> Rather than giving firm answers, the discussion after their brief talks indicates that the experts were treated as consultants rather than as holding all the answers about how children's television should be produced, as Paul Osterrieth insisted—'Psychologists may seem to know everything, but really they do not'—which he followed up by putting his own questions to the producers about their work, treating them as equal in knowledge of television productions for children.

The talks by academics were matched with talks by producers on topics such as producing different genres for children and for young people, particular programmes, and how to present different topics for various age groups. Because the workshops emphasized group work and plenary discussions—a format that gave the audience of the talks a voice—critiques of the presented programmes were central. For example, when Mogens Vemmer from the Danish Broadcasting Corporation talked about its news magazine for children, participants were invited to judge the effectiveness and intention of the programme, not only take Vemmer's word for it.<sup>28</sup> The critical examination was even backed up by a study of its production by Halloran. These discussions centred on questions that called for self-examination amongst the participants, as they were encouraged to consider whether they wanted children to have news programmes, whether they wanted children to believe what they watched on television (should television question its own statements), should children be part of news programmes, and were there any subjects that should be excluded? Judging from the summary of the discussions, the talks prompted the participants to examine their own biases and those of their institutions and call for more research into the effectiveness of programming and more possibilities for receiving feedback. A session on entertainment in children's television also made the producers consider the challenging fact that they disliked some programmes which they knew young



people favoured: 'do they know better than we do what they need as relaxation and to help them sort out the contradictions (of modern life)?' the participants asked one another. Questioning their own intentions and for whose benefit they were making the programmes was a central task for attendees. Taking the views of young people seriously meant the producers had to confront their preconceptions. In the same vein, the transnational nature of the workshops also challenged the views of children and young people formed within the cultural frameworks of nation-states.

### Transnational challenges to existing knowledge

The transnational nature of the workshops was a major factor in prompting producers to understand their experiences in a new light. It is clear from the summaries of the discussions that there was little agreement on what a good television programme for children was. From the summary of the workshop in 1970, we learn that

the work in groups was demanding and exhausting, sometimes painful as motives and prejudices were probed and challenged first by the experts and then by colleagues from other countries. There was the humbling experience of discovering cherished programme techniques and ideas were not unique. The mortifications of having long-standing theories and programmes attacked professionally on grounds never previously considered harmful and sometimes the painful admission that the attack was justified!<sup>29</sup>

Views on what might be appropriate for 12–15-year-olds seem to have been a source of disagreement at the 1970 workshop. One task that participants had to work on was 'the possibility of preparing a short programme warning young people of the dangers threatening them from a sexual maniac who was at large in their community'.<sup>30</sup> This task is reported to have caused much discussion and resistance because members had different views on how to explore sex and sexual crime for children. In the 1972 workshop, one question which participants

disagreed about was whether themes such as birth and death could be dealt with by children's television, and reflected that different 'social climates' made programmes possible in some places but not in others.<sup>31</sup> The transnational setting made the producers aware of both the differences and similarities in television production across Europe.

### Sharing knowledge in a transnational space

In the opening address at the 1972 workshop, Otto Nes, the chairman of the EBU Study Group, talked about tolerance and imagination, as he believed one of the most important outcomes of the workshops was to overcome national, religious, political, and pedagogical differences. By providing television producers and directors with a better understanding of the conditions and ideals for the production of children's television in other countries, he hoped they would pass this on to their audiences. To what extent this goal was met lies beyond the scope of this essay. But it is plain the EBU workshops were transnational hubs which ensured that European television producers were confronted with their own biases, gained knowledge about other production cultures, and experienced a community where their practical experience mattered. They were provided with opportunities to share, discuss, and widen their knowledge of television production, and the results of their efforts were, again, shared with other members of the EBU.

As a Europe-wide union that supported public service broadcasters, the EBU had the ability to foster knowledge-sharing and build experiences outside the commercial, competitive sphere—its focus was not on ratings, selling programmes, or optimizing performances to maximize market share. It had the freedom to experiment with new ideas and to receive criticism. It was open to sharing practical experiences and did not necessarily have to convince the other participants of why one or another way of doing things was right, but simply to find inspiration and create an awareness of how children's television was produced elsewhere in Europe.

How the workshops were organized encouraged a particular kind of knowledge. Participants were asked to share their experiences and take their peers' opinions and ideas seriously. It was not named individuals or single institutions that were the focus. The pamphlets conveyed the results of group work and discussion rather than uniform standards or authoritative views. This meant participants and readers could learn from the workshops, but also validated their own practical experiences. What stood out as an imperative was that a knowledge of children's and young people's lives should be the basis for programme production and evaluation. By pressing this point in a shared European forum that had many resources to form and disseminate its ideas, the EBU was a contributing factor in making children's television more child-centred in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

## Notes

- 1 The historiography of children's television in Europe is very uneven, with most produced in north-western Europe, concentrated in Scandinavia, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands. The international periodical *Fernsehen und Bildung* provides an overview of television production across Europe from 1968 onwards, but with a focus on Western Europe.
- 2 Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar (eds.), *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020), 17.
- 3 Suzanne Marchand, 'Weighing context and practices: Theodor Mommsen and the many dimensions of nineteenth-century humanistic knowledge', *History & Theory* 59/4 (2020).
- 4 For the European broadcasting landscape for children's television, see Helle Strandgaard Jensen, *Sesame Street: A Transnational History* (Oxford: OUP, 2023), introduction, ch. 2.
- 5 See Mogens Vemmer, *Fjernsyn for dig: 50 år med verdens værste seere* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2006); Michael Schmidbauer, *Die Geschichte des Kinderfernsehens in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Munich: K G Saur, 1987); Buckingham Davies, Hannah David, Ken Jones & Peter Kelley, *Children's Television in Britain: History, Discourse, and Policy* (London: British Film Institute, 1999); Ingegerd Rydin, *Barnens röster: Program för barn i Sveriges radio och television 1925–1999* (Stockholm: Prisma, 2000); Helle Strandgaard Jensen, *From Superman to Social Realism: Children's Media and Scandinavian Childhood* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 2017).
- 6 EBU (European Broadcasting Union), *Report of Second EBU Workshop for Producers and Directors of Television Programmes for Young People, Stockholm* (Geneva: EBU, 1970), 8.

- 7 Alexander Badenoch, 'European Radio's Silenced Witness: The European Broadcasting Union's Written Archives', *TMG Journal for Media History* 25/2 (2022).
- 8 Jensen, *Sesame Street*.
- 9 Helle Strandgaard Jensen, 'Prix Jeunesse and the Negotiation of Citizenship in Children's Television', *Journal of the History of Childhood & Youth* 11/1 (2018), 101–107.
- 10 BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park, England (BBC WAC), T10/57/8, EBU subcommittee 'Television programme committee, study group for programmes for children and young people, 9<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting, Geneva', minutes 3 & 4 Mar. 1967.
- 11 BBC WAC, T10/57/8, EBU Children's Programmes, Proposed EBU seminar for producers and directors of children's programmes, 23 Nov. 1966.
- 12 BBC WAC, T10/57/8, EBU subcommittee 'Television programme committee, study group for programmes for children and young people, 9<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting, Geneva', minutes 3 & 4 Mar. 1967.
- 13 BBC WAC, T10/57/8, Correspondence, Doreen Stephens (BBC) to Mr Neaf (EBU), 30 Nov. 1966.
- 14 BBC WAC, T10/57/9, EBU subcommittee 'Television programme committee, study group for programmes for children and young people, 9<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting, Geneva', minutes 3 & 4 Mar. 1967.
- 15 EBU, *Second EBU Workshop*, 8
- 16 BBC WA T10/57/8, Notes on BBC proposal for EBU seminar from Head of Family Programmes (Television), Doreen Stephens to Director of Television, 'Proposed EBU Seminar for Producers and Directors of Children's Programmes', 23 Nov. 1966.
- 17 BBC WAC, T10/57/9, EBU subcommittee 'Television programme committee, study group for programmes for children and young people, 9<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting, Geneva', minutes 3 & 4 Mar. 1967.
- 18 EBU, *Second EBU Workshop*, 38–9.
- 19 I have only been able to read the latter two, as the booklet from 1968 is not available in a public library.
- 20 European Broadcasting Union Archives, Geneva (EBUA), Administrative Office, Television Programme Section, 'Basis of work of the EBU study group for programmes for children and young people', June 1967.
- 21 Sophie Heywood & Helle Strandgaard Jensen, 'Exporting the Nordic children's '68: The global publishing scandal of The Little Red Schoolbook', *Barnboken: Journal of Children's Literature Research* 41 (2018).
- 22 EBUA, Administrative Office, Television Programmes Section, 'Basis of work of the EBU study group for programmes for children and young people', June 1967, pp. 4–5.
- 23 *Ibid.* 6.
- 24 *Ibid.* 6.
- 25 Jensen, *Sesame Street*. Ch. 2.
- 26 *Ibid.* ch. 2.
- 27 EBU, *Third Workshop for producers and directors of television programmes for young people Geneva 1972* (Geneva: EBU, 1972), 17.
- 28 EBU, *Second EBU Workshop*, 12.
- 29 *Ibid.* 11.
- 30 *Ibid.* 11.
- 31 EBU, *Third Workshop*, 37.



# Personal finance bloggers as knowledge authorities

## Performing, embodying, and circulating knowledge online

*David Larsson Heidenblad & Charlotte Nilsson*

Historians of knowledge start with the social. Knowledge actors can hence be found wherever people flock and engage. In the twenty-first century this often has a digital dimension, as credibility and trustworthiness—in diverse fields of practical knowledge—are typically built over time through blog posts, podcasts, and direct interaction with an audience. For historians of knowledge, this dynamic is of topical interest and speaks directly to ongoing discussions in our field, notably about the circulation of knowledge in society and in people's lives.<sup>1</sup>

Recent work has drawn attention to the concept of the 'knowledge arena', defined as a recognized place where certain kinds of interactions between knowledge actors and an audience occur.<sup>2</sup> In parallel, scholars have sought to broaden the range of actors whose involvement in circulation processes they study, with a view to analysing the dynamics of everyday engagement and the experiences of the many.<sup>3</sup> The ambition is to investigate new forms of knowledge, for example by engaging with hidden, practical, less formally defined knowledge forms.<sup>4</sup>

In *Forms of Knowledge*, the previous edited volume from the Lund Centre for the History of Knowledge, one of us—David Larsson Heidenblad—argued that financial knowledge would be promising to

study since it not only permeates everyday life in capitalist societies, but also has a rather weak link to formal education and academic institutions. It is a form of knowledge which has escaped scholarly scrutiny, especially in relation to its social importance and reach.<sup>5</sup> Hence, in this essay we develop those arguments further by analysing how personal finance bloggers position themselves as knowledge authorities.

Our chosen empirical case is the married couple Jan and Caroline Bolmeson, who run the personal finance blog RikaTillsammans ('Rich Together') and, according to a survey in 2022, they are Sweden's largest 'finfluencers'.<sup>6</sup> RikaTillsammans was launched as a modest blog in 2007 but has since grown to a full-fledged digital community with a weekly podcast, extensive written articles, and a busy forum. Most topics are related to personal finances, including savings and investments, loans and debts, the stock market, consumption, time management, and human capital. There are also topics with a clear philosophical dimension, especially in the forum, where many aspects of 'the meaning of life' are discussed, although generally from an economic perspective (for example, whether having children is worth the cost and effort, or whether money or time is ultimately the most valuable asset).<sup>7</sup>

By April 2023, over 300 podcast episodes and 1,000 articles had been published. The podcast episodes are accessible both as audio files via pod apps and Spotify and as videos on the blog and YouTube. The blog elements can be accessed free except for one: the Plus Service, which has bonus material for paying subscribers.<sup>8</sup> RikaTillsammans has around 350,000 unique visits every month. Since the blog forum was introduced in 2020, around 16,000 individuals have posted comments, and users create around 300 new posts and 20 new discussion threads every day.<sup>9</sup> RikaTillsammans also has 20,700 subscribers to its YouTube channel.<sup>10</sup> Besides a blog and YouTube, RikaTillsammans is also present on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The Bolmesons are often interviewed by the traditional media (newspapers, radio, and TV) as private people and personal finance experts.<sup>11</sup>

We use the example of Jan and Caroline Bolmeson and the RikaTillsammans blog to show how knowledge actors in the digital sphere of popular capitalism build legitimacy, credibility, and engagement not with formal qualifications but by showing they are everyman investors—like their followers. A key element is the performative aspect—actors stress that they, as private people, also invest in the way they recommend to their followers, meaning they position themselves not only as knowledgeable financial advisers, but also as ‘ordinary’ citizens trying to make the best of the financial situation they are in. However, it is not only a case of building identification and community. There is an important ideological message in the act of ‘ordinary’ citizens mediating financial knowledge: we cannot rely on established institutions or the industry to support us in financial matters, and hence we must learn for ourselves and teach one another. A personal finance blog like RikaTillsammans is historically specific because it presupposes, and possibly reinforces, two recent, intertwined developments: the financialization of everyday life and the rise of interactive digital media.<sup>12</sup>

### Financialization and digitalization

In January 2007, Apple released the iPhone. Later the same year, the global financial crisis unfolded. These two seminal events are rarely lumped together, yet they form a pivot date from which a more profound popular engagement with stock markets emerged. Smartphones paved the way for what was to be known as Web 2.0, in which social media platforms rose to dominance. The wider populace, who had hitherto formed the online audience for various homepages, now became content creators. At the same time, in the years following the financial crisis, the stock market recovered. As researchers have pointed out, even though the crisis raised acute questions about the soundness of capital markets, after a few years of strong recovery it seemed to have strengthened rather than weakened people’s confidence in the liberal market economy, continuous capital growth, and an expanding financial sector.<sup>13</sup>



On the basis of financialization, on the one hand, and digitalization, on the other, commercial motives encouraged corporations in the financial industry to develop user-friendly digital solutions that made it easier for novices to try their hand at the stock market. Instead of visiting a bank or calling a broker, individuals needed only to download an app, click buttons, transfer a little money, and buy stocks. Transaction fees, which throughout the twentieth century had been substantial, also fell dramatically. In Sweden, the niche bank Avanza—which since its launch in 1999 had specialized in digital stock trading with low fees—launched the mutual fund Avanza Zero in 2007. It was a large-cap index fund with no fees. Household investors with less than SEK 50,000 were eventually exempted from all fees for buying and selling stocks.<sup>14</sup>

Financial transactions thus became cheaper and simpler as a result of industry initiatives. In addition, political decisions, such as state-subsidized saving schemes (1978/1984), the major pension reform (1994/1998), and the privatization of the state-owned telecom company Telia (2000), were important for familiarizing ordinary citizens with the stock market and fund saving.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in 2012, the Swedish centre-right government introduced the ISK, a special form of investment savings account. The value of the account's holdings were taxed, but transactions and transfers were not. The changes in policy and legislation further amplified the trend towards the popularization of the investment process.

The Web 2.0 saw a subgroup of lifestyle influencers come to prominence in the 2010s: blogs and social media accounts promoted individuals who had continued to invest during the financial crises and had since made hefty profits. They documented and discussed their portfolio developments and investment decisions. In Sweden, a small but vibrant online community emerged, which over the 2010s grew to span new social media platforms such as Twitter and TikTok. These finfluencers channelled and stimulated the growing popular interest in the stock market, especially among the younger generation.<sup>16</sup> Official statistics confirm the number of stockowners has risen. In 2020 and 2021, the number of unique stockowners rose by 508,909,

so that by 2022 some 2.7 million Swedes directly owned stock. The fastest growing segment in the decade to 2022 was young adults, which most likely can be attributed to the generational experience of becoming adults in a flourishing economic cycle with seemingly eternal economic growth, and the open celebration of investors, not least in digital media.<sup>17</sup>

These recent developments we would argue constitute an entrenching of the ‘financialization of everyday life’. The concept gained traction among historians and social scientists in the 2000s. While financialization typically refers to macro aspects of the transformation in economic thought and practice from a focus on profitability to cash flow and the expansion of the financial industry, researchers on the financialization of everyday life share an interest in non-elite actors and describe how financial logics, discourses, products, and practices have increasingly influenced citizens’ daily lives.<sup>18</sup> Apart from the intensified interaction with the financial markets, such as growing numbers of mortgages and stock market investments, it points to a change in which individuals and households think of themselves and act as if they were small enterprises: one ‘invests’ in relationships or ponders the ‘return on investment’ of a particular education or job opportunity. While this phenomenon—commonly called the emergence of neoliberal, investor, or entrepreneurial subjects—is a long-term historical process which goes back to at least the early 1980s, we would suggest that—from a Swedish vantage point—the last fifteen years have seen an intensification, not least due to digital technology and culture. Personal finance bloggers have played an important part, to date largely unexplored by scholars. So we will now turn our attention to what is claimed to be ‘Sweden’s largest personal finance forum’.

### Financial knowledge actors

RikaTillsammans is managed by Jan Bolmeson (b.1981) and Caroline Bolmeson (b.1977). The couple have two children and live in a house in Malmö, Sweden’s third-largest city. Jan has a degree in Engineering

and Caroline a PhD in Molecular Biology. The bloggers thus embody an urban, educated middle class. However, with no formal education in business or economics and given their conventional family and home situation, Jan and Caroline Bolmeson also possess an identification potential for the majority, having an ‘average Swede’ (*medelstvensson*) image. Pictured in their blog and in the mass media over the years, their physical appearance is casually neat without being strict or dull. They are usually portrayed in a semi-private setting—sitting next to each other on a sofa or at a table in home-like surroundings, seemingly happy and laid-back.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, the tone of the podcast episodes, which typically last between 60 and 90 minutes, is consistently informal and pleasant. Viewers see Jan and Caroline seated at a table with a PowerPoint presentation projected behind them in what seems to be a conference room setting (see figure 5.1). In some episodes they have invited guests, but the majority have only the spouses as discussants. It was Jan who started the blog in 2007, and for the first ten years or so he produced most of the content, both audiovisual and text. Caroline has recently been more involved in the blog, particularly the podcasts and media interviews. As of 2023, Jan continues to lead all the podcast conversations, while Caroline interjects to clarify or reflect on certain points. It also seems Jan prepares the presentations by himself, and, even though their articles often have a joint byline, Jan refers to writing them himself (and they are written in first person singular). The blog pictures of the couple give no indication that Jan is more active or central than Caroline, and in the ‘About us’ image Caroline is even positioned as the pivotal of the two, sitting in front of Jan and looking into the camera while he is leaning back, looking at her. Even though their audience presumably notices Jan’s apparent dominance in the actual blog work, there are connotations to their image as a married couple running the blog together and basing much of their content on family life experiences. Caroline’s presence, which in some podcast episodes might come across as redundant, reminds the audience the bloggers are a household and thus private individuals, parents, and house owners.



Figure 5.1. Jan and Caroline Bolmeson, the couple running RikaTillsammans.  
Source: <https://rikatillsammans.se>.

Occasional deviations from the prepared episode structure give glimpses of the Bolmesons' personal life, displaying them as easy-going and humorous, but also as ordinary people with flaws, failings, and anxieties. They often use examples from family-related activities such as their children's birthday parties or school events, and refer to discussions they have at home 'round the kitchen table'. In some instances, such conversations end up in an apparent revelation, as when Jan reveals that, because of their increasing living costs, he has been browsing estate agents' websites, thinking of downsizing to a flat. There is a sense of the audience being taken behind the scenes to follow the family in their real-life endeavours.

The Bolmesons frequently mention their modest childhoods, how poor they were as young students, and the bad financial decisions they have made in the past. Not only are they open that Jan lost a great deal of money in the dot-com crash in 2000, they emphasize it when appropriate. Jan sometimes refers to old blog posts, and so his own

ideas and statements, as embarrassing, which again accentuates their human predisposition to make mistakes, but also that they have the humility to admit as much and revalue their opinions if conditions change. This frankness about their personal lives and past missteps indicates the Bolmesons think such information does not affect their credibility in a negative way. They may assume it generates more scope for the audience to identify with them and be encouraged to follow their example. Theoretically, their anecdotes can be interpreted as speaking of responsible financial subjects who continually work to manage their lives successfully.<sup>20</sup>

### Research as the knowledge authority

RikaTillsammans's main lesson about financial security, and probably about being successful ('rich'), is presented in the introductory episode 'Get started with your savings' (described by the Bolmesons as containing all essential financial knowledge) and repeated in most episodes and articles: keep a small savings buffer in a bank account and invest the rest long-term in the stock market, either using a digital investment platform or cheap global index funds.<sup>21</sup> The recommendation is not only concise, but it also proposes a quick one-off action followed by distinctly passive behaviour—to set up an automatic monthly transfer and then leave investments to grow for several decades while ignoring all market fluctuations. It speaks of a prudent investor who aims for average performance—no more, no less—on the stock market, based on an underlying idea of continual economic growth and, hence, exponentially growing asset values in the long term with no intervention from the investor themselves.<sup>22</sup> The concept of the 'money machine' (*pengamaskin*), which is often used in RikaTillsammans, epitomizes the conviction that if you simply invest and then continue to make regular deposits, the market will do the rest for you.<sup>23</sup>

According to the Bolmesons, this general investment strategy is supported by countless research results. In RikaTillsammans, academic studies are presented as delivering objective, trustworthy explanations

of the (financial) world. Numbers and statistics derived from research are a standard feature, often presented in charts. In the introductory episode, Jan declares their shared devotion to research-based knowledge, mentioning that Caroline has a PhD in Molecular Biology. She confirms her background and adds that she likes statements to be fact-checked. They do not hide that their qualifications are in subject areas far from economics, indicating that they see their academic experience lending them reliability not as vocational training, but as evidence of their general ability to deal with research outcomes. In other words, their skill is in methodology (collecting, analysing, and communicating) rather than empirics, and their credibility comes from their position as knowledgeable outsiders rather than trained insiders.

Overall, although research as a generic category is described as the one proper knowledge authority, the blog celebrates a sort of ‘street-smart’ financial know-how, which while it relies on academic findings also includes ideas and advice from (mostly American) financial self-help literature. For the individual, financial success is an outcome of concrete behaviour (setting the ‘money machine’ to work), rather than abstract understanding. In the introductory episode, Jan expresses this belief with a humorous touch and at the same time addresses the widest possible audience: ‘Unlike most other areas in life where the best things come to those who know and engage the most, when it comes to saving and investing, it is actually the uninterested and lazy people who get the best results. Congratulations everyone who is not interested!’<sup>24</sup> However, by highlighting the distinctly simple nature of successful financial behaviour, they also implicitly question—and shame—individuals who do not take these supposedly effortless measures to secure their personal finances.

### Mistrusting professional advisers

Whereas academic researchers are positioned as undisputable authorities, the Bolmesons express their disbelief in the financial industry and its advisers. Any investment tip from (self-appointed) financial

experts, whether given in a personal bank meeting, tabloid article, or over dinner with friends, should be rejected based on either the supposition of commercial interest and resulting neglect of rational, long-term advice or the basic conviction that ‘no one can outsmart the stock market’ anyway. While continuous investments in low-cost global index funds are the route to financial stability, actively managed funds with high fees are considered a financial industry rip-off.<sup>25</sup> To support this contention, the Bolmesons show a clip in the introductory episode where the Nobel laureate in economics Eugene Fama refers to all stock market advice as finance porn and claims it should be treated as pure entertainment: ‘When someone tries to sell you financial products, bring out the popcorn, not the wallet’. The knowledge authority of research is used to discard, or even to ridicule, the legitimacy of commercial financial advisers.<sup>26</sup>

Since the Bolmesons manage a blog that offers personal finance guidance and inspiration, they take care to emphasize their own independence. They commonly declare that any recommendation of financial products is based on their own judgement, which points out both the unbiased and the performative aspect (‘We are in the same boat’). Explaining ‘How we make money on RikaTillsammans’, the bloggers are exceptionally transparent about the few blog elements that generate income for them. Sporadically sponsored collaborations in episodes or articles are signalled in predefined ways, for example by changing the text colour of an article or stating ‘commercial link’ in brackets.<sup>27</sup> One of the few financial advice books they praise is *Mer pengar för pengarna* (‘More money for your money’).<sup>28</sup> Its authors are financial industry dropouts who also run a financial counselling service, *Småspararguiden* (‘Small savers guide’), designed to enlighten consumers about the self-serving investment advice offered by banks and other commercial actors and to educate households to make sensible financial decisions—similar to RikaTillsammans, in other words.<sup>29</sup>

Crucially, thus, denying the credibility of financial industry representatives trying to sell products does not mean mistrusting the financial market itself. Quite the opposite. The overall message is that

individuals must equip, and so empower, themselves with the proper knowledge and tools to act in the market without the intervention of greedy middlemen.

### Family first

The Swedish welfare state is internationally renowned for collectively funding and subsidizing education, healthcare, day care, parental leave, retirement, etc. Yet, in recent decades, there has been a gradual shift towards increasing individual responsibilities. Political reforms, beginning in the early 1990s, have sought to make citizens less reliant on the state.<sup>30</sup> In the international literature on neoliberalism, some have argued that changes of this kind make inherited wealth, family fortunes, and family values more important. According to Melinda Cooper, this has supported an alliance between free-market liberals and social conservatives.<sup>31</sup>

Children and family are important concepts in RikaTillsammans. Besides the Bolmesons' frequent references to their family life, Jan has co-authored *Gör ditt barn rikt!* ('Make your child rich!'), the only book published thus far by either of the Bolmesons.<sup>32</sup> Saving for one's children is not merely a substrand of the blog's mission to educate individuals to take control of their personal finances. Besides the emphasis on financial knowledge as something important enough to be acquired in early childhood, there are other ideological sides to including the youngest family members in the discourse. By emphasizing the responsibility of parents to teach their children, it reminds the audience they are left to look after themselves and their household members. It implies a criticism of the personal finance education that society—which, in this context, means the Swedish school system—fails to provide. In some episodes, this accusation becomes explicit when the Bolmesons and their guests (teachers) discuss the lack of financial literacy training in Swedish schools.<sup>33</sup> According to the bloggers, one of the most common remarks they hear when lecturing and discussing personal finances is that 'this should be taught in school'.<sup>34</sup>



So, what kind of knowledge and skills do the Bolmesons recommend for parents to transfer? In the episode ‘Saving for children, saving with children’, they establish that the ‘saving for’ part is straightforward since the same long-term strategy as for adult savers should be employed, meaning regular transfers to cheap global index funds.<sup>35</sup> Instead, the couple declare it is the ‘saving with’ which is more important, for the prime task of parents who wish their children to have financially successful lives is to give them knowledge instead of money—that is, to help children develop their financial understanding and self-confidence. They suggest having financial conversations with children as young as 5. Broadly speaking, though, they downplay communicating theoretical knowledge in favour of a certain mindset and type of behaviour. For example, Jan expresses his fondness of an ‘entrepreneurial allowance’ where the child is paid not solely for doing traditional household chores, such as cutting the lawn, but also for identifying the problem and proposing a solution (the grass is too long and needs cutting). Preferably, the parent should then encourage the child’s authority by showing they are at their disposal for completing the task. Instead of producing an employee mentality of following orders, the child will then develop an entrepreneurial mindset of taking the initiative, solving problems, and delegating assignments.<sup>36</sup> The description is reminiscent of the features of the entrepreneurial subject as outlined above.

### A neoliberal community

As knowledge actors, the Bolmesons can be described as facilitators or administrators of a financial knowledge community. They repeatedly stress that their blog content does not originate from themselves; their role is to collect, arrange, and present facts and advice. Rather, they credit researchers, book authors, and forum discussants. The latter have increasingly been positioned as a knowledge authority. Since 2021, the Bolmesons have even labelled RikaTillsammans a forum, not a blog, and they often mention forum discussions in their podcasts

and articles. Besides research, there is one more trustworthy financial knowledge authority—each other.

A cornerstone of the performative knowledge conveyed in the blog is that the Bolmesons, as private people trying to control and improve their financial situation, are not only like their audience, but also they do the same things: ‘we *always* invest our own money in what we recommend in the blog. When we speak of a mutual fund, an investment vehicle, a collaboration or similar, we are in the same boat.<sup>37</sup> Such statements not only address a general sense of identification or sympathy between the bloggers and their audience, but it also establishes a wide ‘us’ of ‘ordinary’ Swedes trying to pick their way through the complex, uncertain, and lonely—albeit potentially rewarding—financial situation that both politicians and corporations have placed them in. The inferred meaning of the optimistic blog name is thus that we are poor—or, at least struggling, estimating, hoping—together.<sup>38</sup> The Bolmesons’ affiliation with ‘ordinary’ Swedes instead of any industry or institution is clearly expressed in their critical stance on banks and other commercial financial actors on the one hand, and—more implicitly—the Swedish state with its high taxes and negligible personal finance education on the other hand. The perspective reinforces the position of the individual household as the primary bearer of both financial risk and opportunity; however, it also conveys a sense of ‘we are in this together’.

The term neoliberal is disputed and researchers cannot agree on a common definition. Where conceptual and intellectual historians focus on the ideological content originating from the 1930s Mont Pèlerin Society, politically implemented in the US and Europe from around 1980, some sociologists and historians understand neoliberalism primarily as governmentality.<sup>39</sup> Yet another strand emphasizes the general marketization and consequent consumerism that increasingly permeates all parts of society and human life.<sup>40</sup> In the case of Rika Till-sammans, the term resonates not only with the absolute commitment to the liberal market economy, but also with its assemblage of topics ranging from psychology and relationships to world politics under a personal finance umbrella, or the ‘widespread economization of

heretofore non-economic domains, activities, and subjects'.<sup>41</sup> These neoliberal—or entrepreneurial—subjects view their lives as a corporation to manage, so innovation, risk-taking, and self-responsibility are embraced as features of both public and private life.<sup>42</sup> Opposed to neoliberalism as distinctly individualistic and with almost no room for solidarity or communal effort, however, RikaTillsammans addresses a community sense of encouragement and empowerment that we would argue amounts to a neoliberal community.

### An online knowledge authority to trust

In this essay, we have described a prominent example of a historically specific knowledge actor—the personal finance blogger—that emerged in Sweden in the twenty-first century as an expression and reinforcement of the 'financialized–digitalized' citizen. The development of RikaTillsammans was congruent with the larger historical developments which Sweden, and most other Western societies, have experienced since the 1980s, moving towards continuous financialization under the logic of a liberal market economy. The Bolmesons use their blog to encourage other citizens to become savvy, self-reliant financial actors and to naturalize stock-market knowledge and activities as key life skills. While the content they create is not original, their active circulation work and efforts to build a growing community are of topical interest for historians of knowledge.

The Bolmesons' positioning as knowledge authorities is interesting, as it showcases intricate relationships with established institutions, various bodies of knowledge, and their own audience. There is undeniably an oppositional tendency and notable mistrust of politics and the financial industry, but it is paired with a fundamental confidence in the financialized market economy, upheld by the same institutions and arrangements. In relation to science and scholarship there is an ill-defined adherence to 'research', and the Bolmesons' credibility is strengthened by their own level of education. Yet, the most striking feature of RikaTillsammans is the belief that 'ordinary' investors—like themselves and their audience—can teach and empower one another.

It is by participating in an engaged online community that individuals can thrive financially. We have tentatively labelled this a neoliberal community, and it is probably no coincidence that such communities have emerged on personal finance platforms such as RikaTillsammans.

The moral self-justification of RikaTillsammans and other similar educating blogs or podcasts—the Swedish ‘Börshajen’, the Finnish ‘Äta, sova, spara’, the American ‘Of Dollars and Data’—builds on the experience of a welfare state in retreat, leaving individuals to secure their own economic well-being *and* to learn how to do so. The commercial actors that step in to help citizens, primarily the banks and financial industry, are driven by their own interests. RikaTillsammans is based on assumptions about trust: while the state and the financial industry cannot be trusted (for different reasons), the market as such can, along with certain strands of financial research. RikaTillsammans sets out to circulate financial expertise to make citizens independent market actors. It presents a potentially attractive alternative for individuals or families who find themselves ‘alone’, caught between supposedly unreliable, greedy bank advisers and an equally unreliable, evasive welfare state: if we join in, it says, we can be *rich together*.

For historians of knowledge, this contemporary phenomenon raises fundamental questions. How new is this dynamic of specific actors building dispersed communities around certain bodies of knowledge? What are the historical precursors in the financial sector and beyond? And how best to map the historical development of a salient feature of the internet age? Our study elucidates the importance of paying close attention to how knowledge actors position themselves as authorities in relation to existing institutions and competing knowledge claims. How are niches carved out? What is required to build and sustain engagement over time? And what is it that makes an online knowledge authority a trusted source of practical advice for certain audiences?<sup>43</sup>

## Notes

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II  
CAPABILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS





# Marginalized knowledge actors

*Maria Bach*

Some ideas get less attention than others. And as much as intellectuals may want to believe that an idea spreads, and only spreads, if it gets us closer to the truth, that is not the only reason an idea may be taken up and circulated. An intellectual's class, caste, gender, nationality, physical location, period, and so forth affects whether the knowledge they may produce will be read, accepted, and passed on. A person's unique localization in societal and historical space will affect whether they will be considered a knowledge actor. Knowledge creation in modern science, and especially economics, is notoriously focused on European and North American intellectuals. There seem to be boundaries that define who can be a knowledge actor. In this essay, I question those boundaries to uncover marginalized actors who are seldom analysed.

Marginalized actors are individuals who were part of dialogues and produced speeches or texts largely ignored during and often after their time. They are ignored because they are considered inferior, effectively marginalized from societal debates. Sometimes they are ignored on the regional, national or international level, sometimes on all levels. Examples include natives of a colonized land, women or working-class men before they gained the right to vote. These actors were or are considered incapable of, or in the least not good at, producing new ideas or adding anything noteworthy to societal debates. They are considered copiers of existing knowledge. The result

is often that they do not get published and their contributions to knowledge are forgotten about all together. Others voice their ideas in lesser-known channels. Others still generate their own channels of communication within which they can publish.

### Euro-American dominance

The question that dominates the history of science is why modern science originated in Western Europe and not elsewhere. In an epoch-making paper, George Basalla laid out a three-stage model that explained the diffusion of Western science to the rest of the world.<sup>1</sup> Basalla described how modern science from Europe spread to non-scientific societies in the first stage. These non-European spaces were passive containers for data, providing a ‘source for European science’.<sup>2</sup> In the second stage, when European scientific institutions emerged, which encouraged Western scientific activities, the non-scientific societies grew dependent on European empires. In the final stage, imperial territories gained independence through nationalist movements and then national scientific institutions based on Western science. The model, however, is full of assumptions that are debatable. In Basalla’s subtitle alone—‘A three-stage model describes the introduction of modern science into any non-European nation’—I can identify four: modern science originates in Europe and is thus European; modern science is a unified entity; modern science spreads everywhere; and it spreads the same way in every space, and is universal.<sup>3</sup>

And yet, Basalla’s thinking mirrored other well-known, widely circulated arguments of the time, such as Walt Rostow’s five-stage model for economic development, where non-European regions would develop like Europe had.<sup>4</sup> ‘Development’ here includes economic, political, and social phenomena such as industrialization, intellectual progress, and democracy. Even today, the most accepted narrative about development asserts that progress spread from Britain to other European countries, then to European settlements in America, eventually reaching Russia and Japan by the end of the nineteenth century. Development is limited to European industrial progress and that

region's specific experience with progress. Development itself is said to have also originated in Europe and spread across the world like the material processes of progress. The most accepted narrative of development is extensively founded on European ways of knowing.<sup>5</sup>

Historians of the social sciences and humanities have found similar trends. In a retrospective on the association and journal of *Social Science History*, Peter Perdue found a lack of attention to the non-Western world.<sup>6</sup> The field of social science history started in the 1970s, but had yet to look much outside Europe and North America when its journal celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Perdue includes basic statistics from the Social Science History Association's annual conference, where at best 10–15 per cent of its presentations covered non-Western topics. He concludes there has been 'no trend toward internationalization of research as reflected in titles of presentations or subject matter', and the association 'still remains overwhelmingly American and European, both in its theories and its regions of study'.<sup>7</sup>

In the newer field of the history of the humanities, the argument runs that fresh perspectives can widen research topics and showcase the many contributions to the humanities made outside Europe and North America.<sup>8</sup> The founders begin with a common understanding that the humanities have played an important role in reinforcing racism and racist sentiment through colonialism. 'After all, racism exerts power and affects structures, institutions, knowledges, and moralities—including academia'.<sup>9</sup> These historians have labelled 'colonial humanities' as disciplines that 'have created and reinscribed systematic prejudice'.<sup>10</sup> They recognize the power of knowledge whereby colonial violence has been perpetuated in the name of Euro-American humanities.

### Looking elsewhere

We have often forgotten to look at how *other* meanings of development came about and what their specific contributions to development debates are.<sup>11</sup> Dominant narratives, like the European idea of progress and development, minimize other ways of describing and theorizing

the world. In the discipline of the history of ideas, and here the history of economics, studies are predominately about well-known figures such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, while lesser-known figures are more rarely cited or analysed.<sup>12</sup> In the history of the humanities, historians want to overcome monologic Euro-American academia by engaging more deeply with African, Asian, and Indigenous epistemologies and research.<sup>13</sup> In the history of economics, I address the gap by unpacking the production and diffusion of alternative discourses of development by focusing on a group of Indian economists writing from the margins of the British Empire at the end of the nineteenth century.

This first generation of modern Indian economists is a good example of marginalized knowledge actors. They worked in an imperial setting and were treated as inferior, while their addressees, mainly British, were considered superior. As marginalized knowledge actors in the ongoing debates about Indian progress and development, the Indian economists of the late nineteenth century were and are frequently labelled copiers of existing economic knowledge from Western Europe and North America. As Christopher Bayly writes, global historical narratives of Western superiority often omit India having theories to understand political and socioeconomic changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup>

The last three decades of the nineteenth century saw a radical decline in the belief among Indian intellectuals that Britain, with its relatively advanced industrialized economy, could develop India.<sup>15</sup> There was also growing support for state-led development in Western Europe, particularly in Germany, and in the US and Japan. The state-led idea of development challenged British imperialism and increased further the inequalities in the Indian colony.<sup>16</sup> India was experiencing deindustrialization, severe famine, and increasing poverty, and was hit hard by Britain's and Europe's economic crisis from 1873 to 1896.<sup>17</sup> The Indian economists of this period theorized that imperial policies were both draining India of much-needed capital and deindustrializing its economy.<sup>18</sup> They saw India entering a period of 'regress', with some

of the worst famines in its history, increasing rural indebtedness and poverty, and worsening regional inequalities.<sup>19</sup>

One founding text of Indian economics is a lecture by Mahadev Govind Ranade in 1892 at Deccan College, primarily because the term 'Indian economics' was first coined during that lecture.<sup>20</sup> Ranade (1842–1901) was the first Indian to become a judge of the High Court. His lecture hall in 1892 would have largely been filled with Indian students. The audience may also have included some officials, as the college's location was the summer capital of the imperial administration. Deccan College was part of the imperial university system, a prominent place for Indian intellectuals and one of the oldest modern educational institutions in India. Another founding text was by Ganapathy Dikshitar Subramania Iyer (1855–1916), a leading Indian journalist and social reformer.<sup>21</sup>

Both texts laid out two reasons India needed its own economic thinking. First, the troubling socioeconomic conditions in India and elsewhere seemed to disprove the relevance of universal economic principles such as free trade and comparative advantage.<sup>22</sup> Iyer asserted that 'orthodox economic science, as expounded in English textbooks, have to be modified when applied to the conditions of this country'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Ranade said that the traditions of orthodox economics did not consider the 'relative differences in Civilisation, or the possession of natural advantages, or disadvantages, in matters of situation, climate, soil, National aptitudes'.<sup>24</sup> Second, there was a need for an Indian economics that reflected the realities of India's current economic situation, meaning imperialism and poor socioeconomic conditions.<sup>25</sup> Ranade said that Indian economics should be based on the study of how 'Ethnical, Social, Justice, Ethical, or Economical differences in the environments' affected social change, 'progress', or 'regress', to then identify an effective development plan.<sup>26</sup>

Ranade's and Iyer's notions of Indian economics proved popular with other Indian intellectuals, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Ganesh Vyankatesh Joshi, Surendranath Banerjee, Kashinath Trimbak Telang, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, enabling Indian economics to emerge.<sup>27</sup> The 1870s and 1880s saw a rise in

dialogue among Indians and with their rulers. Several town and regional organizations were formed. A hundred local associations were established in Madras alone in the decade after the Great Famine.<sup>28</sup> Each association represented a different societal group—for example, the Pune Sarvajanik Sabha, established by Ranade, was mostly made up of maths teachers.<sup>29</sup> The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, was the first major organization to house different political viewpoints and professionals, including political economists, teachers, lawyers, traders, and merchants.<sup>30</sup> The 72 members who attended the first meeting in Bombay were all founders and leaders of modern institutions, many of whose writings were later brought under the intellectual umbrella of Indian economics.

The intellectuals associated with Indian economics asked why India was still far away from transitioning from a backward to a modern developed nation. Why had the economic gulf between India and Britain widened instead of narrowed? Why did the Indian economy not enjoy progress when economies like North America, France, Germany, Canada, Italy, Russia, and even Japan did?<sup>31</sup> The answers, the Indian economists hoped, would result in the implementation of better imperial policies that would harness much-needed progress in India.

The research in Indian economics was disseminated through lectures at universities and various societies and conferences as well as in published books and articles largely in English. Yet these texts circulated almost exclusively in India, and when they were available elsewhere, they were predominantly consumed by Indian and anti-imperialist audiences in Britain. For example, most of the articles were published in the journal that Ranade founded. The Indian economists were not getting published in British economic journals or even treated as economists. According to many imperial officials and British intellectuals, the Indian economists were political activists fighting for Indian self-rule, not political economists creating knowledge. I see the developments in Indian economics as coming from the margins, because the Indian economists were at the margins of intellectual circles.<sup>32</sup>

## Difficulties when looking elsewhere

How best to reconstruct narratives from the margins? On the one hand, marginalizing one's protagonists too far can mean their agency is lost as thinkers, the principal aim of uncovering marginalized figures. Scholars such as Mona Gleason and John Robb have cautioned against falling into the trap of agency ideal when agency becomes a researcher's main goal. Instead of being scholars of a particular person or group of people, scholars become their advocates.<sup>33</sup> I do not want to liberate these Indian economists—those who followed in their footsteps did that by gaining independence a little over half a century later, using the earlier economists' eye-opening studies and the institutions and communication channels they established. I want to identify their contribution to economic knowledge. The agency ideal seeks to juxtapose the Indians against Europeans in a binary interpretative framework. I wish to challenge the assumptions of inferiority or powerlessness and embrace the messier, more nuanced exchanges. Marginalized actors have things done to them, but they act to change things over time, too. But their imperial context and existing dominant ideas cannot be ignored. How did the first generation of modern Indian economists function in a Eurocentric world on their own terms or in ways that challenged the status quo? My approach leaves intact the hegemony of imperialism and Eurocentrism over imperial subjects, but also 'over what was judged to be historically significant'.<sup>34</sup> My approach lies somewhere between giving agency and acknowledging the contextual challenges.

Historians who study knowledge production in imperial contexts have convincingly argued that knowledge was dominated by Europeans and their experiences. Others call for deprovincializing narratives where we can expose how dominant narratives, like development, came from certain times and spaces.<sup>35</sup> Yet others stress we cannot ignore the hegemony of European and imperial discourse on the imperial intellectual subjects.<sup>36</sup> Another group of historians have successfully shown that the spread of ideas from Europe to India was not a simple diffusion—the receivers transformed, adapted, and



refracted the ideas that came from their imperial rulers.<sup>37</sup> Global historians insist there is little to no space for Indian thinking while the British Empire existed due to the interconnectedness of India, and other imperial territories, with its imperial rulers.<sup>38</sup>

We are thus presented with a dilemma, writes Kapil Raj. Either we see modern science as a product of Western Europe, generating the divide between the West and the Rest, which eventually reached non-European societies when they came into contact with European capitalism, or modern science comprises competing national narratives, each of which claim their thought is most applicable to their nationalist context. One way around the dilemma is to see modern science as dehumanizing and alienating, because it imposed a foreign framework of rationality onto non-European regions.<sup>39</sup> Gyan Prakash, for example, has shown how a group of Indians produced ‘another reason’ in imperial India.<sup>40</sup> According to this view, the knowledge so produced can only be applied locally, in direct contrast to the originator of modern science, which was and is universal. Several scholars now agree this is untrue. Western Europeans produced various iterations of modern science. Modern science is far from a unified entity.<sup>41</sup> Modern science does not have its own logic of development, based on a formal set of propositions. It is not innately universal, nor forcibly imposed on others. Raj thus proposes a relocation of modern science to other non-European spaces in his analysis of European and Indian exchange in making modern science.

I agree with scholars such as Raj that science—economic science in my case—is not universal and that it can and did originate in other places than Western Europe. But I cannot agree that what we think of as modern science, and synonymous with European science, was not imposed on imperial territories. It was imposed over the centuries by institutions big and small, formal and informal, which propagated modern science as European and the only universal way to understand and explain the world. The European curriculum in schools and universities in the imperial territories entrenched the hierarchy of European knowledge as superior and the rest as inferior. Often enough, Indian scholars who went through that education

system were themselves convinced that their fellow Indians were only regurgitating existing knowledge and not producing original knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

### How to look elsewhere

My approach modifies Raj's relocating approach by accommodating theoretically and methodologically to the imperial context of control, while still avoiding the agency trap. I seek to contextualize the marginalization and understand the complexities of the situation, the room for change, and the contribution made by marginalized actors. As historians of the humanities have put it so well, academia has developed an 'imperial reason' since the Renaissance, where concepts to do with rationality and knowledge 'were enmeshed and intertwined with ideas of race and gender inequality'.<sup>43</sup> Some people were rational and could create knowledge; others could not.

Propaganda, manipulation, and domination place constraints on knowledge production. Some scholars maintain that although Indian economics identified British rule as a barrier to economic development, economic thinking did not find solutions to generating economic growth. According to these scholars, Indian economics also failed to create alternative tools to analyse economic development. For example, the reviews in *The Times* and the *Times of India* had the following to say about Dutt's volume on Indian history:

The literary skill and research which he has devoted to his object, prove Mr Dutt capable of writing history if he could for a moment put his politics aside. But the work before us is not a history, it is merely a collection of historical arguments for a political sect.<sup>44</sup>

Similar conclusions can be found in later scholarship.<sup>45</sup> Studies seem to focus on the discursive and material constraints imposed upon imperial subjects, and often conclude that the British dominant discourse such as political economy categories and norms taught at the imperial universities made discursive innovation difficult for

Indian intellectuals. India's imperial status and extreme poverty is said to have left Indian intellectuals preoccupied with urgent political and economic needs, rather than knowledge creation.

Censorship was a reality in imperial India, limiting how the Indian economists could contribute to knowledge production. Ranade's scholarship was suspended for saying the Mughal empire had been better for India than British rule was.<sup>46</sup> Banerjee was found guilty of contempt and sentenced to two months in prison for publishing an editorial in *The Bengalee* (2 April 1883) in which he compared Judge Norris to the notorious seventeenth-century British judges, Jeffreys and Scroggs, because Norris had been involved in a dispute about a *shaligram* or family idol at the Calcutta High Court.<sup>47</sup> In any context, we need to understand who can voice their concerns (a form of action) and to what extent this was or is possible.

And yet I find the Indian economists' multidiscursive and multispatial contexts, although some were constraining, left room for imagining a new configuration of the global political economy of development. By multidiscursive, I mean the traces of various discourses, world views, ways of seeing, voices, etc., identified sometimes through citations, at other times through similar wordings seen in other texts. Multispatiality highlights the international, multi-institutional, and contextually diverse nature of these Indian economists' writings. They were Indians who travelled and studied in other countries, especially Britain. The historical, political, and socioeconomic context offered the discursive possibility for the Indian economists to rearticulate and redefine existing economic thinking, rather than only reproducing the dominant economic theories. As many historians of ideas have theorized, ideas are necessarily transformed when passed from one thinker to another.<sup>48</sup>

My approach incorporates the idea that discourse can both constrain and facilitate social actions. Our field of perception is limited by the discursive resources at our disposal, but those resources simultaneously offer meaning and an understanding of our context.<sup>49</sup> The Indian economists learned discursive practices (concepts, frameworks, and tools of analysis) from their imperial university education

and the literature, which were primarily based on another regional context—as articulated by the Indian economists themselves.<sup>50</sup> They used these imported, imposed discursive practices to understand different regional circumstances in the South Asian subcontinent. The approach incorporates how these actors spoke and published in varied spaces where their legitimacy and ability to be heard differed substantially.

My method combines a dialogic theoretical framework with positive discourse analysis (PDA). Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic approach to analysing discursive practices enables me to theorize how discourses simultaneously constrain and facilitate meaning-making.<sup>51</sup> My method, PDA, operationalizes the dialogic approach into a more concrete step-by-step process of defining the Indian interlocutors' multidiscursive, multispatial contexts, and how these contexts affected the particular discursive practices and knowledge created in specific utterances. PDA is also specifically designed to focus on marginalized discourses. I set out the discursive innovations in Indian economics by systematically uncovering the link between context and discourse. My investigation moves back and forth between context (by examining secondary economic history literature and my primary sources) and discursive practices (by analysing my primary sources).<sup>52</sup>

### Results of relocating development economics

By relocating development economics, I have been able to gauge how knowledge was produced in another space and time. The relocation of development economics thus happens on two fronts. First, I relocate development economics to another space, India, where historians of economics have rarely gone before. Second, I relocate development economics to another time. Historians of development economics consider it a post-war concept.<sup>53</sup> My study shows that development economics dates back 80 years to another space entirely. The relocating approach offers a new perspective on the history of development economics.

The relocating approach also uncovers how constraints and an inferior position affect the knowledge produced. Knowledge produced by marginalized actors is often refracted at the margins. The Indian economists were on the margins in an imperial territory, but their ideas also changed existing thought at the margins. Dominant narratives over-power thinking in a way that makes it hard for new knowledge to be produced. New discursive practices often appear as re-articulations or dis-articulations of a dominant discourse and occur at its margins.<sup>54</sup>

There are several examples of redefinition, refraction, or hybrid theories in Indian economics. A key example pertains to the stage theory of civilization. The stadial theory had become popular in the late eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment and is later found in texts throughout the nineteenth century by thinkers such as Marx, John Ferguson McLennan, Friedrich List, and Herbert Spencer.<sup>55</sup> To a large degree, Indian economics stage theory looked like the existing four-stage theory, but Indian economists remade the theory by adding a lower imperial stage to which India had regressed due to imperialism. They also rewrote an earlier stage of civilization where India had been more advanced, with progress greater than it was experiencing in the late nineteenth century. The Indian economists could thus refute the idea that India could not skip to a higher stage of civilization, because they had experienced it in the past. India did not need to wait to progress or gain independence, like the stage theorists from Europe argued.<sup>56</sup>

Another key example concerns universal development. For Europeans, Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage, which advocated a global division of labour that assigned raw material production to Asia and industrial production to Western Europe and North America, became irrefutable.<sup>57</sup> Even List, who prescribed universal free trade once 'all' countries had industrialized, denied the possibility of Asian progress: 'Hence the entire dissolution of the Asiatic nationalities appears to be inevitable.'<sup>58</sup> All countries thus only included Europe. Theorists like List who came from a country, Germany, that was industrializing after Britain, argued that their countries should and could also industrialize like Britain, but not Asia.<sup>59</sup> While the Indian

economists, seeing their economy deindustrialize and increasingly poor, could not see the benefits of such an international model. An economy dominated by agricultural production and exports was stalling Indian economic growth.<sup>60</sup> The Indian economists could not imagine a world without an industrialized Western Europe, but the British could imagine a world without an industrialized India.

The Indian economists, however, could also imagine an industrialized India. The rereading of Indian history, which resulted in the refraction of the stadial theory where India had been at a higher stage of civilization before imperialism, enabled Indian economics to reimagine the global political economy of development. Indian economics reconstructed a universal idea of development, theorizing that global industrialization would bring greater growth to all countries, thanks to the increased potential for capital accumulation (leading to more investment and production) and greater aggregate demand (due to higher employment in newly industrialized countries). The increased aggregate demand would increase demand for British (as well as other exporting nations') goods. England's trade, reasoned Naoroji, would increase by £250,000,000, if each member of the Indian population could buy English goods worth only £1 per year, assuming a population of 250 million.<sup>61</sup> The increase in exchange would boost the capacity to further invest in industrial growth, thanks to higher levels of capital accumulation. Previous theories associated with classical political economy such as Ricardo's were Eurocentric, justifying the world view that it was a zero-sum game that enriched Europe while impoverishing the rest of the world. Indian industrialization would have beneficial outcomes to their trading partners' progress—a win-win development model.<sup>62</sup>

### Looking ahead

What does this say about the more general questions of what is a knowledge actor and how different knowledge actors produce knowledge? I see two answers. By looking to actors previously not treated as knowledge producers, we could gain new insights into our world.

But the more promising and perhaps less researched answer lies in better understanding how knowledge production is affected by context. When we accept and adequately consider and theorize the constraints and limitations of marginalized knowledge actors, we can better identify the work of those whose important ideas and theoretical contributions 'have been rendered less visible through the exclusionary colonial gaze'.<sup>63</sup> Marginalized actors are often silenced and must often persist and fight to be heard. More importantly, they often need more conviction in their ideas before they share them because they internalize what everyone tells them: that they are inferior. Actors who are not marginalized can spread knowledge more easily, faster, and further, because they are listened to and their knowledge is often less contested. Their knowledge can become well known, perhaps even a part of common knowledge. They can produce knowledge accepted by the majority to be the truth. These dominant forms of knowledge impact the contents of marginalized knowledge due to probable critiques and the potential for marginalized knowledge to spread and be accepted.

The relatively new discipline of the history of knowledge can contribute to breaking the dominance by expanding our studies of marginalized figures. Several actors were seemingly ignored because they did not come from Europe or North America, were not white, nor were they considered part of the global elite. The essay uses the empirical example of a group of late nineteenth-century Indian economists, writing on the margins of the British Empire, to show the importance of looking at figures often forgotten as knowledge actors. I call on historians of knowledge to treat knowledge creation as a process of diffusion, dissemination, and transformation in specific localities, to open up sufficient analytical space to re-evaluate the contributions of marginalized actors, and their often underrepresented and overlooked contributions to global debates on such things as economic development.

## Notes

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# The capacity to act

## On phronetic knowledge among the less privileged in seventeenth-century Sweden

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The emergence of the history of knowledge has come with a tangible—and productive—tension between a long-established emphasis on scientific knowledge and the conditions for its production on the one hand, and a growing interest in knowledge as a social and cultural phenomenon and the often overlooked forms of non-scientific knowledge on the other hand. While scholars have long prioritized the former, the history of knowledge retains the potential to provide some balance. Applied to cultural and social history, we believe the history of knowledge offers a possibility to recognize the relationships between knowledge and agency, and to incorporate other actors and sections of society than have usually been the case, including the less privileged, the uneducated, and the coerced, even if in hindsight their paths did not cross with those engaged in scientific endeavours. While some scholars have raised concerns about the loss of analytical precision if expanding the scope from science to a broader concept of knowledge, we argue that we have much to gain from investigating knowledge as a resource used in the struggles of everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

A basic tenet for this shift in focus is that knowledge is not a separate domain but integral to social life as such. Nico Stehr has spoken of knowledge as an anthropological constant, highlighting that action is based on knowledge, as are social roles, power relations, and cultural reproduction.<sup>2</sup> Like Marian Adolf, he has proposed that ‘knowing is

*grosso modo* participation in the cultural resources of society' and that knowledge may therefore be characterized as the capacity to act, since it 'creates, sustains, and changes existential conditions'.<sup>3</sup> For the history of knowledge, the challenge is to recognize and investigate this ability to act, wherever it appears, and to further an understanding of how knowledge is put to work by actors of different kinds, may they be individuals, groups, institutions, or other collectives. Key to this understanding would be an analysis of how knowledge has been used to create, sustain, and change the conditions under which different actors have gone about their everyday routines, ordinary or extraordinary, navigating their way through a landscape of power relations, and of social, cultural, and economic restraints and possibilities.

The premise of this essay is that to write about agency and actors in the history of knowledge, one must recognize not only a multitude of actors, but also a multitude of knowledge forms, all woven into society, work, and everyday life. The potential of such multiple knowledges—their historically and contextually situated usefulness as grounds for action—is key. In this essay, we continue the discussion of knowledge in relation to agency in work and everyday life. Our case is built around examples from an ongoing project investigating knowledge circulation, learning, and social mobility in Sweden among low-ranking employees of early modern aristocrats. We investigate the De la Gardie family, from the statesman Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie (1622–1686) and his sister, the mill-owning industrialist Maria Sofia De la Gardie (1627–1694), to their parents, the prominent military leader Jacob Pontusson De la Gardie (1583–1652) and the landowner and courtier Ebba Brahe (1596–1674).<sup>4</sup> We explore the conditions of agency set by this milieu, asking how knowledge was used by different actors in their interaction within the aristocratic organization. To do so, we use *supplications* or written petitions addressed to the estate owner, in which employees asked for help with issues in their daily lives and work, often relating to the payment of wages, clothes, food, and lodging, but also education, mobility within the organization, recommendations, and resignations. We elaborate on the concept of phronetic knowledge to further the understanding of knowledge as

grounds for action—the capacity to act—and how knowledge played into the act of petitioning in this context. We go on to discuss the relationship between knowledge, action, and agency, and the role in agency of power relations, looking at the complexities of any situation where knowledgeable actions contrast to challenged, restricted, or arbitrarily limited agency.

### Phronetic knowledge in context

The concept of phronetic knowledge draws on the Aristotelian division between *theoria* and *episteme*, *praxis* and *phronesis*, and *poiesis* and *techné*. While *theoria* has been used to denote epistemic or scientific knowledge, *praxis*, and the adjacent virtue of *phronesis*, has implied practical wisdom and a good judgement, sometimes equated with prudence in government and affairs. *Techné* has been used to describe the making of art or craft, focusing on the means to an end.<sup>5</sup> As adaptations of this division show, we should view the categories as intersecting, and as starting points for historical inquiry. They allow for an analysis of knowledge's role in action and agency, highlighting its different aspects.<sup>6</sup>

When ordinary, work-related agency is discussed in relation to knowledge, it is usual to highlight practical and technical matters, interpreting knowledge as know-how or a productive knowledge that enables the individual to perform certain tasks in a specialized way. This is technical, *poietic* knowledge as a means to an end. However, while techniques and skills are vital to our understanding of knowledge in action, everyday life and work also entails the elusive capability to navigate certain circumstances and situations—what we may call practical or phronetic knowledge, or a 'knowledge that comes from a close understanding of practice in specific contexts'.<sup>7</sup> This knowledge may also be understood as the interaction between knowledge of something (a theoretical or technical knowledge) and practical judgement, or as the ability to adapt one's response according to the situation, applying one's knowledge in the process. *Phronesis* or phronetic knowledge has been discussed in relation to medicine and

psychiatry, where theoretical knowledge is combined with practical insights guiding the professional interaction, for example between doctor and patient, that demands certain qualities of judgement.<sup>8</sup> But phronesis may also be applied to any number of situations that include human interaction and the use of knowledge and judgement. Jonna Bornemark has emphasized that phronetic knowledge is context-bound and, unlike epistemic knowledge, derives from experience in the field in which it is applied. It differs from the 'general and abstract language of episteme or the manualized knowledge of *techné*', she concludes.<sup>9</sup>

As Bent Flyvbjerg suggests, phronetic knowledge highlights 'the possibilities, problems, and risks we face in specific domains of social action', uncovering 'not only appreciative judgements in terms of values, but also an understanding of the practical political realities of any situation as part of an integrated judgement in terms of power'.<sup>10</sup> Although Flyvbjerg's research concerns modern day planning and organization theory, his methodological perspectives apply to historical studies, which he too recognizes. Flyvbjerg writes of the need to uncover daily practices by attention to detail and the 'little things' suggested by Nietzsche and Foucault, rather than trying to get closer to reality through theoretical or scientific discourses.<sup>11</sup> The benefit of such a perspective is to bring ordinary situations, decisions, and activities to the fore when analysing the role of knowledge, giving precedence to people's actions.

To study the strategies of a group of people who hitherto have not been credited with much agency, we thus apply a historical perspective to explore the actions of individuals in contexts that conditioned everyday life. This has at least two implications. First, it calls for consideration of the relation between actors, actions, and agency, and more specifically perhaps, the role of power to knowledge and action. The intertwined nature of knowledge, rationality, and power must be emphasized here, like the dynamic character of power relations. At the same time, it is necessary to question whether actions actually indicated agency and to what degree the constraints that these people worked and lived under were arbitrary. Was it possible to play by the rules and yet turn it to one's own advantage, or were conditions and

power relations more random?<sup>12</sup> Second, we must look at the role in phronetic knowledge played by planning, calculating, and strategic or tactical action, to follow the distinctions made by Michel de Certeau.<sup>13</sup> This entails elaborating on the concrete role of knowledge in action and agency, postulating that phronetic knowledge is an awareness of the conditions under which the actor can manoeuvre with varying degrees of skill. In this sense, phronetic knowledge would indeed be an ‘art of judgement’, balancing instrumental rationality with value-rationality.<sup>14</sup> Did employees on aristocratic estates engage in such balancing acts? And in what ways was phronetic knowledge required in such an organization?

### The act of petitioning

Needless to say, information about the daily lives of the men and women employed on aristocratic estates is limited. This is usually the case when we speak of the less privileged—they did not leave many traces behind for us to study. In this instance, however, we are fortunate that Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, and his bookkeepers, chose to document the estate administration, making sure that everything, and in particular the petitions from employees, were saved to keep track of all the claims for payment, outstanding debts, etc. Some 600 written petitions from low-ranking employees alone survive for the 1650s to Magnus Gabriel’s death in 1686. To that we can add the numerous petitions from others both within and outside the estate organization.

Petitioning was a widespread practice in early modern Sweden and elsewhere, as the literature shows. Faramerz Dabhoiwala highlights the extensive studies of mass-petitioning in the early modern world, which have established petitions as a ‘ubiquitous form of communication’ which existed on all levels of society; the downside is that petitions have been studied as a mass phenomenon rather than individual acts, leaving questions about this everyday practice and its significance for ordinary people.<sup>15</sup> From a Swedish horizon, we can confirm that petitions to the king and the government have



been investigated, but petitions from employees to their masters or landowners have only been dealt with to a limited extent. This despite people of all social classes in seventeenth-century Sweden knowing that a petition was a channel for grievances. Like the national and regional archives, private archives are filled with petitions from people asking for anything from alms for their survival to requests for government or military promotion, and anything in between. Young and old, rich and poor, men and women: people knew that they could petition their masters.<sup>16</sup> The sheer number of petitions sent to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, and the fact that his administration was set up to handle such quantities, demonstrate the legitimacy of this form of communication. In short, he expected to be petitioned. The number of decisions are also a sign of the quantities involved. Between the 1650s and 1686 they were kept in summary, leaving us with some 4,500 summaries with notes on the outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

What did writing a petition entail? The sheer number may lead us to think it was easy, but that would be to underestimate what it took for someone who had no possessions and was living just above or even below the subsistence level. Paper, a commodity which was not abundant in early modern Sweden, presented the first obstacle, alongside the actual writing of the petition. We do not know how this was arranged. Did employees go to a scribe in the estate organization? (Such scribes existed, but did they actually take on such work?) Or did they go to one of the other scribes in the community (city, village, church)? We do not know if petitioners had to buy the necessary materials themselves. One possibility is that it came as a package: a petitioner contacted a scribe, who knew how to write, where to send or deliver the petition, and who had the tools of their trade, such as paper, pen, ink, and wax for the seal. The petitions to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie were in nearly all cases carefully written in a trained hand, but usually had a signature which differed in style from the rest of the letter. The standardized way the petitions begin and end further strengthens the conclusion they were written by scribes. But to what degree was the petitioner a part of the process?

All petitions had a personal narrative. Some were shorter and less developed, while others provided detailed accounts of events, calculations, and hopes for the future. The narratives were used to substantiate the claims in the petition, and a general conformity between claims and reality, as perceived by the petitioner, but also to some extent verifiable by the receiver of the petition, is likely to have been necessary. Lies were a possibility, but the aristocratic estate bureaucracy may have deterred people from being too creative. The cases, often about promises given but not kept, accounts of expenses not reimbursed, or requests for outstanding wages, were all to some extent charted by the administrative machinery, putting the petitioner in a position where they had to be ready to argue their case. We will return to people's command of how the organization worked in order to get what they were owed. The number of cases of unpaid wages alone suggest that even this basic feature of life as an employee called for petitioning, bargaining, and recurrent interaction with the master of the estate.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the system of petitioning there was an evident need for phronetic knowledge, where insight into practical matters as an employee and into accounting, bookkeeping and to some extent legal matters was combined with the ability to present and balance such information with reasonable demands expressed in the correct fashion. Yet there were different ways of presenting an argument and, we would argue, different ways of knowing, which were put into action in petitions.

### Socially acquired knowledge

In what would in many respects be considered an oral culture, where many people had limited knowledge of reading and writing, knowledge acquired and circulated by rumour and verbal interaction was an important feature of the claims advanced in petitions to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie. Petitioners argued that what had been bestowed upon others should also fall to them, asking to be treated equally with their peers. One example was that of the stable grooms (*stalldrängar*) Oluff and Anders who happened to be away when the other stable

grooms were given new clothes.<sup>19</sup> Something similar happened to Marcus Marcusson, who had been sent off to work as a tiler when his fellow stablehands received clothes.<sup>20</sup>

Another example of how verbal interaction and rumour were a vivid part of employees' lives, fuelling petitions, related to negotiations about mobility between the different estates and other organizations, especially when current or previous employees had heard there were positions open. A vacancy at the tavern in Lidköping had been noticed by Christian Taffeltäckare who worked in Stockholm as a table setter (*taffeltäckare*) for Magnus Gabriel. Not only did he know the position of innkeeper was vacant, but he also knew someone else had been recommended for it by the town's foremen. He pressed his case, arguing he was the more worthy candidate, since the other man already owned a house and had, as Christian put it, already received his fair share of Magnus Gabriel's good will.<sup>21</sup> Another example was Staffan Nilsson, former master of the household (*husgerådsmästare*) for Magnus Gabriel's mother, Ebba Brahe, who wrote that he had heard of a vacancy in the chancellery (*kanslikammardräng*). Staffan argued that the step down in rank would be an advantage as he was getting on in age and had problems with his eyesight.<sup>22</sup> Examples such as these show a degree of planning and calculation for the future, although based on knowledge that had been socially acquired. The conclusion is that to navigate an aristocratic estate organization, petitioners had to stay attuned to what was going on. The petitions confirm that many did so, and that they acted on the information they had come by.

### Accounting knowledge

While socially acquired knowledge likely required that people pay close attention to what happened to others in the estate organization, whether they were employed themselves, had been, or hoped to be, petitioning also demanded knowledge that was not shared in this way. A significant number of the petitions we have studied concern financial matters—credit and debts, deferred wages, taxation, commissions,

the value of goods—along with legal issues such as contracts and inheritance. The cases illustrate the complex nature of an aristocratic organization and the degree of knowledge and action needed from the employee.

Deferred wages were a recurring topic. In a series of petitions from the cook Nils Månsson, we can see a variety of strategies to get the money he so desperately needed. The first seems to have been written at Michaelmas, late September being the time of the year when servants traditionally changed jobs. Nils appealed to the count's fatherly benevolence, praising his many mercies and thanking him for all he had done. He described his family's despair—the unheated hovel in which they lived, he, his wife, and their four small children, their desperate poverty, and winter coming. They had been thrown out of the room they rented after their credit had run out with the landlady. Almost in passing, he said if he could get some of his wages that would help his situation. It seems Nils was duly paid 150 daler koppermynt by the count. In a later petition he wrote in a more straightforward fashion, still mentioning his family's hardships but now focusing on his unpaid wages. 'I must announce there is still an outstanding part of my salary and that we now lack money and clothing', Nils stated in the opening sentences of his second letter, concluding this was the case since he had 'only received' 150 daler koppermynt, although he was owed more.<sup>23</sup> In a third petition, Nils went even further to specify his financial demands, now only adding a short sentence about his family's poverty. In this petition, the last we see of Nils in our sources, he provided a clear account of the outstanding wages owed. In a 'humble reminder', he stated that of his salary for 1664 he had only received 294 daler koppermynt, which left a little over 260 daler owing. 'Would the count please help me to this, for the subsistence and nourishment of my poor wife and children', he asked.<sup>24</sup> What can we conclude from this? Nils had apparently been paid some of what he was owed, perhaps as a direct result of his petitions. He had also changed his argument, from an emphasis on his master's benevolence and care for the poor to specifying an amount, showing what he was owed and for what period, minus the sums he had already received.

Did Nils know he had to be more specific? Did someone tell him? In what ways did the scribe, whom he may have engaged, advise him to change strategy? Or did he perhaps write the petitions himself? We have no way of knowing what the exact process was, but we can see the result, which suggests that Nils kept track of both credit and debts.

In his case and actions Nils was not unusual. He was one in a long row of petitioners trying to convince their master they should be paid for their work or given the clothes, shoes, food, or lodging they had been promised. What do the petitioners' arguments tell us about the knowledge used and presented in this medium? In a collective petition addressed to Magnus Gabriel from all the horsemen (*hovvryttare*) on the estate, we see a combination of socially acquired knowledge and knowledge in financial accounting. The petition opened with a strong claim, namely that in the past six months they had all experienced the same thing: none had been paid for their services. They also explained why they needed their wages: they needed money for clothing and laundering. They were, however, eager to point out that the boots they had received should not be deducted from their wages, which they heard was the bookkeeper's intention. The petition shows us a group of men who had apparently decided to act together, discussing the mutual problems of being employed by count De la Gardie. They had probably discussed things with the bookkeeper, but were not satisfied with his answers and so took matters further, pre-empting the decision that boots were part payment of the outstanding wages.<sup>25</sup>

Collective action was practised both in larger groups and in smaller ones. In a case possibly from 1649, two employees on one of Magnus Gabriel's ships in Stockholm shared a sheet of paper to write similar yet separate petitions, pleading for payment of their deferred wages. The first, by one Erik Jakobsson, spoke of his earlier employment with the crown and made sure to mention the drop in pay, however acceptable, when he joined Magnus Gabriel's ship. In the service of the crown his pay had been 30 daler kopparmynt a month, but now he was only entitled to 25. And the problem was he did not even receive that. Detailing the wages in kind he had received—dried meat, salt 'green meat', peas, groats, and a total of 10 daler kopparmynt—he

concluded this did not amount to more than 18 daler koppermynt, showing he knew addition and how to estimate the value of goods. His co-petitioner, who made less a month, made a similar request. Beside the fact that the petition shows their ability to count, make estimations, and keep track of their personal finances, it also brings to the fore their ability to exert pressure on the count. Erik wrote, clearly yet carefully, that he was content with their arrangement, even though he had made more money in service to the crown; however, he asked for confirmation from the count that he intended to pay him the promised amount, suggesting that there were limits even to his loyalty.<sup>26</sup>

The case of Carin Persdotter is another example of how a knowledge of accounts and arithmetic was part of daily life for the people working for the De la Gardie family. Carin, whose husband was 'absent' according to her petition, presents us with a different side to such organizations, namely the landladies and others who provided accommodation for aristocratic employees, did their laundry, and sometimes supplied their meals. Carin detailed her situation, explaining how she had taken care of a De la Gardie lackey, Swen, providing him with a home, a bed, and laundry for 2 daler koppermynt a week. Swen had lived at hers for 38 weeks but still had not paid anything. The arrangement was not only between her and the lackey, it seems; it was offered as a service to Magnus Gabriel, and hence she complained to him. Swen owed her 76 daler koppermynt, but the credit she had extended had put her in a difficult situation because of her husband's absence and she had been forced to pawn all her belongings. She begged Magnus Gabriel to have mercy and pay the outstanding debt to free her from her misery.<sup>27</sup>

Keeping track of accounts and debts was a necessity for anyone who wished to make their case to the count or any of his administrators. What the examples show is that at least some employees knew how to do this.

## Tactical knowledge

While many petitioners showed skills in acquiring knowledge, calculating, and accounting, others went further in their use of knowledge to navigate and strengthen their position. We would argue they made use of a tactical knowledge which involved both accounting skills, a knowledge of rights, and creativity in applying that knowledge and planning for the future.<sup>28</sup> Such petitions went beyond the more immediate requests for help or relief, and involved an analysis of how different options might be beneficial, demonstrating a more long-term perspective. They also show financial and contractual issues could be kept alive for decades, spanning generations.

In a petition from a woman named Christina, whose marital status is unknown to us, we find someone with a clear idea of her rights who also had an active knowledge of the legal arrangements substantiating her claims. In her petition, Christina told the count that her maternal grandfather had served as a chef to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie's father, Jacob Pontusson De la Gardie, for more than fourteen years, accompanying him from France. She said 200 daler of her grandfather's salary had been owing, so he and Jacob had agreed that he would receive some land to hold in gage until the 200 daler was paid. According to Christina, documents showed that 'heir after heir' would be given the right to use and live off the land until the payment was made. However, despite not paying the wages, Magnus Gabriel's father had for some reason revoked the agreement and taken back the land. Somehow, Christina had come into possession of a document with Jacob De la Gardie's seal, showing he had given orders that the land be retracted—something, she claimed, she would never have thought possible of the old master, of blessed memory. Her petition shows she had detailed knowledge, transcending generations, and was prepared to use it for tactical purposes. There is a curious detail: in the finishing lines of the letter, Christina said she had heard Magnus Gabriel was coming (we cannot be sure where to) and that she had therefore taken ship from Österbotten (in the Finnish half of the kingdom). During the journey she lost all her belongings at sea.

She pleaded with Magnus Gabriel to help her in her time of need by paying the 200 daler his father had owed her grandfather. She thus combined an elaborate legal argument with an urgent appeal to his mercy because of her bad turn of fortune.<sup>29</sup>

Another example of how petitioners tried to plan for the future is a petition by one Catharina Linnarsdotter. Her story had its twists and turns, but evidently she had decided to speak on behalf of both her husband and her children. She said her husband, Johan Larsson Sidenius, had been refused a position as master of the kitchen (*spismästare*) at Uppsala University (of which Magnus Gabriel was chancellor), but had been promised another position, and that assurance was why Catharina petitioned Magnus Gabriel. However, she also wanted to make a different request. Since her husband, who only had a more lowly position, was now ill, and having five young sons they could not provide for but wishing them to be educated so they could serve God, the crown, and the fatherland, she had a proposal to make. Were Magnus Gabriel to apply to the King in Council for her to have the right to brew and sell beer, she could provide for her family when her husband could not.

The widow of a De la Gardie huntsman, Margareta Larsdotter, also gave a detailed account in her petition, showing she was well acquainted with the contracts, credit relationships, and wage and tax arrangements over a career spanning many years, between her deceased husband, the foreman at the estate where her husband had worked, and the count. She was destitute and she was desperate to spare her children from becoming beggars. How did she take action? She was clearly knowledgeable about the details of her husband's work history—this was a discourse in which she felt it was necessary to give a detailed account to substantiate her plea for help to the fullest, not merely throwing herself on the count's mercy and praying for the survival of her children. Further, she elaborated on the way taxes were deducted to show the unfairness of the estate foreman's actions, which had placed her and her children in an impossible situation. Not only did she evidently keep records, but she also used them tactically to strengthen her case, denouncing the estate foreman to the count.<sup>30</sup>



Yet another widow demonstrated her ability for tactical action: Cherstin Gudmundsdotter, whose husband, Jöns Persson, had recently died after working 27 years as a postmaster, asked to take over her dead husband's office. She was encumbered with debt and had four sons to support, so her situation was dire. One son had been a soldier but was laid off for the time being and the other three hoped to become bookkeepers. It was her humble wish to be postmaster—one of very few offices that seventeenth-century widows in Sweden could hold.<sup>31</sup> She also suggested that one son could act as her assistant, while this would enable her to give her other sons the means to get an education. The whole family's future depended on the count's decision, and she was careful to present him with a ready solution.<sup>32</sup>

Christian Hansson, a young De la Gardie silver chamber boy, was another strategic planner whose petition to his master contained a well-thought-out plan. A member of a household where there was considerable mobility in both geographical and social terms, he dared ask his master to fulfil his dream of becoming a pastry chef. His idea was that if De la Gardie paid for his training—which, he underlined, was not expensive—he would not only forever be the count's devoted pastry chef, but he would also be able to support himself. His proposal was apparently well received according to a note on the petition. He was eventually sent to both the royal court in France and several German princely courts where he was trained to become a table setter (*taffeltäckare*).<sup>33</sup>

When employees set out to use the De la Gardie household machinery for their future betterment, they showed their understanding of the opportunities and how to argue their case. They wanted something for themselves—a safer future—and offered loyal service to the count and his house in return. The tactical element of these petitions, we suggest, is in the carefully mustered arguments to navigate a complex situation, requiring a good knowledge of the system and their own circumstances. Their willingness to propose complex solutions indicates that each petitioner had analysed the information available to them, come to a conclusion, and framed it as a concrete request.

## Conclusion

From the view of the De la Gardie administration, secretaries, and bookkeepers, the petitioners (or solicitants as they were sometimes called) were a real problem. In a nine-page memorandum dated October 1666, Erik Månsson Hasselgren gave a detailed account of how to run the 'archive' and keep it in order. One of the constant problems was the petitioners, who demanded attention and kept staff from their other duties. They were hard to keep track of, Hasselgren complained, and staff needed to know which Petter, Påwel, Jon, or Hans was petitioning and whether their claims were legitimate, pointing to the need for administrators to have inside knowledge too. This report from the other side, from those tasked with managing the De la Gardie estates, gives a fresh perspective on the act of petitioning. It confirms its centrality to the organization and its presence in its everyday bureaucracy—and that petitioners' knowledge claims had to be checked and countered by the knowledge produced and preserved by the organization. If not, the amorphous mass of people working for the De la Gardies would have the upper hand.

From this, we conclude that petitioning was considered meaningful and there was reason for petitioners to hope for at least some success. The number of petitions which were granted points in that direction. For employees, the act of petitioning was thus a way forward, an arena for action where they had an agency they may not have had elsewhere. In petitions, employees could detail their cases and claim their rights, appealing to their master's mercy and benevolence while making their case for what they were owed.

From our examples, we would also argue that the knowledge they demonstrated in their petitions was thought important to their success. Hasselgren's memorandum, bewailing the problems of dealing with so many petitioners, was an admission that the De la Gardie bureaucracy was at a disadvantage when it came to knowledge about its employees. The petitioners, meanwhile, provided details to support their claims. Not only did they know what was going on around them—how the system worked, how to keep records, how to calculate their own

debts and money due—which enabled them to make tactical choices when planning for the future, they also used this knowledge to make demands. This kind of knowledge-based agency is a mark of their balancing act, or what we have called *phronetic knowledge*. Petitioning was an act of instrumental rationality, illustrating how petitioners sought to achieve a positive outcome for themselves. But the arguments in the petitions were value-oriented: they made claims to what they saw as right in the context. By presenting the necessary information they sought the recipient's consent, arguing for mutual, contractual relations and for promises to be kept. The petitions discussed in this essay also shared a key feature: they were rarely only a plea for alms. Instead, they usually presented specific claims and detailed calculations, emphasizing the petitioner's right to what was claimed. Although much was made of paternal benevolence, the arguments were often framed in terms of hard figures.

We have chosen to explore phronetic knowledge by looking at employees on aristocratic estates in seventeenth-century Sweden. They were prepared to negotiate improved positions and conditions within an organization which may be best described as feudal, comprising as it did many estates, a strong hierarchy, and a system of compensation built around deferred wages and long-term credit relationships. The petitions written to the master of the household show how employees were guided by an extensive knowledge of the system in which they worked, carefully tailoring their demands, suggestions, and pleas for help. They had knowledge of the possibilities, however restricted, and tried different ways of negotiating to achieve the best outcomes for themselves and their families. Negotiations also show that employees knew how to keep track of their spending, tax arrangements, and credit relationships, in certain cases spanning generations. More than anything, they show that employees, even the lowest in rank, were prepared to act to solve immanent problems or to secure better prospects for themselves and their families and relatives. To strengthen their arguments they applied both knowledge and practical judgement.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, Sven Dupré & Geert Somsen, 'The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Special issue: History of Science or History of Knowledge?* 42/2–3 (2019); Suzanne Marchand, 'How Much Knowledge is Worth Knowing? An American Intellectual Historian's Thoughts on the Geschichte des Wissens', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Special issue: History of Science or History of Knowledge?* 42/2–3 (2019); Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015); Martin Mulrow & Lorraine Daston, 'History of Knowledge', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
- 2 Nico Stehr, 'Knowledge Society, History of', in James D. Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2nd edn, Oxford: Elsevier, 2015).
- 3 Marian Adolf & Nico Stehr, *Knowledge* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 18, 22; Stehr, 'Knowledge Society', 108.
- 4 The project The Aristocratic Household as Academy, funded by the Swedish Research Council, is running 2020–2024.
- 5 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), 117–18.
- 6 The nuances and complexities of these discussions are beyond the scope of this essay. For the wider discussion, see, for example, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Fredrik Svenaeus, 'Vad är praktisk kunskap? En inledning till ämnet och boken', in Fredrik Svenaeus & Jonna Bornemark, *Vad är praktisk kunskap?* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2009), 11–34; Christian Nilsson, 'Fronesis och den mänskliga tillvaron: En läsning av Bok VI i Aristoteles Nikomachiska etik', in Jonna Bornemark & Fredrik Svenaeus, *Vad är praktisk kunskap?* (Södertörn: Södertörn Studies in Practical Knowledge, 2009). For the application of such perspectives, see, for example, Joe Smeeton, 'From Aristotle to Arendt: A Phenomenological Exploration of Forms of Knowledge and Practice in the Context of Child Protection Social Work in the UK', *Qualitative Social Work* 16/1 (2017).
- 7 Anna Petersén & Jan Olsson, 'Calling Evidence-Based Practice into Question: Acknowledging Phronetic Knowledge in Social Work', *British Journal of Social Work* 45/5 (2015), 1584.
- 8 Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lecture at the Collège de France, 1973–74* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 134; Cecilia Riving, 'Phronesis as Therapy and Cure', in Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar (eds.), *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020).
- 9 Jonna Bornemark, 'Neutrality or Phronetic Skills: A Paradox in the Praxis of Citizen Dialogues Organized by Municipal Administration', *Pedagogika Społeczna* 3/65 (2017), 55. The conceptualization includes practical knowledge, phronetic knowledge, and even phronetic skill, all being variations (and synonyms) of the original term, *phronesis*.

- 10 Bent Flyvbjerg, 'Phronetic Planning Research: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections', *Planning Theory & Practice* 5/3 (2004), 284.
- 11 Ibid. 295–6.
- 12 Ibid. 293.
- 13 Michel de Certeau, 'On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life', *Social Text* 3 (1980).
- 14 Flyvbjerg, 'Phronetic Planning Research', 284 quoting Vickers.
- 15 Faramerz Dabhoiwala, 'Writing Petitions in Early Modern England' in Michael J. Braddick & Joanna Innes (eds.), *Suffering and Happiness in England 1550–1850: Narratives and Representations* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 127.
- 16 Ibid. 127; Martin Almbjör, *The Voice of the People? Supplications Submitted to the Swedish Diet in the Age of Liberty, 1719–1772* (Umeå: Department of Historical, Philosophical & Religious Studies, Umeå University, 2016), 3–5.
- 17 Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives), Stockholm (RA), Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, Sammandrag av brev och suppliker med resolutionspåteckningar från 1650–1680, vols. E1656–E1658.
- 18 Anna Nilsson Hammar & Svante Norrhem, 'Servants as Creditors: Navigating the Moral Economy of an Early Modern Aristocratic Household', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47/4 (2022), 500–503.
- 19 RA, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, vol. E1642, Oluff and Anders to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.
- 20 Ibid., Swen Månsson to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, 11 Feb. 1679.
- 21 RA, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, vol. E1641, Christian Taffeltäckare to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.
- 22 Ibid., Staffan Nilsson to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.
- 23 Ibid., Nils Månsson to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.: 'ansöka, och tillkännagiva hurulunda en god del resterar, och innestår på lönen, och nu hos mig befinner stor mangel och brist på kläder, och mera annat jag till min fattiga hustrus, många små barns och mitt ringa hushålls försorg kunde bevara'.
- 24 Ibid., Nils Månsson to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.: 'dem jag nu uti största ödmjukhet underdånigen bedder, at EHGE nådigst behagade mig ringa tjänare till ställa låta, och der med behjälpeelig wara, till min fattiga hustrus och barns uppehälle näring'.
- 25 Ibid., Samtliga hovryttare to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.
- 26 RA, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, vol. E1642, Erik Jakobsson to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, Jan. 1649; see also RA, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, vol. E1641, Gustaf Larsson to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, 11 Jan. 1683. For other examples, see, for example, *ibid.*, Petter Andersson to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.
- 27 RA, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, vol. E1622, Carin Persdotter to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d. For an example of what could happen to those who could not provide correct accounts, see RA, Oluff Andersson to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d., Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, vol. E1642.
- 28 For a lengthier discussion of the distinction between tactics and strategies, see Certeau, 'Oppositional Practices', 5–10.
- 29 RA, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, vol. E1622, Christina [Ca–lsdotter] to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.

- 30 Ibid., Margareta Larsdotter to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, n.d.
- 31 Britta Lundgren, *Allmänhetens tjänare: Kvinnlighet och yrkeskultur i det svenska postverket* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1990).
- 32 RA, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies samling, vol. E1622, Cherstin Gudmundsdotter to Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, 1 Dec. 1670.
- 33 Lunds Universitetsbibliotek (Lund University Library) (LUB), Släktarkiven, Samling De la Gardie, vol. 100, Handlingar rörande Maria Euphrosyne De la Gardie, född von Zweibrücken (1625–1687), draft 24 June 1686.



# Grappling with knowledge actors

## A view from global history

*Lisa Hellman*

In this essay, I bring global history into contact with the history of knowledge, and specifically the actors circulating it. Doing so highlights three possible fracture points: actors, circulation, and knowledge. I look closely at each and consider to what degree a global perspective presents challenges when applying each term, and what paths ahead lie open for us.

A move from the history of science to a history of knowledge means including a more diverse range of practices, and placing these in a cultural, social setting. Global history makes those settings *inter-regional*, either by comparison or by applying a non-national framework of analysis; bringing in how global encounters and ties across borders have worked as a motor for development and change is key to letting the field mature and grow. Thus, global history approaches, perspectives, and methodological solutions have every potential to enrich the history of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> As Peter Burke points out, however, the ‘most fundamental challenge’ to the history of knowledge comes from the rise of global history: a broadening of the field is not uncomplicated.<sup>2</sup>

Thankfully, friction is productive. The challenges that come from integrating a global approach into the history of knowledge illuminate fault lines present in both fields. I would argue that asymmetric power relations and un/freedom are key issues for the history of knowledge



and global history alike. With this in mind, to what degree are the concepts actor, circulation, and knowledge helpful, or workable, within the frame of global history? To what degree can global history illustrate the tensions within now-established understandings? Most importantly, what are our most promising routes ahead?

## Actors

To start with the actor—the person or people producing, circulating, and making use of various forms of knowledge—the history of knowledge welcomes knowledge actors in a multitude of incarnations. This impulse draws largely on developments in the history of science; this is why some would consider the history of knowledge as an expansion or a qualification of the history of science, rather than a field in its own right.<sup>3</sup> Leaving that discussion aside, the two fields nevertheless move in step and are developing similar strategies, for example the inclusion of artisanal knowledge practices.<sup>4</sup> It has been more than twenty years since the major paradigm shift in the history of science broke with the presuppositions of how science is created, and who created it, moving away from the idea of the lone, male, and scholarly genius.<sup>5</sup> Donna Haraway underlines the strong presupposition of the gender of a scholarly actor, a theoretical understanding that has further obscured the role of women in this history.<sup>6</sup> In addition, studies show the importance of assistant and laboratory workers, highlighting them as key workers in the scientific revolution.<sup>7</sup> However, this broadening of who was a knowledge actor in terms of gender and class remain focused largely on Europe and North America.

Despite the best of intentions, the effect has been to privilege certain types of knowledge and certain processes generating knowledge. Cases when they acted as knowledge actors elsewhere merely stressed that the production had a home front and a place to study, and that the two were not the same.<sup>8</sup> Patrick O'Brien has argued that the emergence of a global history of knowledge was strongly connected to the European dominance of science.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, studies have and are problematizing the block-like division between 'traditional' or

‘Indigenous’ knowledge and ‘European’ or ‘colonial’ knowledge as one that also reproduces Eurocentric dichotomies.<sup>10</sup>

This classed, gendered turn towards a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of how new knowledge was created and spread eventually sparked the inclusion of actors from outside Europe, and as fields such as intellectual history and the history of science are taking a global turn, in that Eurocentric norms are being called into question, this remaining European and North American bias (and the binary division between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’) has not gone unnoticed. A common conception of global intellectual history consists simply in the intellectual history of parts of the world not considered the West.<sup>11</sup> This is like the attempts to ‘globalize’ the history of knowledge. Lukas Verburgt claims that the very thing that helps define the history of knowledge, or for that matter the history of knowledge as a culmination of the modern history of science, is its ‘non-western, non-academic knowledge’.<sup>12</sup> This is reminiscent of the universalist aspect of world history: to gather sufficient examples from all parts of the world is to claim a global reach.<sup>13</sup> As global historians would argue, however, any such geographical expansion needs to be coupled with the very things that were exchanged and entangled, as well as parallel theoretical considerations; otherwise there is a risk of focusing on certain types of actors and texts, namely those that fit into an imagined—and often Western European and modern—pattern.<sup>14</sup>

When considering the examples of non-European knowledge actors, examples are commonly drawn from China, Japan, and India—notably regimes of knowledge that can be considered with little reconsideration of the scholar, or his place in society (because it is invariably a he).<sup>15</sup> When going beyond the insular consideration of one society, scholars often focus on go-betweens.<sup>16</sup> Any circulation of knowledge between or within cultures required go-betweens: intercultural brokers who did not merely ‘transfer’ knowledge, but changed it. A classic example is that of the navigator and priest Tupaia, who acted as a translator for James Cook, giving him access to knowledge he might otherwise not have understood existed, and whose contribution to the navigation of the whole expedition is now being reconsidered. Such go-betweens

included those in privileged positions, such as Hasekura Tsunenaga, who led the Japanese embassy to Madrid and Rome in 1613–1614, during which he imparted knowledge about the state of affairs in Japan. These actors nuance the picture of who the knowledge actor can be—to a degree. When the global turn hit the history of knowledge and its related fields, the way was already paved for the further inclusion of more actors, but what we have seen is a move backwards. In much (though far from all) global history of science, rather than building on these insights, we have seen a renewed conventionality when it comes to the actors the story concerns.

A key argument in the resurgence of biography as a scholarly genre in the 1970s, especially in feminist history writing, was it was a way to highlight actors and stories rarely put centre stage.<sup>17</sup> That is how the genre has been used in global history: global microhistory has drawn on this and the Italian understanding of the genre to highlight hitherto obscured aspects of history. Global microhistories have shown the importance of actors from Africa or East Asia, for example, or of new perspectives on well-known events, beyond imperial or official narratives.<sup>18</sup>

In the history of knowledge, inclusivity, the radical potential of the biographical turn, has struggled to make headway. Milinda Banerjee has shown how the willingness to recognize the importance of non-European actors has led global intellectual historians to place these ‘new’ actors in close relation to conventional, European narratives and show their connection to famous European, male actors, as if it is only by impacting them one demonstrates influence. In doing so, Banerjee argues, forms of intellectual discourse in Indian cosmologies, and indeed by non-elite actors, are obscured.<sup>19</sup> A further example of this is the Indian political theorist M. N. Roy. New research shows how Roy himself consciously weaponized his ‘otherness’ by following a set pattern of how an intellectual from outside Europe or the US should act, dress, and express their thoughts: by being the ‘right’ kind of different, he placed himself in the political, intellectual context where he wanted to be.<sup>20</sup> Following such a pattern of what constitutes an intellectual might not be the best route to take if we are to include

actors from various traditions of thought. To do so is not to aim at ‘representation’ (postcolonial and critical race scholars have shown the weaknesses of such an idea), but rather to avoid stories so narrow they are not merely skewed, but faulty.<sup>21</sup>

Nadin Heé has pointed out that allowing postcolonialism to inform the history of knowledge is also to harness the potential of global history. We need not only to include an ‘other’, but also break down the conceptions of that ‘other’. Using binaries of ‘West’ and ‘the Rest’ is part of the problem, one that including insular ‘non-European’ actors and examples does not solve. Crucially, beyond including diverse actors, regimes, and phenomena, we need to consider them as part of the same world, be it in a comparative or an entangled sense.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, a global turn for knowledge actors brings demands for an even more inclusive approach to the group we consider knowledge actors, one that must be taken without losing track of our hard-won insights on race, class, gender, and binary conceptions of West/Rest.

## Circulation

The next point when considering the concept of knowledge actors in the light of global history is ‘circulation’. This term quickly gained currency because of the way it wrenches the exchange of ideas from a diffusionist understanding and relocates it to active relationships and ideas, objects, or skills as they spread between regions. However, the term has been criticized for being vague and for promoting a smooth flow, rather than allowing for conscious or top-down introduction.<sup>23</sup>

Power relations are, and need to be, part of our analyses of history. How to systematically integrate a power perspective is a challenge for all global history, but integrating this reality is crucial to making a global history of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> The insight that knowledge creation takes place on uneven ground and in a landscape of power relations between genders, ethnic groups, and regions is far from new, but it is increasingly placed centre stage.<sup>25</sup> In key works such as *Global Intellectual History* (2013) and *How To Write The Global History Of Knowledge Making* (2020), power is presented as inherent to the

universalization of narratives, and in the organization of knowledge and interpretation of scientific regimes.<sup>26</sup>

Martin Mulrow and Lorraine Daston have touched on how the history of knowledge and the suppression of knowledge are key to understanding colonial dynamics.<sup>27</sup> Such discussions of colonial power in the history of knowledge go back to Edward Said, who underscores that knowledge production was closely tied to the exercise of power—the epistemic logic of colonialism, according to which some are studied and represented, and others do the studying. Much work has been done, and is being done, on knowledge as an instrument of colonial and imperial domination, especially in the UK and North America.<sup>28</sup> According to this strand of research, hegemonic imperial discourses displace other narratives. The underlying logic of dissemination holds true also for studies of knowledge regimes in, for example, Japanese and Russian colonialism.<sup>29</sup>

While crucial for understanding imperial history, the question is how this globalizes knowledge in the long term. This calls to mind Dipesh Chakrabarty's argument that to study European knowledge regimes, in however critical a manner, perpetuates the historiographical theories, methods, and categories on which they are based. As an alternative, he calls on us to allow for a heterogeneous worldview by provincializing Europe, not in the spirit of cultural relativism, but to deconstruct the assumptions that the Enlightenment or modernization are universally valid.<sup>30</sup>

Going beyond imperial knowledge regimes, historians of knowledge argue that their approach can show the power of migrants to counter local knowledge—the subversive knowledge practices of the subaltern—and how knowledge dissemination was coupled with appropriation.<sup>31</sup> However, this still assumes the existence of discrete regimes of knowledge, feeding into universalist writing, covering the whole world. Studies which argue for the influence of certain centres beyond Europe (most famously those in India) can still assume Eurocentric definitions and values, as Kapil Raj points out, and even couple it with progression or evolution.<sup>32</sup>

This provincialization is not without its complications. Jürgen Renn calls for caution, saying that by provincializing science we risk obfuscating its power dynamics, even silencing some of the crimes committed in its name. He argues instead that the point is to recognize how the world has been connected by knowledge, and the planetary impact of it.<sup>33</sup> However, Renn's global mapping of the impact of science presumes an imperial centre. Global history, meanwhile, has long discussed how to map interconnections and knowledge transfer even when detached from the imperial and colonial contexts, and to do so as a way to examine global geopolitical constellations and conditions in specific cases.<sup>34</sup> There are today studies that question any notion of one-sided knowledge transfers, diffusion, or appropriation; showing several simultaneous localities of knowledge production, assuming no clear centre, but still not shying away from mapping the asymmetries of power.<sup>35</sup> Sebastian Conrad, for example, not only rewrites the dominant narrative about the diffusion of European Enlightenment thought, but argues that it was in fact the many global entanglements themselves that blocked the view of the manifold contributions of non-European thinkers to the Enlightenment, including actors from Haiti, Korea, China, and India.<sup>36</sup> Keeping track of these complicated notions of power when applying an actor-focused lens will be key.

From the first, intercultural connections and global entanglements have been inherent in the notion of 'circulation'.<sup>37</sup> As the history of knowledge evolves, it grapples with its conventional understanding of science as being something conscious—even a proof of a conscious action. Global history has been rightly criticized for its mobility bias, and has increasingly had to include relationships of power, silence, dissonance, and disruption.<sup>38</sup> In light of that shared problem, a global history of knowledge risks combining the worst of global history and the history of knowledge, and might even be read as celebratory.<sup>39</sup> Part of that risk stems from the focus on actors, in particular their agency.

Agency is not something inherent to actors, as if as soon as one has a biographical approach, it demonstrates agency. Rather, it is part of a qualitative idea: a way of being and a way of doing. As such, it is key to an understanding of circulation. Agency naturally becomes a key term

when considering actors' influence and actions as a driving force in the history of knowledge, as this volume does. It is questionable how helpful it is, though. Agency has been questioned for decades, and its connection to neoliberal ideas of freedom is plain to see.<sup>40</sup> In the light of the global challenge for a history of knowledge, it might help to go back to Walter Johnson's seminal essay 'On agency'. Writing about slavery, he questions the scholar's will to find and highlight agency, and to define that as conscious, ideally subversive, action.<sup>41</sup> Slavery studies have for natural reasons a nuanced, vibrant discussion of freedom and agency. The history of knowledge has not been part of that discussion. Rather, such discussions as exist are about knowledge actors' room for manoeuvre and come in the form of social position and the skills to make use of it.<sup>42</sup> This is interesting, because freedom has historically been seen as a prerequisite for scholarly thought in Europe. Only those with enough money, time, and liberty to act as they choose—in short only gentlemen—could be trusted to create truth.<sup>43</sup> This notion sometimes bleeds over into modern analyses of historical scholarly processes. There is a strong, recurring, if rarely stated idea that carrying out scholarly work is a sign of agency in a historical actor, even of liberty.

Global history can offer fresh perspectives, because it brings in different types of actors all over the world and as a result sheds light on very different settings for knowledge production or circulation. An example is the tens of thousands of Korean craftsmen and farmers who were kidnapped in the Imjin War (1592–1598). They were targeted because of their skill, put to work on arrival in Japan, and had a significant impact on the development of Japanese pottery, especially the now famous Arita, Satsuma, and Hagi ware. Another example is Chinese migrant plantation workers in nineteenth-century Peru, working under exploitative coolie contracts, and how they drew on Indigenous knowledge to work the local soil and grow crops, funnelling that knowledge back to the coercive landowners. A final example is the Jesuits and Franciscans at the Beijing court in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who are famously presented as privileged and with a unique influence on Chinese mathematical

thinking and East Asian cosmologies. When looking at their work, life, and mobility, however, they are better understood as domestic slaves to the Kangxi emperor.<sup>44</sup>

The interesting thing is that applying the label of enslaved or coerced to any of these actors does not change what they did, nor their influence. The key is how knowledge actors have been presented: supposing that to create knowledge is a sign of agency, even liberty, then tracing their knowledge becomes a proof of that agency. As examples from global history can help show, sometimes the opposite was actually the case. This story is a complicated one, as tales of manumission and ego-documents of captivity became part of a broad epistemology of freedom and slavery being renegotiated over the course of the eighteenth century, so those who had been unfree helped circulate knowledge and create ideas of what it was to be free.<sup>45</sup> It is hazardous to draw conclusions about an actor's scope for manoeuvre based on the fact they took part in scholarly exchanges; this does not mean we should disregard their skills, but instead should not overestimate the degree to which being a knowledge broker was a choice.

To include coerced circulation of knowledge, for example by prisoners and captives, shows the diversity of intellectual labourers, but also friction in the circulation—that is, the people who could not, or would not, move, and diverse forms of forced mobility. While the very concept of 'circulation of knowledge' is rooted in both postcolonialism and critical network theory, critics emphasize how easily the flows can seem smooth.<sup>46</sup>

This is another way the history of knowledge and global history move in lockstep. Today, some of the most widely cited texts are about the absence of transregional connections, when ideas or knowledge are concealed, distorted or falsified, and occasions when connections break and disappear.<sup>47</sup> Some of the most exciting work on this friction is by historians of translation and language, in which mistranslations, silences, and confusion have long been debated.<sup>48</sup> Historians of knowledge too argue for the importance of considering histories of silences, of not knowing: Cornel Zwierlein calls it the 'dark side of knowledge', and adds that we should study who has the power to draw



the line between the known and the not known.<sup>49</sup> As Verburgt points out, such delineations are not carried out randomly. Rather, to create knowledge is also to create, or grapple with, epistemic hierarchies.<sup>50</sup> Crucially, though, the focus here is still the creation of knowledge as the end point and marker of power—or the lack of it. Examples such as the enslaved Korean potters can help us remember there are darker sides to knowledge than not being heard, or not being allowed to become a knowledge actor.

In the 2000s, global history was rightly criticized for not sufficiently addressing unequal power relations and exploitation. Now, some twenty years later, these issues are at the heart of the conversation. While we must be careful not to return to diffusion, all actors and areas did not have the same resources to produce and circulate knowledge. In future, we might analyse circulation *about* inequality and unfree actors; *by* unequal and unfree actors, but also inequality in the circulation itself: in some directions there might be easy flows, sometimes we might recognize friction or a complete stop, and sometimes knowledge can be forced forward. In the circulation of knowledge, the circle could be a manacle.

## Knowledge

A final concept to consider is the notion of knowledge. The history of knowledge has a broad definition of knowledge, relying on an expansion within history of science around the turn of the century, with scholars such as Simon Schaffer underlining how even the classic actor of the scientific revolution relied on practical, hands-on work, and how the division between practical and theoretical knowledge is not only highly anachronistic, but downright wrong.<sup>51</sup> This is now par for the course within the history of science. When the discussion goes global there is, however, little agreement on what knowledge is not and a great willingness to say what it is: the definition of knowledge at the moment is inclusive, reaching from those who include examples from the classic history of science to all that is non-academic and non-Western.<sup>52</sup> With a global turn, this lack of a definition of

what constitutes knowledge is even more important, but also more challenging.

This leads to a larger discussion—that of the norms of comparison and analysis in global history. As early as 2006, Jack Goody, an advocate of a global perspective, was warning against comparisons on the basis of a European model of scholarship. If the only thing that counts as a university is a building and institution that looks like those in Europe in both form and function, then higher education automatically and unavoidably becomes a European invention.<sup>53</sup> If, on the other hand, one compares practices and functions with an open mind, there is a potential to draw quite a different picture. In the Chinese history of science in particular, this has become a sticking point, exemplified by the ‘Needham question’. This refers to the question posed by the pioneering sinologist and historian of science Joseph Needham: if China was far earlier than Europe with so many key inventions, why was it eventually overtaken? Why did the scientific revolution not take place there? However, this supposed paradox presupposes a European framework of science. Only by shrugging off a strict European understanding of scholarly processes and notions of the scientific, can we understand developments and exchanges elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> Here global history still has much to learn from research on postcolonialism. What one group criticizes can be addressed by taking on a different group and their understanding of a problem: dispensing with the parochial approach has a strong analytical potential.

For the history of knowledge, a global turn might thus present an escape from Eurocentrism and narrow definitions of science and knowledge, but it has its challenges. It is a wonderful achievement that knowledge is no longer conceptualized exclusively as theoretical and written knowledge, having expanded to include understandings of knowledge as used by diverse social groups and in diverse regions.<sup>55</sup> At the Moscow court in the seventeenth century, for example, pharmaceuticals were sourced from Asia, Africa, Western Europe, and the Americas. Some botanical items and some chemicals were transformed into medicines in this period, others were not. Newly

imported American botanicals were fashionable, while some common West European practices, such as making medicine from human corpses, sparked disgust.<sup>56</sup> Medicine meant many things, depending on time and place.

The risk with taking diverse, at times conflicting, understandings of knowledge into account is the analytical disconnect when combined with the idea of knowledge as a thing created in intercultural circulation. For more than fifteen years, the history of science has been talking about circulation as a way of moving away from the model where an idea has an origin and spreads by diffusion. This is also a way to judge Mulsow's approach, seeing the history of knowledge as a history of communication. Rather than define knowledge, he sees it as constituted by what is being communicated.<sup>57</sup> But is there a logical end point to the non-origin line of thought? If one follows entirely local norms of knowledge or science, is it possible, say, to compare innovations, applications, or technologies across regions: what are the things being compared then constituted of?<sup>58</sup>

Global history is equally open to this challenge. The theoretical basis of global history, and particularly of circulation, oscillates between two philosophical understandings of what it is we are studying: it posits that a thing has a strict and defined essence, but nevertheless relies on the understanding that the thing is only and exclusively created in negotiation, and has no existence beyond that transformation. On the one hand, we use a Kantian understanding of matter—that a scholar of knowledge is (futilely) trying to understand 'das Ding an sich', the thing-in-itself—albeit recognizing that a thing is created in a culture, a society, and a 'horizon of interpretation'. On the other hand, the extreme take on a non-origin global history would be a Bergson reading, where knowledge, space, and time are inseparable, and space and time continually renew knowledge; there is no origin, and nothing to follow, because the following, the flow, is the thing itself. A global history of knowledge risks being caught between these two partially contradictory understandings. For a global history methodology, the key factors are the entanglements and the consistent negotiation and

change, but global connections are still proven to have happened by showing that a recognizable *something* has shifted place and form.

The impulse to enlarge the concept of knowledge conceptually, regionally, and cosmologically so it makes sense for all regions, all types of actors, and all eras risks leaving us between the Scylla of having a definition so narrow it excludes important processes, groups, and regions and the Charybdis of making us dilute the concept of knowledge until it has lost all meaning and all analytical punch. Although a prerequisite for renegotiating the categories of the history of science, embedded with layers of European history and power, a completely open-ended approach to the history of scientific circulation might at worst be contradicting itself.

### Where do we go from here?

Our task as historians is not merely the deconstruction of established truth, but also the creation of new frameworks and new narratives of the history of knowledge—and to take seriously the question how and indeed whether such ambitions are still possible.

I believe they are. A recent example is Mulsov's *Überreichweiten*, which places truly diverse understandings of knowledge (and the actors working to circulate it) not just side by side, but in an intercultural and connected flow, one marked by not just epistemic, but also classed, racialized hierarchies of power.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in a more theoretical vein, a recent special issue of *Isis* focusing on Chinese gazetteers uses insights from the history of knowledge in an exciting new take on what drove Chinese developments. It sparks the question of whether 'redrawing of the map' of science has an equal bearing on developments elsewhere.<sup>60</sup> Taking this further, a more global history of knowledge might have much to learn from Area Studies. Marcon concludes that the history of science in Asia is becoming a history of knowledge, at least methodologically speaking.<sup>61</sup> It can equally well be put the other way around. Perhaps it is the historians of science working on non-European history and thought who have been paving the way

for approaches now common among historians of knowledge.<sup>62</sup> There China, and scholars working on China, hold a pre-eminent place.

The focus on China as a non-European other still presents an example of a highly literate, often centralized society. This is a point to remember—and to be wary of. Combining global history with the history of knowledge shows how both fields, despite their open ambitions to move beyond established narratives and frameworks, risk perpetuating elite perspectives. Both fields use ideas of circulation and connection that bring to mind an unhindered flow, and both take the neoliberal line that an exchange is for the most part something positive and productive, at the very least for the actor behind it. Neither field has yet fully integrated friction and hindrances, asymmetric power relations and coercion.

One way forward might be to discuss an even broader range of cultural, linguistic, and social brokers, including the unfree, the coerced, and the displaced. To do so might help show the reality of the messy development of scholarly practices, intertwined with multidirectional power relations and go-betweens in precarious positions.<sup>63</sup> When we look at how knowledge circulated, we find not free flows of scientific thought, but exchanges that are site- and context-dependent and could stem from chance or necessity. Drawing on gender and slavery studies, both global history and the history of knowledge should incorporate notions of asymmetric power relations and coercion, allowing for a break with any notion of a tie between knowledge and libertarian freedom—especially when the focus is agency and actors.<sup>64</sup>

Such actors should not be thought insular, however. Were we to do so, we would be reproducing the universalist ambitions of world history. Rather, what global history can offer the history of knowledge is fuel for its interest in locality, in the local and grounded formation of knowledge.<sup>65</sup> With its close connection to geographical theory, global history can help complicate what constitutes locality, showing that our space also had a time, and vice versa, and that that making of space was not only changeable and socially constituted, but also entangled with other spaces and other social processes near and far.

A focus on actors can be used to nuance the very concept of circulation and to discuss how knowledge was moved—with an aim, a direction, and actors making it move. The generating and spread of science and thought are not only potential tools of power, but also things which must relate to the constraints and opportunities of the society they are set in. Circulation depends on power, whether imperial or personal. This fact risks being lost when the ‘circulation’ moves the creation of scholarship from one limited context to an intercultural setting. When used well, the concept of circulation can chart the uneven landscape of power that all human relations move in and create. Where circulation ceases to be celebratory, where it no longer sees knowledge as something inherently positive, it opens up new, exciting, and global avenues of thought.

Study the actors who circulate knowledge and we have the opportunity to grapple with the big questions in the history of knowledge and global history alike. We need to continue to broaden our understanding of who could and would act as a knowledge actor, but without imposing a framework privileging one gender, culture, region, or class. We also need to reconcile the age-old tension in trying to choose between structure and actor as the motor of history, without for that matter equating agency with choice. And finally, we need to create an inclusive, indeed a global understanding of knowledge without watering down the term to where it loses all analytical strength. If we succeed, global history and the history of knowledge will not only meet but thrive together.

## Notes

- 1 Samuel Moyn & Andrew Sartori (eds.), *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 3; for an example, see Joachim Östlund, ‘An Ottoman Imperial North: The Routes and Roots of Knowledge in the Age of Tulips’, in Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar (eds.), *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020).
- 2 Peter Burke, *What Is the History of Knowledge?* (London: John Wiley, 2015).
- 3 Lorraine Daston, ‘The History of Science and the History of Knowledge’, *Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1/1 (2017); Jürgen Renn, ‘From the History

- of Science to the History of Knowledge—and Back’, *Centaurus* 57/1 (2015); see also Staffan Müller-Wille, Carsten Reinhardt & Marianne Sommer (2017), ‘Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Wissensgeschichte’, in Marianne Sommer, Staffan Müller-Wille & Carsten Reinhardt (eds.), *Handbuch Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2017).
- 4 Sven Dupré & Geert Somsen, ‘The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies’, *Berichte Zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42/2–3 (2019).
  - 5 Such notions lingered long, see Annika Berg, Christina Florin & Per Wisselgren, ‘Par i vetenskap och politik’, in ead. (eds.), *Par i vetenskap och politik: Intellectuella äktenskap i moderniteten* (Umeå: Borea, 2011).
  - 6 Donna Jeanne Haraway, ‘Modest Witness: Feminist Diffractions in Science Studies’, in *The Disunity of Science: Boundaries, Contexts, and Power* (Stanford: SUP, 1996).
  - 7 Steven Shapin & Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: PUP, 2011); Matteo Valleriani (ed.), *The Structures of Practical Knowledge* (Cham: Springer, 2017).
  - 8 Arlene Leis (ed.), *Women, Collecting, and Cultures beyond Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2023).
  - 9 Patrick O’Brien, ‘Historical Foundations for a Global Perspective on the Emergence of a Western European Regime for the Discovery, Development, and Diffusion of Useful and Reliable Knowledge’, *Journal of Global History* 8 (2013).
  - 10 Marwa Elshakry, ‘When Science Became Western: Historiographical Reflections’, *Isis* 101/1 (2010). This recalls Fanon and the need he felt to wear a ‘white mask’ as a colonial intellectual.
  - 11 Duncan Bell, ‘Making and Taking Worlds’, in Moyn & Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*; this is also the definition applied by Dupré & Somsen, ‘History of Knowledge’.
  - 12 Lukas M. Verburgt, ‘The History of Knowledge and the Future History of Ignorance’, *Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 4/1 (2020).
  - 13 For an example, see the monumental collections in the now GitHub-supported project *Lieux de savoir*, <https://lieuxdesavoir.hypotheses.org/>. The same logic applies to the global element in Sommer et al., *Handbuch Wissenschaftsgeschichte*.
  - 14 Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, ‘On Ignored Global “Scientific Revolutions”’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 21 (2017); Frederick Cooper, ‘How Global Do We Want Our Intellectual History to Be?’ in Moyn & Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Global Intellectual History Beyond Hegel and Marx’, *History & Theory* 54/1 (2015).
  - 15 This also applies to Marcon’s own reading of Tokugawa society in Federico Marcon, ‘The Critical Promises of the History of Knowledge: Perspectives from East Asian Studies’, *History & Theory* 59/4 (2020); cf. James Poskett, *Horizons: The Global Origins of Modern Science* (Boston: Mariner, 2022).
  - 16 Kapil Raj, ‘Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators’, in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *A Companion to the History of Science* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2016); Vanessa Smith, ‘Joseph Banks’s Intermediaries: Rethinking Global Cultural Exchange’, in Moyn & Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*, 82.
  - 17 Lois W. Banner, ‘Biography as History’, *American Historical Review* 114/3 2009.
  - 18 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006); Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World*,

- 1550–1800 (Cambridge: CUP, 2008); Mark Gamsa, ‘Biography and (Global) Micro-history’, *New Global Studies* (2017); Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Entanglements of a Man Who Never Traveled: A Seventeenth-Century Chinese Christian and His Conflicted Worlds* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Lisa Hellman, ‘Enslaved in Dzungaria: What an Eighteenth-Century Crocheting Instructor Can Teach Us about Overland Globalisation’, *Journal of Global History* 17/3 (2022).
- 19 Milinda Banerjee, “‘All This Is Indeed Brahman’: Rammohun Roy and a “Global” History of the Rights-Bearing Self’, *Asian Review of World Histories* 3/1 (2015).
  - 20 Leonie Wolters, *Cosmopolitan Elites and the Making of Globality: M. N. Roy and Fellow Anti-colonial, Communist and Humanist Intellectuals, c.1915–1960* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).
  - 21 For examples of intellectual and global historians demonstrating this, see Stefanie Gänger, ‘Disjunctive Circles: Modern Intellectual Culture in Cuzco and the Journeys of Incan Antiquities, c.1877–1921’, *Modern Intellectual History* 10/2 (2013); Tonio Andrade, ‘A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory’, *Journal of World History* 21/4 (2010).
  - 22 Nadin Heé (2017), ‘Postkoloniale Ansätze’, in Sommer et al., *Handbuch Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 89.
  - 23 Stefanie Gänger, ‘Circulation: Reflections on Circularity, Entity, and Liquidity in the Language of Global History’, *Journal of Global History* 12/3 (2017).
  - 24 Frederick Cooper, ‘What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian’s Perspective’, *African Affairs* 100/399 (2001); for a more recent debate, see Richard Drayton & David Motadel, ‘Discussion: The Futures of Global History’, *Journal of Global History* 13/1 (2018).
  - 25 A classic is Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).
  - 26 Moyn & Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*; Johannes Feichtinger, Anil Bhatti & Cornelia Hülmbauer (eds.), *How to Write the Global History of Knowledge-Making: Interaction, Circulation and the Transgression of Cultural Difference* (Cham: Springer International, 2020).
  - 27 Martin Mulso & Lorraine Daston, ‘History of Knowledge’, in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
  - 28 Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: OUP, 1981); Christopher Alan Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000); John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: OUP, 2014). It also includes the notion of the colony as a laboratory for innovation, see Frederick Cooper & Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
  - 29 Gregory Afinogenov, *Spies and Scholars: Chinese Secrets and Imperial Russia’s Quest for World Power, Spies and Scholars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Mariko Asano Tamanoi, ‘Knowledge, Power, and Racial Classification: The “Japanese” in “Manchuria”’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 59/2 (2000); Nadin Heé, *Imperiales Wissen und koloniale Gewalt: Japans Herrschaft in Taiwan 1895–1945* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2012).



- 30 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: PUP, 2000).
- 31 Verburgt, 'History of Knowledge'; for subalternity, see Renn, 'From the History of Science', 38.
- 32 Kapil Raj, 'Beyond Postcolonialism ... and Postpositivism: Circulation and the Global History of Science', *Isis* 104/2 (2013); this problem is still apparent in Poskett, *Horizons*; Jürgen Renn, *The Evolution of Knowledge* (Princeton: PUP, 2020).
- 33 Renn, 'From the History of Science', 39.
- 34 Lissa Roberts, 'Situating Science in Global History: Local Exchanges and Networks of Circulation', *Itinerario* 33/1 (2009); Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Focus: Global Histories of Science: Introduction', *Isis* 101/1 (2010), 95–97; Jonardon Ganeri, 'Well-Ordered Science and Indian Epistemic Cultures: Toward a Polycentered History of Science', *Isis* 104/2 (2013), 348–59; Dagmar Schäfer, 'Thinking in Many Tongues: Language(s) and Late Imperial China's Science', *Isis* 108/3 (2017).
- 35 Two early examples are Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Pidgin-Knowledge: Wissen und Kolonialismus* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2013). Many have followed in their footsteps.
- 36 Sebastian Conrad, 'Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique', *American Historical Review* 117/4 (2012).
- 37 Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*; for Raj, 'Beyond Postcolonialism', the concept of circulation was meant to overcome binaries such as centre and periphery, and include power, resistance, and negotiation.
- 38 David A. Bell & Alex Shephard, 'This Is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network', *New Republic* (26 Oct. 2013); Drayton & Motadel, 'Futures of Global History'; Jeremy Adelman, 'Is Global History Still Possible, or Has It Had Its Moment? Aeon Essays', *Aeon* (2 Mar. 2017). [aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment](http://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment).
- 39 Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Global Intellectual History Meanings and Methods', in Moyn & Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*.
- 40 Lynn M. Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', *Gender & History* 28/2 (2016); this ties into the critique of Homi Bhabha's overly post-structuralist approach, losing sight of asymmetric power relations and material conditions, summarized in Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- 41 Walter Johnson, 'On Agency', *Journal of Social History* 37/1 (2003).
- 42 See, for example, Martin Mulrow, *Prekäres Wissen: Eine andere Ideengeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012).
- 43 Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- 44 Litian Swen, *Jesuit Mission and Submission: Qing Rulership and the Fate of Christianity in China, 1644–1735* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).
- 45 Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600–1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002); Elodie Duché, 'Captives in Plantations: British Prisoners of War and Visions of Slavery in Napoleonic France and Mauritius', *French History & Civilization* 7 (2017); Joachim Östlund, *Saltets pris: Svenska slavar i Nordafrika och handeln i Medelhavet 1650–1770* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014).

- 46 Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*; Graham Harman, 'Entanglement and Relation: A Response to Bruno Latour and Ian Hodder', *New Literary History* 45/1 (2014).
- 47 See, for example, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: PUP, 2004); Robert N. Proctor & Londa Schiebinger (eds.), *Agnology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: SUP, 2008); Margot Finn, "Frictions" d'empire: Les réseaux de circulation des successions et des patrimoines dans la Bombay coloniale des années 1780', tr. Cécile d'Albis, *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 65/5 (2010); for a recent example, see Ulrike Kistner, 'Can Black Folk Dream—in Theory? Psychoanalysis and/of/in Coloniality: Anamnesis of a Failed Encounter', in Johannes Feichtinger, Anil Bhatti & Cornelia Hülbauer (eds.), *How to Write the Global History of Knowledge-Making: Interaction, Circulation and the Transgression of Cultural Difference* (Cham: Springer International, 2020); an entire centre in Munich, dis:connect, has recently been founded upon this idea.
- 48 Doris Bachmann-Medick, 'Introduction: The Translational Turn', *Translation Studies* 2 (2009); Miguel Ramalhe Gomes, *Translation, the Canon and Its Discontents: Version and Subversion* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017); Céline Carayon, *Eloquence Embodied: Nonverbal Communication among French and Indigenous Peoples in the Americas* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute, University of North Carolina Press, 2019).
- 49 Cornel Zwierlein, *The Dark Side of Knowledge: Histories of Ignorance, 1400 to 1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); cf. Linsey McGoe, *The Unknowers: How Strategic Ignorance Rules the World* (London: Zed, 2019).
- 50 Verburgt, 'History of Knowledge'.
- 51 Shapin & Schaffer, *Leviathan*; Renn, 'From the History of Science', 37.
- 52 Dupré & Somsen, 'History of Knowledge'; Verburgt, 'History of Knowledge', even points out how this is defined by what it is not; in Japan too it largely overlaps with the definition of the history of science, see Marcon, 'Critical Promises'.
- 53 Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).
- 54 See Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Volker Scheid & Curie Virág, 'Introduction to History of Science Special Section on tong 通', *History of Science* 56/2 (2018); Thomas Maissen & Barbara Mittler, *Why China Did Not Have a Renaissance—and Why That Matters* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2018); Marcon, 'Critical Promises', also discusses why the Needham question persists.
- 55 Renn, 'From the History of Science'; Dupré & Somsen, 'History of Knowledge'; for another call for comparisons, see Dag Herbjørnsrud, 'Beyond Decolonizing: Global Intellectual History and Reconstruction of a Comparative Method', *Global Intellectual History* 6/5 (2021).
- 56 Clare Griffin, *Mixing Medicines: The Global Drug Trade and Early Modern Russia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022).
- 57 Mulsow, *Prekäres Wissen*.
- 58 This vagueness and the problems it poses for comparisons are also discussed by Marcon, 'Critical Promises', 30–1, although he sees the malleability as a strength.
- 59 Martin Mulsow, *Überreichweiten: Perspektiven einer globalen Ideengeschichte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022).

- 60 Shellen X. Wu, 'Introduction: Redrawing the Map of Science in Modern China', *Isis* 113/4 (2022).
- 61 Marcon, 'Critical Promises', 27.
- 62 Consider influential works such as Benjamin A. Elman & Gordon Wu, *On Their Own Terms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Schäfer, 'Thinking in Many Tongues'.
- 63 See Natalie E. Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Simon Schaffer (ed.), *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2009).
- 64 Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips & Kalpana Wilson, 'Introduction', in ead. (eds.), *Gender, Agency and Coercion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Ana Stevenson, *The Woman as Slave in Nineteenth-Century American Social Movements* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
- 65 Dupré & Somsen, 'History of Knowledge'; Marcon, 'Critical Promises', also refers to this point as crucial to overcome Eurocentric biases.

# Telling stories differently

## Travelling female academics and the circulation of knowledge across continents, 1928–1967

*Ning de Coninck-Smith*

In July 1928, five people applied for a position as lecturer (*docent*) in English at Aarhus University when it had not yet received full university status and was merely providing introductory university courses.<sup>1</sup> Among them were two women: one was Grethe Hjort (1903–1967), the other Johanne Magdalene Stochholm (1894–1976). As well as a description of their academic credentials, both women had attached a testimonial from the internationally renowned linguist Otto Jespersen (1860–1943) to their application. Hjort was only briefly considered as a serious candidate. Stochholm, who was thought to be a man, was not discussed by the members of the governing board.<sup>2</sup>

The selection committee, consisting of three professors from the University of Copenhagen, found that none of the five applicants had substantial research experience and their respective academic merits could not be properly assessed. Since the position was temporary, two members of the committee suggested the hiring of Mr H. T. Price, an Englishman, who had taught at the University of Copenhagen. If Price got the job, went the argument, Aarhus would have an edge over the department of English in Copenhagen, which then would be without a native English speaker. The minority backed Dahl's candidature, arguing that positions at a Danish university should preferably be given to a 'Danish scientist'.<sup>3</sup> The board accepted the

latter recommendation and offered the position to Torsten Dahl (1897–1968), who had spent a year and two summers in the UK, taught at the University of Copenhagen and at a business school and had co-written a textbook, but had no research experience beyond his MA thesis. At this point he already had two children and, according to his application, had been forced to take temporary teaching jobs to provide for his family, not finding the time to work on the material he had collected on English syntax.<sup>4</sup> Six years later, Dahl was promoted to a full professorship and could move his growing family into one of the four newly built houses for professors on the campus grounds, never finishing his doctoral thesis. One can only speculate about the reasons for the board's choice. From the minutes of their meeting, he seemed as unknown to them as Stockholm, with his first name not added until later.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps someone outside the selection committee had put in a good word for him (his father was a professor of law at the University of Copenhagen); perhaps they were swayed by the arguments made by the minority on the selection committee; or perhaps it was just because he was a married man and teaching experience had greater weight than research at this early stage of the new institution.<sup>6</sup>

How the two women received the news of Dahl's appointment is another question that remains unanswered, but shortly afterwards both left Denmark. Hjort travelled to Cambridge, receiving a PhD from Newnham College in 1931 before moving on to a position as a Pfeiffer research fellow at Girton College. Stockholm took up a position as professor of English at the all-female Sweet Briar College in Virginia. Their research interests reflected the importance of Renaissance poetry in the study of English. During her time at Cambridge, Hjort continued her studies of the fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*, while Stockholm prepared to publish her PhD thesis on the English dramatist Philip Massinger (1583–1640).<sup>7</sup>

## Interpretations

Hjort's and Stochholm's academic journeys bear many similarities to the travels of other university-educated women when more young women were knocking at the doors of the universities. The pioneering years were gone and an ever-growing number of young women were opting for a career within academia. Studies by Joyce Goodman, Tamson Pietsch, and others have shown that the Anglo-American tradition of female colleges combined with networks, clubs, and libraries for female academics supported women's possibilities of obtaining an academic position. Women from the UK were helped by the existence of the British Empire and the founding of 'settler universities'.<sup>8</sup> However, some have also noted that women rarely reached the upper echelons of academia, remaining on the margins in roles as highly educated wives, administrators, or temporary teachers. The modernization of femininity in the interwar years, which led to demands for the acknowledgement of women's academic competence and greater equality in sexual life and marriage, breathed new life into women's colleges and the homosocial relationships that dominated libraries, seminars, and laboratories. Female students were no longer (solely) preparing for marriage but aspired to live an independent academic and working life.<sup>9</sup>

In this essay, I trace Hjort's and Stochholm's academic journeys and, despite their Danish origins, the striking parallels with travelling female academics from Anglo-American academia. My approach to the exploration of the issue of Knowledge Actors is microhistorical and biographical. It enables me to explore the mediators that facilitated the circulation of knowledge about academic positions across continents. As pointed out by Heike Jöns, mediators can be material or immaterial. Examples of material mediators include letters, testimonials, and institutions such as university departments or female colleges, while academic cultures, knowledge, affections, and aspirations are examples of immaterial mediators.<sup>10</sup> However this essay is not only a narrative about two individuals and their dreams of academic employment; it

also shows how universities are contested and gendered spaces, where private and academic lives are interwoven.<sup>11</sup>

Hjort has been the subject of various short biographical entries and mentioned in memoirs written by her contemporaries. In 2003, John Stanley Martin published a booklet that placed her time at University Women's College in Melbourne in a broader narrative of her scholarly contributions and return to Aarhus University.<sup>12</sup> Stockholm has not attracted any similar interest among historians. With this essay, I set out to connect their lives and so render the invisible visible.

### Travels and grants

When leaving Denmark after the rejection of her application in 1928, Hjort was already familiar with the research environment in Cambridge from both short and longer visits in the preceding years when collecting material for her MA thesis on the link between different manuscripts of William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>13</sup> Around 1936, she changed her name to Greta Hort and applied for British citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

In 1938, Hjort was appointed the first principal-elect of the University Women's College in Melbourne. This was so exceptional, news of it reached the Danish and Australian newspapers even before her arrival.<sup>15</sup> She took leave in 1946 and travelled to Palestine, Britain, and Denmark, before settling in Prague with her companion, the Jewish geographer Julie Moscheles (1892–1956), a specialist on Scandinavian geomorphology who had been employed at Charles University before the war. The two women had met during the war at the Czech section of the Red Cross in Melbourne, where Hjort was president. On her return, Moscheles discovered that her family had been exterminated by the Nazi occupiers.<sup>16</sup>

While in Cambridge, Hjort had taken an interest in mysticism and, once in Melbourne, she embarked on further studies of the history and philosophy of religion. In Prague, she continued these studies, with a special focus on what might have caused the Plagues of Egypt, held a presentation on the history of Charles University at the Congress of the Communist Party in 1951, and translated several books from

Czech to English.<sup>17</sup> When Moscheles died in 1956, Hjort returned to Denmark. For the second time, she applied for a position as a lecturer at Aarhus University and in 1958 was appointed a professor at the department of English, becoming only the second female professor at the university.<sup>18</sup>

When a reporter from the Danish women's magazine *Alt for Damerne* asked Hjort in 1960 why she had not remained in Denmark, she answered that she had no reason to stay since there was no peg on which to hang her hat. She had worked hard to finish her MA before the retirement of her supervisor, the famous linguist Otto Jespersen—but, having failed to do so, she could not apply for his position.<sup>19</sup> According to Jespersen's memoirs, she still would not have got the position, despite her academic promise, because she was too young—she was 24.<sup>20</sup>

Hjort financed her studies with a combination of grants and work. In her second year at Newnham College, she secured a grant of £240 from the Stuart Research Fund, arguing that her study of *Piers Plowman* demanded that she remained in Cambridge, but that it was 'financially difficult for me'.<sup>21</sup> A couple of years later, her studies at Girton College were paid for by the award of a Pfeiffer Research Fellowship and the Gamble Prize in 1936. Beside these grants, she paid her way by teaching at the Royal Danish School of Educational Studies (Danmarks Lærerhøjskole) in the summer.<sup>22</sup>

Like Hjort, Stochholm had spent time abroad before she left Denmark in 1929. She made her way across the Atlantic for the first time in 1923 to study at the women-only Bryn Mawr College. Also like Hjort, she financed her studies through a combination of work and grants. She probably had a small inheritance from her father, who died when she was 18 (her mother had died in childbirth). As a student, she lived with her stepmother and three young siblings before leaving for the US.<sup>23</sup> During her studies at the University of Copenhagen, she had earned her living as a translator and as a private secretary to Kristoffer Nyrop (1858–1931), professor of Romance languages at the University of Copenhagen.<sup>24</sup> She received a travel grant from the University of Copenhagen in 1923 and, the following year, a grant



from the American-Scandinavian Foundation. Stockholm's private correspondence with the president of Smith College, William Neilson, shows that during the Great Depression, when it was presumably difficult to get grants, Neilson lent her \$400 interest-free to cover her living expenses and research. She later paid him back and in 1931 donated a further \$60 to be spent on loans and scholarships for the college's students.<sup>25</sup> It was also to Smith that Stockholm turned in 1932, when she needed two people as character reference for her application to be naturalized as a US citizen.<sup>26</sup>

### Academic networks, references and testimonials

Stochholm was among the founding members of the Danish branch of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) in 1922. As secretary, she represented Danish women at the federation's international conference in Paris that same year. According to the later president, Aslaug Møller (1876–1964), she had benefitted from her contacts within this network when travelling to the US.<sup>27</sup> On her way to Bryn Mawr College in 1923, she had passed through the UK. Here she stayed with a cousin of M. Carey Thomas, who was president of Bryn Mawr College, from where Stochholm would gain a PhD in 1925. According to Thomas's description, she was 'a jolly fat Danish girl' who would 'make an excellent speaker for any Internat[ional] Or Crosby Hall meeting, as she is enthusiastic about both'. Crosby Hall in London was leased by the IFUW's British branch, which added a residential block to the great hall and space for offices. The hall of residence was later used by guest researchers who had received an IFUW scholarship.<sup>28</sup> Later in life, Hjort too made use of all-female institutions, such as the Lyceum Club in Melbourne and Hopkinson House, a residence for women in London that also ran courses in 'institutional management' for prospective principals at women's colleges.<sup>29</sup>

As Pietsch has pointed out, testimonials were of growing importance in the nineteenth century as the number of academic positions grew and new universities were founded across the British Empire.

Personal acquaintance was backed by degrees, positions, and institutional affiliations.<sup>30</sup> As foreigners, Stochholm and Hjort must have been highly dependent on references and testimonials from people who were known and respected in Anglophone university circles.

Stochholm's employment at Sweet Briar College was facilitated by a letter from William Neilson, president of Smith College where she had been teaching in the academic year 1925–1926, to the principal of Sweet Briar College, Carl Connor, recommending her as 'a person with vigor and a very good mind'. There were 24 others ranked above her at the Smith College English department, so Neilson thought she 'should have a chance at a position with a clearer road ahead ... It seemed to me that she had the equipment required by your description and that her international experience was an asset.' Stochholm had not been happy teaching first-year students and Neilson—and Stochholm—hoped that she could work with more mature students at Sweet Briar. Writing to thank Neilson, Stochholm said she was happy with the teaching and the college was expanding, but she missed the research facilities and genuine interest in research at Smith College.<sup>31</sup>

As mentioned, Hjort had spent time in Cambridge when a student at the University of Copenhagen under the supervision of Professor Otto Jespersen. He had provided her with a testimonial when she applied for the position at Aarhus University in the summer of 1928. In February 1929, he wrote a new testimonial, this time in English, stating that 'Miss Grethe Hjort is certainly one of the ablest pupils I have had in the University of Copenhagen'. While his first testimonial did not get her the job at Aarhus, the second might have helped her entry into Newnham College and later grant from the Stuart Research Fund.<sup>32</sup>

Her application to Girton College in January 1931 came with two references, written by scholars in her field. Both had read her manuscript on *Piers Plowman*, and both were highly impressed. She 'is covering new ground', one wrote. He had taken the liberty of showing the draft to a visiting colleague from Harvard, who wrote a testimonial of his own.<sup>33</sup> When Hjort arrived at Girton College, a new Mistress of Girton College had just been appointed, the mathematician and philosopher Helen Wodehouse (1880–1964). The two women

had a shared interest in mysticism and, according to memoirs of the Australian philanthropist Lady Rosemary Derham (1921–2002), who was a University Women’s College alumna, ‘they carried out experiments with extra-sensory perception ... they claimed that they seemed to know on the day, that a letter did arrive that it would arrive.’<sup>34</sup> According to the memoirs of a Girton College alumna, Mary Duff, Wodehouse had ‘cared for’ Hjort and suggested her future too might lie in running an all-female university college. It was also Wodehouse who encouraged Hjort to apply for the position as principal at the University Women’s College in Melbourne and who later recommended her to the board.<sup>35</sup>

When the Pfeiffer Research Fellowship ended in 1934, Hjort must have been determined to remain in the UK. It seems she applied for teaching positions at other colleges, judging from drafts of testimonials written by the principal of Newnham College, Pernel Strachey (1876–1951).<sup>36</sup> According to Mary Duff, Wodehouse helped Hjort get a job as warden at the Gloucestershire Training College of Domestic Science in 1934. She left the position after a few months to become sub-warden at University House, a University of Birmingham hall of residence. This was a period of her life it seems Hjort wanted the future to forget. When in 1946 Girton College set out to collect information about former students, Hjort demanded this information not be made public.<sup>37</sup>

In 1948, Hjort and her partner Julie Moscheles were involved in plans to establish an international university. How this happened is one among many unanswered questions in this narrative and probably a story in its own right. The proposal came from the International Association of University Professors and Lecturers (IAUPL), a UNESCO-affiliated NGO that existed to support the rebuilding of universities after the war, encourage student and staff exchanges, and contribute to global peace. The proposal had been put forward at IAUPL’s third conference in Paris in the spring of 1948, with participants invited to comment by the end of the year.

Hjort and Moscheles made a few comments on the original draft and set out to produce a description of their own ideal international

university of human studies, with an international staff who would contribute to intercultural knowledge and understanding and breathe new life into philosophical and humanities departments and enhance their societal prestige.<sup>38</sup> According to Professor Franz Blatt (1902–1979) of Aarhus University, Hjort mentioned in a letter to him that she had hoped to gain a position at the international university if it were to be in Prague, rather than the proposed site in Switzerland.<sup>39</sup> However, nothing came of it, and the proposal to create international social science institutes also stalled.<sup>40</sup> This led Hjort to conclude in the curriculum vitae she sent with her application in 1956 that ‘had the conditions been different, then I would have had the best opportunities to study in all Europe’s libraries. The hope was crushed and now, with the death of Professor Moscheles, there is nothing to keep me in Prague.’<sup>41</sup>

At the meeting at the Faculty of Humanities where Blatt mentioned Hjort’s reasons for living in Prague, he also admitted he had ‘accelerated’ her application for the vacant position of English lecturer.<sup>42</sup> According to John Stanley Martin, she had smuggled a message out of Czechoslovakia ‘to Aarhus University’ after Moscheles’ death since she could not obtain an exit visa because of her status as a foreigner with a residence permit.<sup>43</sup>

### Transnational knowledge encounters

Even before she arrived at Melbourne University, Hjort had made a name for herself. In an interview in the Melbourne newspaper *The Mercury* before she left London at the end of May 1938, she was described as ‘typical of the modern intellectual of the day’, who, despite wearing hardly any make-up herself, was supportive of young women’s use of lipstick, ‘as long as it did not leave marks, which the unfortunate college domestic had to remove’. The article continued that she believed men and women should meet at college dances, drink coffee together, go on hiking trips, and take ‘advantage of all that youthful companionship had to offer’. This was how young girls behaved in Denmark. According to Hjort, ‘they were naturally keen

on sport, arid outdoor life, I think the tendency is perhaps to be less “professional” than in the rest of Europe. We value simple things such as hiking, cycling, and swimming far more than competitive forms of sport.<sup>44</sup> Once settled in Melbourne, she decided that the doors to the college should stay open until 10 p.m., with the last person to enter locking the gate. For the college’s female students, this was simultaneously both wonderful and shocking.<sup>45</sup>

At a graduate reception in July 1938, she spoke of the importance of university education. It could ‘help a person to find out what kind of work they wanted to do, help them to find that work and fitted them to take it up’.<sup>46</sup> On another occasion, she said young people were not ready for life when they left school. A university education was a way of becoming good citizens, and of ‘producing good husbands and wives—a fact which was often overlooked’.<sup>47</sup>

I cannot with any certainty say whether these statements were considered too ‘modern’ or if there were other reasons some members of the College Council in Melbourne ‘were not attuned to her ideas’, which also included an extension of the library and expanding intellectual activities to include things such as study circles and the employment of ‘resident’ tutors. According to the memoirs of another alumna of University Women’s College, Diana Dyason (1919–1989), there were even ‘rumblings of student revolt, mostly the result of arbitrariness, use of pressure tactics, and what are best termed personal problems’.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps it was true, as somebody later reminisced, that she was not qualified to be a domestic bursar.<sup>49</sup>

One of Hjort’s legacies, according to her obituary, written by Torsten Dahl, was her quest for efficiency, or as he had put it, ‘Efficiency—she did not use the word herself—was highly sought after, even though the price was traditional understandings of “academic freedom”’.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, at a meeting of the Faculty Council shortly after her death, the dean, Holger Friis Johansen (1927–1996), remembered her as someone willing to share her experiences from Melbourne and Cambridge while ‘respecting what is valuable in the Danish tradition’.<sup>51</sup> These two characterizations reflect contemporary disagreements about the direction in which universities were heading. Was the Danish

tradition, with its German roots and emphasis on academic freedom, on the brink of being overtaken by a more job-oriented Anglo-Saxon university culture? This was the claim made by a member of the Faculty Council, Professor Erik Lunding (1910–1981), at a meeting in 1962.<sup>52</sup> In her application to Aarhus University in 1956, Hjort had made it clear that she believed the study of literature should be a way of becoming acquainted with other societies and cultures. Students should be educated with future jobs in mind, so university teachers should have a broad outlook.<sup>53</sup> Once in post, she put these words into action, teaching courses on Australian literature and folk songs and establishing the first collection of Commonwealth literature outside the British Empire in 1965.<sup>54</sup>

The selection committee had at first brushed her off. A local male candidate had been lined up, but needed a few more months to finish the publications he was working on. Unfortunately for those who favoured him, he failed to do so, but that left just one qualified candidate, Hjort, which was too much to bear for some members of the Faculty Council. Her competitor from 1928 and future colleague, Dahl, who chaired the selection committee, cast about for new arguments. He, whose work mostly concerned nineteenth- and twentieth-century British culture and society, first found that her research interests—religious philosophy, mysticism, and medieval poetry—were not relevant to the education of (primarily) schoolteachers. Others defended her, arguing that several other faculty members taught in one field while researching another.<sup>55</sup> Then the committee decided a manuscript on Australian literature, which Hjort had included in her application, was not worth the paper it was written on. ‘One can only hope that the manuscript will undergo a complete revision in line with the sound principles of the science of literature’, they wrote.<sup>56</sup> In the end, she was appointed, since she apparently was the only qualified candidate.

Other encounters between her academic experiences abroad and the Danish university system followed, primarily regarding the syllabus for English undergraduates. With 38 students in 1962 and a handful of theses submitted each year, the English department was second only to the Danish language department in size at the

Faculty of Humanities.<sup>57</sup> Hjort arrived at a time of growing demand for secondary schoolteachers as more young people continued their schooling beyond the seven years of compulsory education, placing pressure on Denmark's secondary schools and creating a shortage of teachers. Further, English was considered the language of modernity and international understanding.<sup>58</sup>

As a consequence, high school teacher training had to change, and as chair of the department's academic council (*Institutrådet*) Hjort was responsible for developing the 1961 syllabus for English graduates, which introduced US and Commonwealth literature and stressed the importance of language ability and a broad sociocultural understanding of literature. The syllabus also had several pages of advice on how to be a good student of English language and literature. A good student had his (*sic*) own private library—very useful later in life—bought and read British newspapers, only used monolingual English dictionaries, and took every opportunity to hear and speak English.<sup>59</sup>

In letters to a British acquaintance from her time at Girton College, she complained about how lonely she had been when working on the revision of the syllabus. Since Dahl was ill, her closest colleague had 'a charming fiancée living in Aalborg... and he *must* get something ready for publication', while the three student representatives were too young. Hjort was apparently not only responsible for the work at Aarhus, but also at the national level, because the department of English at the University of Copenhagen was more recent than Aarhus and its head was very inexperienced in administrative matters. The extra workload left Hjort's arms and neck aching from hours of typing.<sup>60</sup>

### Imaginative archives

At a meeting at the Faculty of Humanities shortly after Hjort's death, the dean, Holger Friis Johansen, said a few words of remembrance. Hjort would be remembered as a dear colleague, strongly influenced by her many years in the world of Anglophone academia. She could, however, be a harsh critic—provocative even—but you did not have

to have known her long to experience her eagerness to help and her desire to collaborate with others.<sup>61</sup> In Torsten Dahl's official obituary he pointed to this same ambivalence about Hjort's character, adding, 'Her self-centredness, which was undoubtedly part of her character, can partly be explained by the many personal sacrifices she had made along the way. Her energetic self wanted to acquire a position fitting for her skills and abilities.'<sup>62</sup>

I must admit this description caught my attention—setting aside the ambivalence of Hjort's personality. It seemed *too* obvious, given what I knew about the process surrounding Dahl's employment and the rejection of Stockholm and Hjort's applications in 1928. I only had to add gender and the narrative would be complete. However, Clare Hemmings' book *Why Stories Matter* made me revise my opinion. Hemmings argues against reading female agency as a sign of resistance or victimization, as it overlooks the possibility of (also) examining agency through the negotiation and ambivalent practices of norms. Agency is contextual, not necessarily autonomous—and can be shared and intersubjective.<sup>63</sup> Instead of telling different stories, she suggests we should tell them differently, underlining the limits of our knowledge of ourselves and others. The encounter between past and present is to be considered 'a space of work, rather than the space that must be cleaned up in order for judgements to occur'.<sup>64</sup>

In the introduction to Hemmings' retelling of the life of the feminist and anarchist Emma Goldman, she considers the methodological challenges of writing stories differently. 'If the past and present are suffused with ambivalence, in other words, so too is the method of putting them in conversation with one another'. I read this as a simple statement that, when doing historical research, an endless number of questions and connections arise that might make sense at one moment, but not necessarily the next. In line with Maria Tamboukou's new materialist understanding of the archive as laboratories, where 'questions, interpretations, theoretical insights and analytical tropes emerge as intra-actions between space/time/matter relations and forces within the archives', Hemmings creates an imaginative archive that 'seeks to tell the unsayable and imagine what cannot be retrieved'.<sup>65</sup>



Tamboukou's and Hemmings' reflections on imaginaries have been an important tool in this study of Hjort and Stochholm and their academic journey, especially when thinking about the affective, immaterial mediators of the mobilities of knowledge circulation.<sup>66</sup> Splicing together fragments found in archival *flânerie*—whether reading the minutes of the Aarhus Faculty Council meetings or making my way through the many boxes in Hjort's private archive—has formed the foundation for my 'imaginative archive', replacing silences and the unsayable with empathy, curiosity, and determination, despite the many unanswered questions.

## Endings

Like women within Anglophone academia, Hjort and Stochholm made use of a network of women-only colleges, organizations, libraries, and clubs in their quest for an academic position. It was not enough to advance their academic dreams, however; male professors and scholars were needed, thanks to their contacts and networks, to write testimonials and to facilitate their academic journeys in various ways.

Despite Hjort's advancement to the top of the academic pyramid as professor, decorated by the Danish king, and recipient of the prestigious Tagea Brandts Rejselegat travel scholarship in 1965, she was remembered with mixed feeling by her male colleagues at Aarhus University.<sup>67</sup> They created a narrative about her as eccentric and lacking in self-confidence, but also friendly, demanding, and a tad intimidating. How they viewed Stochholm, who came from a tenured position in the US, is unknown, but permanent employment was never an option. This illustrates the point, made by Hemmings, that women's situations can change over the course of their lives. In their younger days, both women could set their own agenda; later on in life, they had to negotiate terms with a male-dominated university. It also bears out what Pietsch has to say about women hardly ever making it to the top; there was always a price to pay. In the end, Hjort's and Stochholm's working lives were filled with teaching and administrative commitments, with little time for research.

In contrast to the psychological portrait painted by Hjort's colleagues on the Faculty Council at Aarhus University, a story could be told about a contested relationship between academia, femininity, and modernity. In her presence, Hjort embodied modernity and tradition. She thought a modern language and believed that university training should address the realities of life. She showed sympathy for the modern, independent young woman, who wore lipstick, went to dances, and enjoyed the companionship of young men. She spoke in favour of the 'educated housewife', who could be her husband's intellectual equal. At the same time, she was drawn towards mysticism, Bible studies, and Renaissance poetry and was remembered as a caricature of the Girton bluestocking with 'less dress sense' and 'a penchant for thick, often holey stockings'.<sup>68</sup>

For all its complexity and hyper-detail, there still remain important questions about the narrative of the academic journeys of Grethe Hjort and Johanne M. Stochholm, especially the entanglements between their private and academic lives—or, as Heike Jöns would have put it, the immaterialities of the mobilities of knowledge.<sup>69</sup> Where did they find the will and courage to travel the world? What were their aspirations when applying for the position at Aarhus University in 1928—and what did they feel about their position as female academics in the masculine, heterosexual arena of the universities?

## Notes

- 1 The research for this essay was generously funded by a grant from AUFF/NOVA. The author wishes to thank Jesper Vissing Laursen, Joyce Goodman, Pernille Svare Nygaard, Tyge Krogh, Signild Vallgård, Mogens Rüdiger, Christian Larsen of the Danish National Archives, Hans Buhl of the Aarhus University Archive, Ian Foster of the University of Melbourne Archives, Hannah Westall of the Girton College Archive, Frieda Midgley of the Newnham College Archives, Nancy Young of the Smith College Archives, John Patterson of the Australia Council for the Arts, and Eng Sengsavang of their UNESCO Archives for their kind assistance. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
- 2 Rigsarkivet (Danish National Archives), Copenhagen (DRA), Københavns Universitet, Det humanistiske fakultet 1920–1975, ks. 21, Læg Aarhus sagen 1928. Johanne Magdalene Stochholm changed how she spelled her name. She was born Stochholm (Kirkebog, Budolfi Sogn, 4 January 1894) and was registered by Copenhagen Police

- as such when she was a student (Politiets Registerblade 1 Nov. 1914) Applying for the position at AU in 1928 her name was misspelled or misread as Stockholm. In the Sweet Briar College Year Book in 1936 she was Stockholm, but she signed her letters to Smith College Stochholm (SCA, Office of President, W.A. Neilson files, Stochholm correspondence 1929–1932, Stochholm to Miss Clark, 29 May & 7 June 1932). Once back at AU in the academic year 1959–60 she went by the name of Stochholm (Aarhus Universitet, Aarsberetning 1959–60, p. 31). She remained so until she left the university in 1965 (Aarhus Universitet, 1964/65, p. 72). As she published as Stochholm I have chosen to use that to avoid confusion.
- 3 DRA, Københavns Universitet, Det humanistiske fakultet 1920–1975, ks. 21, 1920 IM–1940 m.m., læg Universitetsundervisningen i Jylland 1928.
  - 4 Torsten Dahl (private archive), AU, læg, docentur 1928/professorat 1934, draft application.
  - 5 DRA, Københavns Universitet, Det humanistiske fakultet 1920–1975, ks. 21, Læg Aarhus sagen 1928.
  - 6 Knud Sørensen, ‘Torsten Dahl, 1897–1968’, *Aarhus Universitet: Aarsberetning 1967–68* (1968), p. 15–18.
  - 7 Newnham College Archives, University of Cambridge (NCA), AC/3/2/31, Research Fellowships and Research Grant Applications 1930, Grethe Hjort, The Scheme; Philip Massinger, *Great Duke of Florence*, ed. Johanne Magdalene Stochholm (Baltimore: Bryn Mawr College, 1933).
  - 8 Tamson Pietsch, ‘Geographies of selection: Academic appointments in the British academic world, 1850–1939’, in Heike Jöns, Peter Meusbürger & Michael Heffernan (eds.), *Mobilities of Knowledge* (Cham: Springer Open, 2017); Joyce Goodman, Gary McCulloch & William Richardson, “Empires overseas” and “empires at home”: Postcolonial and transnational perspectives on social change in the history of education’, *Paedagogica Historica*, 45/6 (2009); Joyce Goodman, Andrea Jacobs, Fiona Kisby & Helen Loader, ‘Travelling careers: Overseas migration patterns in the professional lives of women attending Girton and Newnham before 1939’, *History of Education* 40/2 (2011); Stephanie Spencer, ‘Cosmopolitan Sociability in the British and International Federations of University Women, 1945–1960’, *Women’s History Review*, 26/1 (2017); Josephine May, ‘Empire’s daughters: The first 25 Australian-born women at Girton and Newnham Colleges Cambridge, 1870–1940, as insiders and outsiders’, *History of Education* 49/6 (2020).
  - 9 Birgitte Søland, *Becoming Modern: Young Women and the Reconstruction of Womanhood in the 1920s* (Princeton: PUP, 2000); Pietsch, ‘Geographies of selection’, 176.
  - 10 Jöns et al., *Mobilities*, 3; Heike Jöns, ‘Dynamic hybrids and the geographies of technoscience: Discussing conceptual resources beyond the human/non-human binary’, *Social & Cultural Geography* 7/4 (2006).
  - 11 Ning de Coninck-Smith, ‘Gender Encounters University, University Encounters Gender: Affective Archives, Aarhus University, Denmark 1928–1953’, *Women’s History Review* 29/3 (2020).
  - 12 John Stanley Martin, *Greta Hort: Scandinavian–Australian Migration Project. Monograph no. 3*, Department of German and Swedish Studies, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Australia, 2003; Anna Rutherford, ‘Why Aarhus?’ in Hena Maes-Jelinek, Kirsten Holst Petersen & Anna Rutherford (eds.), *A Shaping of Connections: Commonwealth Literature Studies, Then and Now* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989), 32;

- Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon*, kvindebiografiskleksikon.lex.dk, s.v. 'Grethe Hjort', by Jørgen Erik Nielsen; *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, adb.anu.edu.au, s.v. 'Greta Hort', by Ursula Hoff.
- 13 Grethe Hjort, 'The Good and Bad Quartos of "Romeo and Juliet" and "Love's Labour's Lost"', *Modern Language Review*, 21/2 (1926).
  - 14 DRA, Undervisningsministeriet, 2. Dept, 1. Kt., 1959, journalsag 63/57, tilaktet journalsag 124/59, Grethe Hjort Application/vita; for her change of name, see Girton College Archive, University of Cambridge (GCA), Annual Report, 1936, p. 95; I have used her birth name because she did not use Greta Hort when living in Denmark.
  - 15 *Aarhus Stiftetidende* (8 Apr. 1938); *The Mercury* (8 May 1938).
  - 16 *Wikipedia*, s.v. 'Julie Moschelesová' (20 Mar. 2023).
  - 17 Det kongelige bibliotek, nationalbibliotek og Københavns universitetsbibliotek (Royal Danish Archives), Copenhagen (DKB), Grethe Hjort (private archive). Her theories about the Plagues of Egypt have been rejected by later research, see Brad Sparks, 'Red algae theories of the ten plagues: Contradicted by science', *Bible & Spade* 16/3 (2003), 17/1 (2004).
  - 18 *Aarhus Universitet: Aarsberetning 1957–58*, 38–41.
  - 19 Margrethe Spies, 'En stor personlighed', *Alt for Damerne* (15 Nov. 1960).
  - 20 *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon*, s.v. 'Grethe Hjort', by Jørgen Erik Nielsen.
  - 21 NCA, AC/3/2/31 Research Fellowships and Research Grant Applications, 1930, Grethe Hjort.
  - 22 Martin, *Greta Hort*, 3; NCA, AC/3/2/31 Research Fellowships and Research Grant Applications, 1930, Grethe Hjort.
  - 23 Københavns stadsarkiv, Politiets Registerblade, Johanne M. Stochholm, 1 Nov. 1914; for her mother's death, Kirkebog, Budolfi Sogn 21 Jan. 1894.
  - 24 Smith College Archives, Northampton, MA (SCA), Annual Report of the President, 1926, p. 47.
  - 25 SCA, Office of President, W.A. Neilson files, Stochholm correspondence 1929–1932, Stochholm to president Neilson, 5 Oct. 1931.
  - 26 SCA, Office of President, W.A. Neilson files, Stochholm correspondence 1929–1932, Stochholm to Miss Clark, 29 May & 7 June 1932.
  - 27 DRA, Kvindelige akademikere 1947–1947 Love, arkiv 10541–22093, II-III, læg, Varia og taler Indledning til møde 17 Jan. 1933 (håndskrevet, Aslaug Møller); *Berlingske Tidende* (10 Apr. 1922); *ibid.* (1 Sept. 1922).
  - 28 Joyce Goodman, personal communication, 25 Feb. 2022; Bryn Mawr College Library, Special Collections (BMCL), M. Carey Thomas Personal Papers, Incoming Correspondence, Box 72, Folder Russell, Alys Smith to MCT (18801-1925) 5–3; *Wikipedia*, s.v. 'Crosby Hall' (9 Mar. 2023).
  - 29 Martin, *Greta Hort*, 4.
  - 30 Pietsch, 'Geographies of selection', 158–60.
  - 31 SCA, Office of President, W.A. Neilson files, Stochholm correspondence 1929–1932, W. A. Neilson to Connor, 1 Feb. 1929; *ibid.* Stochholm to Neilson, 5 Oct. 31.
  - 32 NCA, AC/3/2/31 Research Fellowships and Research Grant Applications, 1930, Grethe Hjort, Otto Jespersen's testimonial.
  - 33 GCA, GCAR 2/5/6/1/4 part 1, Application and testimonials. I have not managed to identify the two scholars who signed the testimonials.
  - 34 Lady Derham, quoted in Martin, *Greta Hort*, 3.

- 35 GCA, conversation with Mary Duff, 23 June 1992, transcript; Martin, *Greta Hort*, 4.
- 36 NCA, AC/5/2/8 Student file (G. Hjort), Copy of Testimonials.
- 37 GCA, GCAR 2/5/6/1/4, Personnel file, G. Hjort (or Hort) 1931, Questionnaire DRA, Application/vita UVM 2. Dept, 1. Kt., 1959, journalsag 63/57, tilaktet journalsag 124/59, an undated CV attached to her application to Aarhus University in 1956, in which she omitted her time in Gloucestershire and Birmingham and wrote she spent nine years at Cambridge, apart from one year; GCA, conversation with Mary Duff, 23 June 1992, transcript.
- 38 DKB, Grethe Hjort privat Arkiv, Plan International University of Human Studies.
- 39 DRA, Det Humanistiske Fakultet, Det humanistiske fakultetsråd 1934–1991, forhandlingsprotokol nr. 6, 1955–1958, 19 Apr. 1956, p. 60.
- 40 UNESCO, IAUPL, SS/SSI/CONF.3/SR.1-6, WS/051.11, Consultative Meeting on the Question of International Social Science Institutes, Paris 1951, Summary record. unesdoc.unesco.org
- 41 DRA, Application/vita UVM 2. Dept, 1. Kt., 1959, journalsag 63/57, tilaktet journalsag 124/59, p. 5.
- 42 DRA, Det Humanistiske Fakultet, Det humanistiske fakultetsråd 1934–1991, forhandlingsprotokol nr. 6, 1955–1958, 19 Apr. 1956, p. 60.
- 43 Martin, *Greta Hort*, 14. The recipient of the letter is unknown. It might have been Blatt, but the letter is not among correspondence in his private archive now in DKB.
- 44 *The Mercury* (11 May 1938).
- 45 Martin, *Greta Hort*, 6.
- 46 *The Age* (25 July 1938).
- 47 *The Age* (18 Aug. 1938).
- 48 Martin, *Greta Hort*, 5, 7–9 quoting Diana Dyason.
- 49 GCA, conversation with Mary Duff, 23 June 1992, transcript.
- 50 Torsten Dahl, 'Grethe Hjort, 1903–1967', *Aarhus Universitet: Aarsberetning 1967* (1967), 10.
- 51 DRA, Det humanistiske fakultet, Det humanistiske fakultetsråd, forhandlingsprotokol 1934–1991, kasse 11, 28 Aug. 1967.
- 52 DRA, Erik Lunding (1910–1981), Humanistisk fakultetsråd, Forhandlingsprotokol 1960–1962, protokol nr. 8, 21 Mar. 1962.
- 53 DRA, UVM 2. Dept, 1. Kt., 1959, journalsag 63/57, tilaktet journalsag 124/59, p. 8, Application/vita.
- 54 *Jyllands-Posten*, 4 Aug. 1965; Hans Hauge, 'Commonwealth Caribien eller Postkolonialisme og De Dansk Vestindiske Øer', *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* 30/2 (2009), 15–16.
- 55 DRA, Andreas Blinkenberg (1893–1982), Det Humanistiske Fakultet, Det humanistiske fakultetsråd 1934–1991, Forhandlingsprotokol nr. 6, 1955–58, 19 Apr. 1956.
- 56 DRA, Det Humanistiske Fakultet, Det humanistiske fakultetsråd 1934–1991, forhandlingsprotokol nr. 6, 1955–1958, 19 Apr. 1956, pp. 5–7, evaluation of Grethe Hjort; *Aarskrift for Aarhus Universitet* 1958, 38–40.
- 57 DRA, Aarhus Universitet 1937–2006, Institut for Engelsk Filologi, Det humanistiske fakultet, Specialeoversigt, [list of master thesis] Humanistisk Fakultetsrådsmøde 28 Aug. 1962.

- 58 Knud Holck Andersen, 'Fremtidens gymnasium set fra 1960', *Uddannelseshistorie* (1992); Sigurd Højby, 'Betragtninger over gymnasiesituationen', *Gymnasieskolen* 18 (1959).
- 59 DRA, Det humanistiske fakultet, Institut for engelsk filologi 1961–1979, Diverse sager, 1961 studieordning.
- 60 GCA, GCPP Cave, Hjort to Evelyn (Frances) Cave-Brown-Cave 17 Oct. & 13 Dec. 1959
- 61 DRA, Det humanistiske fakultet, Det humanistiske fakultetsråd, forhandlingsprotokol 1934–1991, kasse 11, 28 Aug. 1967.
- 62 Dahl, 'Grethe Hjort', 10; GCA, GCAR 2/5/6/1/4, Personnel file, G. Hjort (or Hort) 1931, Torsten Dahl to Girton College, 20 Aug. 1967.
- 63 Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 205–208.
- 64 Ibid. 226.
- 65 Maria Tamboukou, 'Archival research: Unravelling space/time/matter entanglements and fragments', *Qualitative Research* 14/5 (2014), 618; Clare Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 7, 33.
- 66 Ibid. 33; Maria Tamboukou, 'Feeling the narrative in the archive: The question of serendipity', *Qualitative Research* 16/2 (2016), 155; de Coninck-Smith, 'Gender Encounters University'.
- 67 The decoration and the travel grants are mentioned in a biographical questionnaire from 1967, GCA, GCAR 2/5/6/1/4, Personnel file, G. Hjort (or Hort) 1931.
- 68 GCA, conversation with Mary Duff, 23 June 1992, transcript; Rutherford, 'Why Aarhus?', 32; Martin, *Greta Hort*, 26.
- 69 Jöns, 'Dynamic hybrids', 563.



III  
CONDITIONS AND CONNECTIONS





# Knowledge in the air

## Circulation, actors, and arenas of knowledge

*Joel Barnes*

It is perhaps characteristic of new subdisciplines, especially those of an integrative, interdisciplinary constitution, that among their early efforts are exercises in relitigating well-established intellectual problems.<sup>1</sup> At its best, where this process draws constructively from selected insights and theories in adjacent disciplines, it need not be a matter of reinventing the wheel, but of translating general problems into the new field's language and conceptual frames of reference, and of assessing how that field's perspective might recast and renew existing ideas. For the history of knowledge, such problems include the circulation of knowledge and knowledge actors, and the relations between the two. The circulation of knowledge, and with it the idea of the transformation of knowledge in its movement across different geographic and social settings, has emerged as something of a master-concept in that variety of the history of knowledge that Simone Lässig describes as seeking 'to analyze and comprehend knowledge *in* society and knowledge *in* culture'.<sup>2</sup> The concept has provided a language with which to historicize knowledge cultures, especially those outside conventional knowledge institutions such as universities, museums, and laboratories. This work builds upon earlier uses of circulation in global histories of science, and in global history generally.<sup>3</sup>

The present volume and other recent work in the history of knowledge turn to knowledge actors.<sup>4</sup> These considerations are new iterations of old problems of historical agency, especially as worked out in the forms of social history that developed from the 1960s. Social history had critical recuperative dimensions, seeking to recover the agency of those marginalized by prevailing social structures. As E. P. Thompson puts it in the classic declaration of the recuperation of such agency, the English working class ‘was present at its own making’.<sup>5</sup> Notably, however, the turn to knowledge actors in the history of knowledge comes at a time when historians in several fields, including the history of slavery, women’s history and the history of childhood, are increasingly questioning traditional social history models of agency.<sup>6</sup> These critiques are directed against what Lynn Thomas calls ‘agency as argument’, and what Mona Gleason identifies as the search for agency as an ‘a priori goal in our analyses’. Such approaches tend to prioritize the study of political resistance to structural determinants over more limited, constrained, and everyday forms of action. Historical actors thus risk being construed, in Joan Scott’s words, as ‘unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will’ rather than as ‘subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them’.<sup>7</sup> Identifying agency, Walter Johnson writes, should not be ‘the defining contribution of our studies’ but rather a ‘simple predicate for any historical investigation’.<sup>8</sup> We are in the realm here of the old anthropological and sociological problem of structure and agency.<sup>9</sup> The literature typically quotes the quintessential formulation of that problem, from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*: ‘Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past’.<sup>10</sup>

By way of a preamble to the main topic of this essay, I would suggest that the problem of structure and agency in the history of knowledge is frequently understood in terms of an oppositional relationship between the circulation of knowledge and knowledge actors. This need not be the case, though it often is. Philipp Sarasin, for example, outlines a different model of knowledge actors in which the discursive power of

knowledge in epistemic hierarchies provides a means of understanding social organization in ways that do not necessarily align with ‘the old socio-historical grid’ of social history. The professional knowledge possessed by, say, a medical doctor determines their social status and scope for action: knowledge is power.<sup>11</sup> Sarasin restricts the history of knowledge to forms of ‘rational knowledge’, a constraint that intersects with his interest in the valorization of rational knowledge into knowledge systems and hierarchies. Such approaches are one strand in the history of knowledge, but have been less developed than are studies of circulation as such, the latter generally without much attention either to valorization or to degrees of ‘rationality’.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it might be argued that ‘knowledge in society’ approaches to the history of knowledge, in so far as they are interested in extra-institutional, vernacular, and historically devalued knowledge, entail an inbuilt bias against making epistemic hierarchies analytically operative. It is by divesting oneself of concern for normative valorization that the wide variety of knowledge circulating in society can best be seen.

In this context, the field’s recent interest in knowledge actors represents a necessary corrective to the focus on circulation as such. As Stefanie Gänger argues in a critique of the language of circulation within global history, an overemphasis on circulation can generate a ‘tendency to emphasize movement over agency’. The organic metaphor—arising initially from early modern models of the circulation of the blood—risks reproducing a model of circulation as ‘a self-evident, and, above all, a self-reliant process’ unpropelled by human action.<sup>13</sup> Against this danger, attending to historical knowledge actors can highlight the contingency of knowledge transmission, the limits, dead ends and obstacles in circulatory networks, and the effort and action involved in setting movements of knowledge in motion. Considering circulation and actors in tandem can produce altogether more irregular and uneven maps of historical knowledge. As will be seen, however, something further is needed.

In this essay, I examine these general problems by considering the history of the theorization of a long-standing theme in the history and sociology of science—that of multiple or simultaneous discovery.

Multiple discovery is a problem of the relation of knowledge actors to the circulation of knowledge, and moreover one in which knowledge circulation has conventionally been conceived in specifically structural terms, such that the literature frames the issue as one of structure and agency. The essay is a response to Staffan Bergwik and Linn Holmberg's call for historians of knowledge to engage with 'what is already known', especially with the analytical language and concepts of the history of science.<sup>14</sup> More than adapting concepts, however, the argument here is that tracing the vicissitudes of how a general problem has been worked out over time is itself instructive. An established field's advantage over a newer one is not merely a larger conceptual toolkit, but its having had the opportunity for long-term disciplinary dynamics to bring clarity to the handling of critical problems—in this case over most of the twentieth century. The argument proceeds by analogy, but speaks to general questions about the relations of knowledge actors to circulation that resonate with the history of knowledge field. My conclusions are not radically revisionist—in fact they lead back to established concepts in the history of knowledge, to the significance of what Johan Östling identifies as 'arenas of knowledge'. An arena of knowledge is 'a place or a platform that, within its given framework, offers the opportunity and sets limits for certain forms of circulation of knowledge'.<sup>15</sup> An arena is distinguished by 'a measure of stability and persistence', though the content of the 'knowledge' circulating through it may vary. I argue for the importance of arenas as mediators between knowledge circulation and actors, and for their scope to resolve what are otherwise intractable problems in the nexus of structure and agency.

By knowledge I here mean epistemic knowledge—propositional knowledge of the sort embodied in texts and discourses.<sup>16</sup> While I restrict my discussion to this domain, and do not extend it to other forms of knowledge such as *phronesis* (practical wisdom), it should be noted that epistemic knowledge as understood here necessarily spans a large field of incompletely realized potentiality. What is at issue is not only propositional knowledge in fully articulated forms, but the mass of half-formulated, dimly intuited ideas that precede

propositional claims. This background matters, as much of what follows hinges on theorizations of the relationship between it and more completely realized knowledge.

### Multiple discovery

In the history of science, multiple discovery is when two or more researchers are said to have made a discovery or devised an invention more or less simultaneously. Classic examples include Charles Darwin's and Alfred Russel Wallace's codiscovery of evolution by natural selection and Urbain Le Verrier's and John Couch Adams' claims to have simultaneously predicted the existence of Neptune. Multiple discovery was long a preoccupation of historians and sociologists of science, because it seemed to say something significant about how scientific knowledge developed and the structure of science as an organized enterprise. What did it say about the role of individual action in the scientific field that, across the history of science, two or more—and sometimes many more—researchers repeatedly arrived at similar findings at around the same time yet independently of one another?<sup>17</sup>

The phenomenon of multiple discovery was frequently observed by historians and commentators on science and technology from at least the late eighteenth century. Its significance as an intellectual problem was first developed by the American anthropologist A. L. Kroeber in 1917.<sup>18</sup> In 1922 the sociologists William Ogburn and Dorothy Thomas asked 'Are Inventions Inevitable?', establishing multiple discovery as a significant problem in the sociology of science. Ogburn and Thomas's article included a much-cited list—subsequently a key dataset for the topic—of 148 cases of 'multiples' across the natural and psychological sciences, applied technologies, and mathematics that stretched back to the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> This work was expanded on by Leslie White in the late 1940s, and reached something of an apotheosis in the writings of Robert K. Merton in the late 1950s and the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> For Merton multiple discovery was central to his understanding of the 'social matrix' of science. As he put it in an oft-quoted, deliberately

provocative phrase, ‘all scientific discoveries are in principle multiples, including those that on the surface appear to be singletons’—that is, science’s structure and processes are such that discoveries, to answer Ogburn and Thomas, are inevitable, and do not depend on single individuals.<sup>21</sup> If one scientist does not happen upon a discovery or invention another will, and often several researchers do so more or less at once.

From Kroeber to Merton, the main line of sociological analysis of multiple discovery was what has been called the ‘maturation’ or ‘Zeitgeist’ hypothesis. This view was underpinned by a progressive, developmentalist assumption that at certain levels of cultural and scientific development, the organized system of science was such that individual researchers were essentially epiphenomenal. It was an argument wryly summarized by the American psychologist Dean Keith Simonton:

Briefly, multiples are said to prove conclusively that the causal source of scientific advance lies outside the individual, for the sociocultural system, or the zeitgeist, determines the time for a given contribution. ... Scientific progress, therefore, does not depend on acts of genius ... Even the star scientists do not create or contribute but merely convey what the times have preordained ... Contributions are ‘in the air’, which creators simply breathe.<sup>22</sup>

The use of organic metaphors is worth noting. Discoveries were said to be ‘in the air’ that scientists breathed. Other writers spoke of the time being ‘ripe’ for certain discoveries.<sup>23</sup> Here we have something similar to the organicism that Gänger identifies in the metaphor of ‘circulation’.

Simonton’s comments reflect the nature of the field by the 1970s and 1980s, in which a wider range of competing interpretations of multiple discovery gained increasing currency. Although Merton had rejected the pitting of cultural maturation and ‘genius’ against each other—seeing rare genius as an aspect of the social system of science—maturation, genius, and chance emerged in this period as

three opposed, competing theories.<sup>24</sup> In part this development seems to have been driven by the growth of ever more elaborate and technical quantitative sociological methods, which appeared to promise empirical tests of competing explanatory models. Historic datasets, such as that compiled by Ogburn and Thomas, were subjected to a range of probabilistic and other quantitative calculations.<sup>25</sup>

Around the same time, the old maturation consensus was being re-examined from a different and ultimately more consequential direction (though as will be seen by not entirely different personnel). With the interpretive turn in the social sciences came the Canadian sociologist Augustine Brannigan's *The Social Basis of Scientific Discoveries* (1981), which shifted attention to the language and rhetoric of discovery itself.<sup>26</sup> Brannigan recast 'discovery' not as an unproblematically existing phenomenon whose causes could be analysed and debated, but as a retrospective honorific, the award of which was part of the ideology and justification of contemporary scientific practice. In Brannigan's major example, Gregor Mendel had not, as was generally supposed, 'discovered' genetics in the mid nineteenth century, nor was his work 'rediscovered' around 1900. He had instead been working on botanical hybridization, and this work continued to be cited in hybridization studies throughout the late nineteenth century. The construction in the early twentieth century of 'Mendelian genetics' was thus an *appropriation* of Mendel's work for purposes quite different from those he had pursued. Mendel's belatedly awarded appellation as the discoverer of genetics was part of what Adrian Wilson, in an important recent article, has termed the 'imagined past' of the new genetic biology.<sup>27</sup> In a study published five years after Brannigan's book, the historian of science Simon Schaffer historicized his argument, arguing that the dynamics of 'discovery' that Brannigan described applied only from the nineteenth century on, with the rise of science in place of natural philosophy, whose more diffuse methods and ethos had not centred on 'heroic discoverers' to the same extent.<sup>28</sup>

One consequence of this radical reimagining of 'discovery' was that it highlighted just how vague and elastic the criteria were for the



simultaneity of multiple discoveries. Sometimes researchers supposedly happening upon the same ‘discovery’ were in fact doing quite different things; sometimes their work exhibited very different degrees of depth and rigour; and sometimes it was in fact separated by gulfs of time (for example, the nebular hypothesis for the origin of the solar system, which is included in Ogburn and Thomas’s list, was advanced by Immanuel Kant and Pierre-Simon Laplace at an interval of more than 40 years, in 1755 and 1796 respectively).<sup>29</sup> As Simonton noted, ‘it may even be argued that true multiples are virtually non-existent: The calculus of Newton was not the same as that of Leibniz, nor was Priestley’s oxygen generated the same way as Scheele’s.’<sup>30</sup>

Brannigan, however, did not merely critique the ‘maturation’ explanation for multiple discovery, as reposition it as a ‘folk theory’.<sup>31</sup> The belief in knowledge being ‘in the air’ had its sociological manifestation in the tradition running from Kroeber to Merton, but also an existence as an ideology of practising scientists. ‘Folk’ has the unfortunate effect of making scientists at the forefront of their fields sound like rustic naïfs, but the distinction turns out to be critical. The theory’s salience in scientific practice itself is well illustrated by the following passage from the British chemist Robert Williams, according to whom scientific development

is in my view largely inevitable and the individuals who make given bits of progress happen to be distinguished simply because they are in the right place at the right time and have become involved with particular ideas and experiments. Given a few weeks, months or very few years the same answers would appear under other names.<sup>32</sup>

This view contrasts markedly with the positioning of certain prominent scientists as what Schaffer calls ‘heroic discoverers’. In the former case, actors are seen as epiphenomenal to the organized system of science in general; in the latter, it is the singular brilliance and insight of particular actors that is understood to drive science forward. Building on Brannigan’s work, the sociologist Michael Mulkay positioned these two ‘folk theories’ as part of the rhetoric of the priority

disputes that often result from cases of multiple discovery. The passage from Williams above is taken from a personal account of a dispute with another chemist, Peter Mitchell, over priority to the theory of chemiosmosis. Williams' theory of scientific development reflects what Mulkey calls the 'discourse of opposition' characteristic of the disadvantaged party in a dispute. Mitchell won the 1978 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for work on the chemiosmotic theory, while Williams reported that he 'felt cheated' that his own work on that theory was generally overlooked. The opposite view, which Mulkey calls the 'discourse of celebration', emphasizes the agency of heroic discoverers and downplays the structural significance of organized science. It is characteristic of the advantaged party in such a dispute.<sup>33</sup>

Brannigan's and Mulkey's sociology transformed the identification of knowledge being 'in the air'—that is, in social circulation—from a key to understanding the structure of organized science in general, to a rhetorical move embedded within the ideologies and interests of scientific knowledge practices. While the sociological theory of cultural maturation is analytically separable from its counterpart as a 'folk theory' of working scientists, in practice the two are deeply entwined. In the twentieth century, those engaged in priority disputes might draw upon the sociological literature in defence of their interests and positions.<sup>34</sup> A list of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century observations of the phenomenon of multiple discovery compiled by Merton suggests the practical entanglement of more analytical and more interest-based contributions even before the full development of maturation as a sociological theory. The list includes analysts of the phenomenon (T. B. Macaulay, Auguste Comte), analysts of other phenomena arguing for the scientific ripeness of the times for their ideas (Friedrich Engels on the development of the materialist conception of history), as well as observations much closer to the ground of the practical organization of science and applied technology (an 1862–4 controversy over the British patent system).<sup>35</sup> Interests had always played a part in determining what counted as scientific knowledge.

## Circulation, actors, and arenas of knowledge

What light does the history of theorization about multiple discovery shed on the problems and methods of the history of knowledge? The account given so far poses in perhaps overly sharp terms the problem of the relations between the circulation of knowledge and knowledge actors' agency. As far as I am aware, no historian of knowledge has argued that the emergence of a given knowledge-claim was 'inevitable', nor has the emphasis of historians of knowledge on the structures of circulation meant reducing historical knowledge actors to the status of epiphenomena—at least not explicitly. But the broad general problems are strikingly familiar.

The vagueness of the idea of knowledge being 'in the air', which opened an avenue for Brannigan's and Mulkay's recasting of the fundamental terms of the problem, is reflected in recent critiques of 'circulation' as an item of historiographical discourse. For global history, Gänger has argued that 'circulation' in that field has become an overly amorphous concept, conflating various forms of diffusion, dissemination, transmission, and reception, often without adequate attention to the materiality of those processes.<sup>36</sup> In the history of knowledge itself, Bergwik and Holmberg similarly charge that 'circulation' is used as a catch-all to refer to too many types of processes, and that situating such circulation within 'society at large' obscures '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)'.<sup>37</sup> The problem of interests is similarly resonant. Again, this is to pose the problem in terms that are somewhat too pointed—commitments would be more fitting—but one achievement of the scholarly rethinking of multiple discovery in the 1980s was to highlight the entanglement of academic analyses of knowledge practices with those practices themselves. In the case of the history of knowledge, a commitment to it as 'first and foremost a social, political, and cultural history' reflects what Suzanne Marchand has identified as the challenge of understanding knowledge production and communication processes in an age in which many old assumptions

about such processes have been upended by ever-increasing digital hyper-connectivity.<sup>38</sup>

What of the subsequent history of theories of multiple discovery and its resonance for the relations between circulation, actors, and arenas of knowledge? In the wake of Brannigan's and Mulkey's interventions, the problem of multiple discovery largely shifted away from the sociology of science. This development reflected the persuasiveness of their critiques, but also more broadly the emergence, in place of the Mertonian perspective, of new sociologies of science, such as Bruno Latour's network analysis.<sup>39</sup> Although the problem has remained a live one in other disciplinary spaces, these have tended to shift attention away from the old sociological problem of historical actors' agency within the structure of organized science.<sup>40</sup>

To consider what happened to the historical-sociological question of structure and agency as it relates to the problem at hand, it is worth going back to other work that Brannigan conducted in the early 1980s in collaboration with Richard Wanner and James White. Although this research drew on Brannigan's study of the reappropriation of Mendel, it was conducted in a quantitative sociological mode distinct from the discourse analysis pursued in Brannigan's 1981 monograph. In papers published in 1983, Brannigan and Wanner argued for what they called a 'communication model' of multiple discovery, in which its incidence diminished over time as communication technologies and the formal organization of science improved, such that duplication diminished as scientific findings were better communicated among practitioners. This was a large generalization that in some respects reinstated old developmental logics, though differently construed, and which was much in need of careful historicization. This was something Brannigan and Wanner encouraged, noting the need for further 'studies of the development of communications media—journals and scholarly association(s) in the various disciplines, as well as improvements in communications technology generally.'<sup>41</sup>

In the decades since, such studies have duly followed in the history of science, focusing on the growth and stabilization of scientific publishing, the emergence of scholarly practices and infrastruc-

tures such as peer review, and the professional relations of scientific communities in different national and disciplinary contexts.<sup>42</sup> Their thrust has been to emphasize the significance of local dynamics of scientific communication. For example, Alex Csiszar's *The Scientific Journal* traces the nineteenth-century growth of the convention, previously unevenly observed, that priority claims had to be published to be recognized.<sup>43</sup> Melinda Baldwin's study of the weekly journal *Nature* shows how its rapid publishing schedule made it a major platform for the publication of priority claims.<sup>44</sup> These are histories of communication technologies that can reasonably be considered knowledge arenas, in so far as they exhibit a degree of stability and orderliness while allowing for variation in the contents of the knowledge flowing through them.

It remains an open question whether these studies might be synthesized into a macro-level account that would confirm Brannigan and Wanner's sociological generalization about scientific communication improving. What they clearly show, however, is that the relationship between historical actors' agency and the structural circulation of knowledge did not exist in the abstract, but was mediated through specifically local arenas of knowledge—communications technologies, publishing platforms, practices, and conventions. Knowledge is never 'in the air' exactly, but is rather mediated through mediums and channels of communication that both enable and constrain actors' engagement with it. While the trio of circulation, actors, and arenas is well established in the history of knowledge, what I hope the account given here has confirmed is their mutual interdependence. As the history of the problem of multiple discovery shows, in the absence of considerations of the systems and technologies through which knowledge circulation and actors are related, theorizing the balance of emphasis between the two—between structure and agency—is at a certain level a matter of interests or ideology. Such interests typically generate competing, incompatible theories that overemphasize the significance of one or the other variable. Though my main example here comes from the history and sociology of science, the pattern of competing knowledge theories is not specific to the organized

structures of disciplinary science. The problem of structure and agency is a broader historical-sociological one, applicable to many domains. In this respect the conclusion that knowledge circulation, actors, and arenas are necessarily interdependent is resonant for histories of epistemic knowledge in general.

## Notes

- 1 For the integrative dimension of the history of knowledge, see Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad & Anna Nilsson Hammar (eds.), *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020), 14–17.
- 2 Simone Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016), 58; see also 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 (2020), art. 3. For circulation in the history of knowledge, see David Gugerli, Michael Hagner, Caspar Hirschi, Andreas B. Kilcher, Patricia Purtschert, Philipp Sarasin & Jakob Tanner (eds.), 'Zirkulationen', *Nach Feierabend: Zürcher Jahrbuch für Wissensgeschichte* 7 (2011); 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); Isak Hammar & Johan Östling (eds.), 'Forum: The Circulation of Knowledge and the History of the Humanities', *History of Humanities* 6/2 (2021); Johan Östling, 'Circulation, Arenas, and the Quest for Public Knowledge: Historiographical Currents and Analytical Frameworks', *History & Theory* 59/4 (2020). For taxonomies of the history of knowledge, see *ibid.* 111–15; Martin Mulsow, 'History of Knowledge', in Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 159–60; Joel Barnes & Tamson Pietsch, 'The History of Knowledge and the History of Education', *History of Education Review* 51/2 (2022), 111–14.
- 3 James A. Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit', *Isis* 95/4 (2004); Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Bernard Lightman, Gordon McOuat & Larry Stewart (eds.), *The Circulation of Knowledge between Britain, India and China: The Early-Modern World to the Twentieth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Stefanie Gänger, 'Circulation: Reflections on Circularity, Entity, and Liquidity in the Language of Global History', *Journal of Global History* 12/3 (2017).
- 4 Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen & David Larsson Heidenblad (eds.), *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas and Aspirations* (London: Routledge, 2020); David Heidenblad Larsson, *The Environmental Turn in Postwar Sweden: A New History of Knowledge*, tr. Arabella Childs (Lund: LUP, 2021); Björn Lundberg, 'Exploring Histories of Knowledge and Education: An Introduction', *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 9/2 (2022).

- 5 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (rev. edn, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 9.
- 6 Walter Johnson, 'On Agency', *Journal of Social History* 37/1 (2003); Lynn M. Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', *Gender & History* 28/2 (2016); Mona Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education', *History of Education* 45/4 (2016).
- 7 Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 793, quoted in Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', 326.
- 8 Johnson, 'On Agency', 114.
- 9 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge: CUP, 1977); Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
- 10 Johnson, 'On Agency', 113; Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', 325.
- 11 Philipp Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?' *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 36/1 (2011).
- 12 Lundberg in the present volume; Lorraine Daston, 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', *Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1/1 (2017); Lorraine Daston, 'Comment' on Mulsow, 'History of Knowledge', 173–8; Sven Dupré & Geert Somsen, 'The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42/2–3 (2019).
- 13 Gänger, 'Circulation', 308, 312–15.
- 14 Staffan Bergwik & Linn Holmberg, 'Standing on Whose Shoulders? A Critical Comment on the History of Knowledge', in Östling et al., *Forms of Knowledge*, 292–6.
- 15 Östling, 'Circulation, Arenas', 122–6.
- 16 Anna Nilsson Hammar, 'Theoria, Praxis, and Poiesis: Theoretical Considerations on the Circulation of Knowledge in Everyday Life', in Östling et al., *Circulation of Knowledge*; Bergwik & Holmberg, 'Whose Shoulders?', 288–9.
- 17 Thomas S. Kuhn, 'Energy Conservation as an Example of Simultaneous Discovery', in Marshall Clagett (ed.), *Critical Problems in the History of Science* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959); Eric Scerri, 'The Discovery of the Periodic Table as a Case of Simultaneous Discovery', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 373 (2015); Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 371–82.
- 18 Merton, *Sociology of Science*, 352–6; A. L. Kroeber, 'The Superorganic', *American Anthropologist* 19/2 (1917).
- 19 William F. Ogburn & Dorothy Thomas, 'Are Inventions Inevitable? A Note on Social Evolution', *Political Science Quarterly* 37/1 (1922).
- 20 Leslie White, *The Science of Culture: A Study of Man and Civilization* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1949), 146–232, 282–302; Merton, *Sociology of Science*, 281–412.
- 21 Ibid. 356.
- 22 Dean Keith Simonton, *Scientific Genius: A Psychology of Science* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 136.
- 23 Kuhn, 'Energy Conservation', 321; Merton, *Sociology of Science*, 354.
- 24 Ibid. 366–70.

- 25 Dean Keith Simonton, 'Multiple Discovery and Invention: Zeitgeist, Genius, or Chance?' *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 37/9 (1979); Augustine Brannigan, Richard A. Wanner & James M. White, 'The Phenomenon of Multiple Discoveries and the Re-Publication of Mendel's Work in 1900', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 11/2 (1981); Augustine Brannigan & Richard A. Wanner, 'Historical Distributions of Multiple Discoveries and Theories of Scientific Change', *Social Studies of Science* 13/3 (1983); Augustine Brannigan & Richard A. Wanner, 'Multiple Discoveries in Science: A Test of the Communication Theory', *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie* 8/2 (1983); Dean Keith Simonton, 'Multiples, Poisson Distributions, and Chance: An Analysis of the Brannigan–Wanner Model', *Scientometrics* 9/3–4 (1986). In this period, contributions to the discussion of competing explanatory models that were less reliant on quantitative methods include Don Patinkin, 'Multiple Discoveries and the Central Message', *American Journal of Sociology* 89/2 (1983); T. D. Stokes, 'Reasons in the *Zeitgeist*', *History of Science* 24 (1986).
- 26 Augustine Brannigan, *The Social Basis of Scientific Discoveries* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981).
- 27 Adrian Wilson, 'Science's Imagined Pasts', *Isis* 108/4 (2017). For an overview of Brannigan's and others' reconsideration of Mendel, see Peter J. Bowler, *The Mendelian Revolution: The Emergence of Hereditarian Concepts in Modern Science and Society* (London: Athlone, 1989), 93–109.
- 28 Simon Schaffer, 'Scientific Discoveries and the End of Natural Philosophy', *Social Studies of Science* 16/3 (1986).
- 29 Ogburn & Thomas, 'Are Inventions Inevitable?', 94.
- 30 Simonton, 'Multiple Discovery', 1608.
- 31 Brannigan, *Social Basis*, 143–62.
- 32 Williams, quoted under a pseudonym in Michael Mulkey, *The Word and the World: Explorations in the Form of Sociological Analysis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 187. For a positive identification of Williams as the scientist quoted, see R. J. P. Williams, 'The History of Proton-Driven ATP Formation', *Bioscience Reports* 13/4 (1993).
- 33 Mulkey, *The Word*, 173–200.
- 34 Joel Barnes, 'Revisiting the "Darwin–Marx Correspondence": Multiple Discovery and the Rhetoric of Priority', *History of the Human Sciences* 35/2 (2022).
- 35 Merton, *Sociology of Science*, 352–54.
- 36 Gänger, 'Circulation'.
- 37 Bergwik & Holmberg, 'Whose Shoulders?', 289–94.
- 38 Östling et al., *Forms of Knowledge*, 9; 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), 130; see also Lundberg, 'Exploring Histories', 1.
- 39 Philip Mirowski, 'A Confederacy of Bunches: Comment upon Niehans on "Multiple Discoveries"', *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 2/2 (1995), 281–2.
- 40 This work includes histories of particular disciplines, such as botany, economics, physics and mathematics; methods studies that seek to identify new multiple discovery lists from citation analyses and distant reading approaches, while leaving the conceptual utility of such lists open; and several threads in the philosophy of



- science. For a recent list of studies of multiple discovery in disciplinary histories, see Luca Tambolo & Gustavo Cevolani, 'Multiple Discoveries, Inevitability, and Scientific Realism', *Studies in History & Philosophy of Science Part A* 90 (2021), 31 n. 2. Methods studies include Michaël Bikard, 'Idea Twins: Simultaneous Discoveries as a Research Tool', *Strategic Management Journal* 41/8 (2020); Henry Small, Hung Tseng & Mike Patek, 'Discovering Discoveries: Identifying Biomedical Discoveries Using Citation Contexts', *Journal of Informetrics* 11/1 (2017), which can be read as providing empirical support for Brannigan's argument that 'discovery' was a retrospective honorific, though they do not cite his work and appear to hold a more realist epistemology. Small et al. find that the likelihood of scientific results being described by subsequent authors as 'discoveries' increased over time, up to 26–30 years after publication, after which the use of such language drops off slightly (51–52). In the philosophy of science, one strand continues the old maturation thesis, now recast as an 'evolutionary' philosophy of science, and achieved by largely ignoring the sociological critiques of the 1980s: D. Lamb & S. M. Easton, *Multiple Discovery* (Amersham: Avebury, 1984), which gives only a polite passing nod to Brannigan (221); Eric Scerri, *A Tale of Seven Scientists and a New Philosophy of Science* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 171–218 *et passim*. Scerri's analysis is explicitly framed as a rehabilitation of the Mertonian position, and against 'the sociological turn that took place following Kuhn's book', i.e. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962); see Scerri, 'Discovery of the Periodic Table', 2. A more impressive philosophical thread has revived the old question of the inevitability of discoveries, but in terms of an epistemological analysis of necessity and possibility, rather than a sociological one of structure and agency, see Gregory Radick, 'Other Histories, Other Biologies', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 56 (2005); Tambolo & Cevolani, 'Multiple Discoveries'.
- 41 Brannigan et al., 'Phenomenon of Multiple Discoveries'; Brannigan & Wanner, 'Multiple Discoveries'; Brannigan & Wanner, 'Historical Distributions', 431; see also Brannigan, *Social Basis*, 175–6.
- 42 Lynn K. Nyhart, 'Writing Zoologically: The *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Zoologie* and the Zoological Community in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany', in Peter Dear (ed.), *The Literary Structure of Scientific Argument: Historical Studies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Melinda Baldwin, *Making Nature: The History of a Scientific Journal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Melinda Baldwin, 'Scientific Autonomy, Public Accountability, and the Rise of "Peer Review" in the Cold War United States', *Isis* 109/3 (2018); Alex Csiszar, *The Scientific Journal: Authorship and the Politics of Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Aileen Fyfe, Noah Moxham, Julie McDougall-Waters & Camilla Mørk Røstvik, *A History of Scientific Journals: Publishing at the Royal Society, 1665–2015* (London: UCL, 2022).
- 43 Csiszar, *Scientific Journal*, 159–97, 216–23.
- 44 Baldwin, *Making Nature*.

# Actors out of sight?

## Digital methods and the visibility of historical knowers

*Jacob Orrje*

In the last decade, history has experienced a digital boom. First, the mass digitization of sources has facilitated research, and more recently a wealth of computational and statistical methods for analysing text—often included under the umbrella term ‘distant reading’—has made it possible to approach the content of ever-larger collections of sources. Distant reading treats textual historical sources as sequences of words, from which we can identify frequencies, collocations, and more advanced semantic relationships.<sup>1</sup> Such methods make it possible for historians to follow the evolution of concepts in the *longue durée* or in transnational contexts.<sup>2</sup> While enabling a wealth of new studies, there are also risks involved when we adapt our historical methods to benefit from this new digital efficiency, especially given the substantial risk of treating textual sources as self-contained bags of words, reducing the contextual complexity that give sources meaning, but which is difficult to include in highly streamlined digital pipelines.

Since the 1970s, historians of all stripes have become increasingly aware of the processes by which historical sources were produced. To scholars using methodologies taken from cultural history, science studies, global studies, or the history of knowledge, a source text is more than just its contents: it inherently carries contexts of production and circulation.<sup>3</sup> Sources have always been acted on by a wealth of heterogeneous categories of actors. This unruly lot of historical

people—their personas, relationships, and broader social context—is often of greater interest than the composition of words in collections of texts.<sup>4</sup> In this essay I examine how digital approaches shape the way historians view these historical actors and their agency, thus focusing on ‘knowledge actors’ in two senses. First, I use the term for the people, with their broader social context, who populate our historical sources and narratives; the people who have made, circulated, and reacted to certain historical forms of knowledge. Second, however, I take knowledge actors also to be a prerequisite of all historical knowledge, whether as producers, mediators, or even destroyers of the historical record. In this sense, the sources we use result from knowledge actors who provide us with a multitude of heterogeneous, skewed, and narrow windows into the past.

This implication of historical actors—as makers of our past—raises particular challenges to some forms of digital history. I thus begin with a discussion of the role of seriality and homogeneous time series when constructing digital histories, and how such methodology, if used naively, may obscure actor agency. I then relate my experiences of two recent digital-history projects.

First, there are the problems of using digital and statistical methods to understand categories of correspondents with the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (1739–1850), from which I argue that the promised efficiency of digital-history techniques can cause us to forget important points of critical historical method, and in particular how digital analyses of large collections of texts make it more difficult for us to adopt actor-centric perspectives to the past. These statistical methods pose the question, central to this book, of what constitutes a ‘knowledge actor’. My answer is that a knowledge actor should be understood through its agency and its way of relating to historical hierarchies of diverse knowledge forms. Historians should use methods that recognize actor agency if we are to understand the interplay of historical knowledge actors.

Second, I turn to an ongoing project to study mobile knowledge actors by deep mapping historical spatio-temporalities. I chart the ways a digital history of knowledge might retain the fine-grained

understanding of power relationships and the distributions of agency necessary to understand how knowledge-making and circulation depends on the interactions, and mobility, of a myriad of heterogeneous categories of actors. Finally, I discuss how the practice of annotating historical data is central to digital analyses that aim to go beyond the mere source content. Annotation requires much work, and especially the integration of more traditional historical skills with digital expertise. Nonetheless, I would argue that data annotation enables us to highlight the complex relationships between diverse historical actors and knowledge forms.

### Seriality and the analysis of knowledge actors

In their much-discussed book *The History Manifesto*, Jo Guldi and David Armitage criticize the prevalence of what they term the short-termism of historical scholarship. They argue that historians have in recent decades abandoned long diachronic narratives that address the great challenges of the present in favour of short microhistories of short timespans geared mainly towards a scholarly readership. In opposition to such limited narratives, they propose a radical reinvention of historical methodology, and a reorientation towards long-term history inspired by Braudel's concept of the *longue durée* coined in 1958.<sup>5</sup>

Guldi and Armitage's manifesto has attracted immense interest among historians, but also received much criticism. In an influential critique, Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler argue it misconstrues recent history writing. Using the same long-period statistical methods proposed by Guldi and Armitage, they instead argue that recent historical scholarship has seen the opposite development, because history theses and monographs today in fact examine longer periods than those published in the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> While they make an important point, particularly by nuancing Guldi and Armitage's narrative of historical research in crisis, by concentrating on the opposition between microhistory and the *longue durée* as a question

of time spans, they miss the one of the points of the manifesto—its historiographical basis.

Guldi and Armitage's proposed digital methodology builds not only on emerging technologies from computer science, but also on older traditions of long-term historical investigation and above all Braudel's *longue durée*. Key to this historiographical tradition is the wish to focus on the repetitive and serializable rather than the anomalous. In an article looking back at the method of microhistory, in practice the opposing approach to that of Braudel, Carlo Ginzburg pointed to what he perceived as the fundamental problem in the macroscopic, quantitative mode of history writing. Ginzburg's main problem with this form of history was that it tended to 'select as cognitive object only what is repetitive, and therefore capable of being serialized'. He argued that such approaches are 'paying a very high price in cognitive terms'.<sup>7</sup> His concern with long-term history was not its timescale, but rather the criteria it used for valuing sources and the principles by which it ordered historical documentation into time series. He thus argued that the key limitation of Braudelian history 'emerges precisely through what should be its basic objective: "the equalization of individuals in their roles of economic or socio-cultural agents".' According to Ginzburg, this approach not only distorted power relationships in relation to who can produce documentation in a given society, but also 'cancels out many particulars in the existing documentation for the benefit of what is homogeneous and comparable'.<sup>8</sup>

I would argue that the points Ginzburg raised against Braudel in the 1990s are valid against much digital history of late. A key approach among digital humanists is that of 'distant reading', a concept introduced by the literary theorist Franco Moretti for a wide range of digital techniques for text analysis, centred on a computer-aided statistical analysis of word frequencies and collocations. Distant reading, as opposed to traditional close reading, thus ideally results in a holistic understanding of collections of texts that would be too time-consuming, or even impossible, for a human to read. In digital history, distant-reading methods have mainly been used for diachronic, conceptual histories of linguistic change.<sup>9</sup> However,

when applied to the raw textual contents of historical sources, most distant-reading methods seem unsuited to analysing the power relationships of historical actors described in our sources, and perhaps even less useful for exploring the actors involved in the production and circulation of the sources themselves. An unsophisticated use of computer-aided statistical analyses of historical sources would thus encourage the search for the serial and repetitive, making it harder to discern diverse categories of actors with differing agency in relation to the production and circulation of knowledge.

When it was published, *The History Manifesto* also sparked discussion among historians of science. As pointed out by the historian of philosophy and science Stephen Gaukroger, the tension between microhistory and big-picture history can be understood using the concepts of under- and over-contextualization. Gaukroger points out that traditional forms of history of science are problematic in the way they under-contextualize their objects of study. For example, the traditional 'history of ideas' in the same vein as Arthur Lovejoy's *Great Chain of Being*, follows 'ideas whose essential content is wholly context free and explores them through radical contextual changes'. However, detailed microstudies that do not filter their detailed material also carry a risk of over-contextualization and risk 'obscuring the object of study' with unnecessary background noise.<sup>10</sup> Gaukroger, much like Ginzburg before him, underlines how the difference between microhistory and *longue durée* 'lies not so much in the length of the period studied, but, rather, in the kinds of questions asked and the resources needed to answer them.' As an example, he points out how synchronic projects comparing disparate geographies face many of the same methodological challenges as those covering long periods.<sup>11</sup> Instead of becoming stuck in the dichotomy between the long term and the micro, we should thus perhaps instead focus on how we construct and contextualize the time series we use to write narratives of historical actors.

## Efficient methods and bad history

The theoretical problems of how digital methods compel us to embrace specific historiographical modes of enquiry are more tangible if we relate them to one problematic example from my own work. Let us hence look at the minutes of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (KVA). In the 1940s, KVA had their handwritten minutes from c.1739–1850 transcribed using typewriters. As part of this effort, they also compiled an *index nominum*. Besides names, the index includes dates of birth and death and short descriptions of any titles, profession, discipline, etc.

By first digitizing the index and using optical character recognition (OCR) and then a custom Python script to populate it, I have compiled a database of all the people in the index as well as of the references to where they are mentioned in the minutes. At first glance, this database simplified work on a new actor-centric perspective on the KVA for a century or more. In his work on its early history, Sten Lindroth, the doyen of Swedish history of science, gave an approximate demography of the academy's early members. By focusing only on its members he, however, provided a narrow understanding of the community around the KVA. Moreover, this narrow approach made high-status categories of actors visible (for example, aristocrats, civil servants, and university scholars), while failing to highlight the broader groups of, for example, the academy's correspondents or employees. Likewise, it favoured forms of knowledge traditionally viewed as 'scientific', while obscuring the many other ways of knowing—of, for example, farmers, sailors, craftsmen, or traditional medicine—that the academy related to in a broader context.<sup>12</sup> While there are wider narratives of the academy—most notably the volume *Knowledge in Motion* (2018)—there is no systematic analysis of these heterogeneous actors and forms of knowledge. Perhaps a digital analysis of the index would facilitate such a study?

While this digitally enhanced index thus constitutes a shortcut to analyses that would have required substantially more effort if the data had been compiled manually, I soon realized my approach had

several methodological problems. First, it was not clear what layers of interpretation I was basing my claims on, as the KVA index is not an unproblematic account of the actors mentioned in the minutes. For example: do we know if all people mentioned in the text are present in the index, or does it have a bias towards categories considered important by the people who compiled it in the 1940s? To understand the index, we would thus also need to understand the historical actors who produced it. Similarly, the KVA's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century minutes must be understood in relation to the changing cultures of Sweden's political and scientific elites. What categories of actors did the KVA's fellows consider important enough to discuss at their meetings and to note in the minutes? It is immediately apparent that the descriptions of the actors in the index were shaped by the multiple contexts of its production. Perhaps the most evident example is how women in the index are generally defined by their relationships to men (as wives or daughters), as opposed to men, who are described using their titles and professions.

Thus, in the course of working with the index, the analysis became an increasingly complex task. To understand it, I would need to decipher multiple contexts of production from three centuries, and relate that to a wide range of knowledge actors: those mentioned in the index, the twentieth-century individuals who compiled the index, and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century academicians who produced the minutes. None of these problems is unique to the name index discussed here. Historians face these problems every day; we always need to relate historical representations to the context of their production and their intended audience. However, some digital methods—and especially distant-reading methods and statistical analyses of highly aggregated data—raise particular problems for historians. Being based on approaching historical representations as serializable as sequences of homogeneous and comparable data, digital methods' efficiency comes from comparing stable categories which are homogeneous over time. I would argue that it is exactly the efficiency offered by these methods that risk compelling us to ignore the contexts of production of the sources themselves. When



approaching compilations of historical data, which themselves are products of a historical context, we thus need to be attentive to what analytical categories we use for constructing our time series and how we relate to changing actors' categories, anomalies, and agency in our historical material.

The example of my own partly failed research process does not mean that distant reading is incompatible with detailed, critical history, or that statistical analyses of sources such as the KVA name index cannot contribute to our understanding of historical change in a meaningful way.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it highlights the importance of integrating a critical analysis of historical sources into digital-history practice. Towards the end of their manifesto, Guldi and Armitage make a similar point. In what seems like a wish to nuance their call for long-term history, they underline that 'events drawn from the lives of actual persons must continue to be a source of circumspection and critical analysis for historians, even as they take their arguments wider'.<sup>14</sup> Studies technically possible from a digital perspective are not always good history. And when we approach sources critically, we might realize that digital methods need to be complemented with other forms of historical analysis.

### Movement, deep maps, and scale

Critical approaches to digital history that abandon the strict seriality of statistical analysis in favour of a more contextual approach often require far more work to curate and closely engage with sources. For digital textual sources, such work generally involves describing it using metadata, as well as annotating the text itself.<sup>15</sup> Metadata and annotations become a way of anchoring the source in relevant historical contexts, and enable other forms, and thicker, historical descriptions. While such approaches thus force us to tone down the promises of automatization and large scales that often, implicitly or explicitly, accompany calls for the digital humanities, it instead charts a way forward by combining long-term approaches with more contextual modes of history that, for example, highlight the agency of actors. As

pointed out by Johan Jarlbrink, in practice digital humanities research is generally far from automatized. Humans are not only required to make sense of results, but digital methods are more often than not based on ‘dull tasks that make data outputs possible’.<sup>16</sup> Digital historians who take actors’ agency seriously would need to critically engage with these tasks, and think about how they annotate data in ways that facilitate research questions relevant to wider fields of historical research.

In recent decades, global historians have developed a large set of sophisticated tools to deal with multiple contexts and broader scopes. In both global history and history of knowledge, concepts such as circulation, scale-making, and friction have been used to analyse historical epistemologies beyond local contexts in a way that makes it possible to alternate between scales, ranging from actors’ performances through larger transnational infrastructures to global connections.<sup>17</sup> Digital humanists, or more specifically scholars in the spatial humanities, have similarly developed a range of theoretical tools for approaching historical space. In a key monograph, Stuart Dunn points to how the field has moved from a focus on specific spatial technologies (primarily geographical information systems, or GIS) towards ‘the study of general principles and broad understanding, as opposed to answering particular research questions’.<sup>18</sup> Dunn particularly points to the development of ‘deep mapping’, a method which blurs the distinction between maps and spatial relations.<sup>19</sup>

Deep maps have been described as ‘finely detailed, multimedia depictions of a place and the people, buildings, objects, flora, and fauna that exist within it and that are inseparable from the activities of everyday life’, which can be used ‘to engage evidence within its spatio-temporal context and to provide a platform for a spatially-embedded argument’.<sup>20</sup> Deep mapping can contribute much to the history of knowledge, for example by illuminating the interplay of mobile actors, disparate geographies, and various cultures in the circulation of knowledge. It offers what is perhaps the most concise example of a digital method that facilitates thick descriptions of historical contexts. In contrast to methods of distant reading originating

in literature studies, the way deep mapping enables the switching of scales—from following individual actors in the streets to mapping long-term, larger geopolitical developments—might for example make it more compatible with modes of history that wish to go beyond an analysis of text and language to instead focus on actors' performances, material aspects, and spatial relationships.

To illustrate how deep mapping could be integrated into long-term historical narratives that preserve focus on heterogeneous knowledge actors, I use the example of my research project, *Mapping the Geographies of Early Modern Mining Knowledge: A Digital History of the Study Tours of the Swedish Bureau of Mines, 1691–1826*, where we use digital deep maps to structure a transnational diachronic history of European state-related knowledge. From the seventeenth to the mid nineteenth century, the Bureau of Mines (*Bergskollegium*) was charged with controlling and upholding the Swedish state's interest in the production and trade of metals. Policing these activities required officials knowledgeable in several fields (ranging from mathematics and mechanics, chemistry, geology, and law to the hierarchies of the mines and miners' working techniques).<sup>21</sup> To gather relevant knowledge, the Bureau encouraged officials to tour foreign territories and compile travelogues, primarily about European mines, ironworks, and other worksites deemed of interest to the Swedish government. These handwritten accounts, consisting of Swedish text written in a German script typical of eighteenth-century Northern European manuscripts, were submitted to the Bureau archive and are now held by the National Archives of Sweden in a series comprising some 12,000 pages.<sup>22</sup>

Our project explores how methods from the spatial humanities might benefit research in the history of knowledge. We examine how such methods might enable large-scale spatio-temporal studies that retain the focus on historical actors. Such an approach requires a great deal of manual work, however. Our workflow thus consists of several steps. Using the *Transkribus* platform for handwritten text recognition, we transcribe the folios.<sup>23</sup> Then we annotate the text, focusing on marking up the places that officials moved through

and described, and such things as categories of knowledge actors, relevant concepts, and key technologies. The result is a dataset with which we can follow and compare the Bureau officials' travels over more than a century and their changing descriptions of European mining knowledge.

This form of annotated dataset makes it possible to create deep maps that describe travellers' itineraries as they moved around Europe. Thanks to the annotations, the travelogues also lend themselves to more sophisticated, and particularly more contextually aware, forms of distant reading. For example, we could explore changes in the composition of words in texts describing the same mines. At the same time, the annotations make a qualitative analysis possible, enabling us to find specific cases in the sources: anomalies, interactions between particular categories of knowledge actors, or different approaches to travel writing. The maps make it possible to compare the descriptions of mines by different travellers, and to understand the geographical spread of mining knowledge, and ultimately the circulation by locality of diverse approaches to mining. The project is thus designed to illustrate a digital historical methodology of zooming between a general level consisting of serialized data on the one hand, and several detailed contexts in which we can see the agency of individual actors as they move through different geographies on the other hand. By broadening our scope in this way, the methods moreover enable us to write a history of knowledge that focuses on contexts beyond the elite communities of universities and academies, and which thus illuminates the role of knowledge in early modern work, state-building, and transnational trade. The digital tools, as employed here, will help in constructing thick contextual descriptions. They are thus primarily aids to other historical research practices geared towards the historical understanding of the circulation of knowledge.

## Conclusions

A question underlying the analysis of this essay has been the relationship between digital methods on the one hand and general big-picture history and narrower, though detailed, actor-centred accounts on the other. The *History Manifesto* has presented a vision of *longue durée* history and digital methodology as two closely knit parts of a new form of history writing, based on big data. It cannot be denied that digital methods provide highly efficient methods for analysing time series. This efficiency is perhaps the reason some digital historians point to such approaches as the key for new big-picture histories. However, as argued in this essay, previous twentieth-century criticism of big-picture history seldom faulted grand narratives for being based on too few sources or overly simplified statistical analyses. Twentieth-century historians critical of the grand narratives of their day instead argued these approaches lacked attention to the anomalies and various power relationships between historical actors, and that these deficiencies resulted in long-term narratives that were under-contextualized. Going forward, if we were to attempt new long narratives in the history of knowledge by using digital methods, we should take the spectre of under-contextualization seriously. Or in other words, we should think about how we can keep an eye on context while expanding our temporal and geographical scope.

There are several reasons why distant-reading methods carry a risk of under-contextualization. First, the structure of the data, usually as plain text, generally favours conceptual studies. As a rule, performatively inclined analyses—of, for example, controversies, relations between people, or power structures—require more fine-grained, curated, and relational data. Such studies demand ways of following speech-acts or other performances, made by specific actors in a certain context and in relation to particular audiences. Second, source selection bias makes it difficult to carry out studies of marginal actors, and thus digital analyses risk reproducing existing dominant narratives. Only specific organizations tend to leave large enough collections, which also are considered valuable enough to digitize by the financiers who

fund such large projects. Thus, the sources available to digital analysis are generally skewed towards, for example, parliamentary records, governmental reports, printed papers, or scholarly journals. Guldi and Armitage identify a similar problem with skewed archives, and how digital studies ‘other than that of the nation-state rests upon the ongoing creation and maintenance of inclusive archives’.<sup>24</sup> However, the creation and maintenance of such archives require specific resources that are seldom available without strong institutional backing.

The two examples from my own studies discussed in this essay serve to highlight how digital approaches can serve very different roles in historical inquiry. For the sake of argument, we could divide such methods into two ideal categories. On the one hand, we have techniques similar to those of distant reading, which promise a high level of automatization, and which enable us to write history using big data. Such history, as argued here, is in many ways similar to the approaches envisioned by Braudel and other big-picture historians of the twentieth century. On the other hand, we have techniques such as deep mapping. These methodologies instead promise new ways of constructing detailed contexts that can be used for writing both grand narratives and short-term history, but which also require a great deal of manual intervention in the form of annotation and structuring data.<sup>25</sup>

These digital approaches offer radically different possibilities for adopting actor-centric perspectives in the history of knowledge. Generally, distant-reading techniques, such as topic modelling or collocation analysis carried out on plain text, seem to encourage a more structuralist approach to historical records, where words and concepts become the object of study. Such approaches also enable statistical analyses of actor categories. Which actors are mentioned in a specific collection of sources, and does the composition change over time? How are these actors discussed and does the textual context in which actors are mentioned change? But such digital approaches are less apt to reveal historical sources as complex networks of knowledge actors and audiences, all with diverse roles in relation to the making and circulation of the source. Less automated techniques—which revolve

around annotating data and visualizing historical contexts—show more promise for such complex historical analyses. Carefully annotated datasets could thus be a way of realizing longer narratives that still maintain the historical narrative based on thick descriptions of the past. As shown in the discussions of deep mapping and handwritten text recognition, we have a wealth of digital tools that can be integrated into the workflows of more qualitatively oriented historians.

There are great opportunities in exploring how we could write digital histories, from the micro level to studies with broader scope, using methods that do not focus on effectiveness and instead aim to support historians' research practices. Using such approaches, we could improve our understanding of marginalized actors, power relationships, and the production contexts of historical sources.

## Notes

- 1 Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).
- 2 Lara Putnam, 'The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast', *American Historical Review* 121/2 (2016); Jo Guldi, 'The Measures of Modernity: The New Quantitative Metrics of Historical Change Over Time and Their Critical Interpretation', *International Journal for History, Culture & Modernity* 7/1 (2019).
- 3 For the circulation of knowledge and the ways it relates to previous contextualizing approaches to the history of science, see James A. Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit', *Isis* 95/4 (2004); Kapil Raj, 'Introduction: Circulation and Locality in Early Modern Science', *British Journal for the History of Science* 43/4 (2010); 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).
- 4 For a similar argument for actor-centric studies in the history of knowledge, see Suzanne Marchand, 'Weighing Context and Practices: Theodor Mommsen and the Many Dimensions of Nineteenth-Century Humanistic Knowledge', *History & Theory* 59/4 (2020). For persona, see Lorraine Daston & Otto Sibum, 'Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories', *Science in Context* 16/1 (2003); Kirsti Niskanen & Michael J. Barany, 'Introduction: The Scholar Incarnate', in ead. (eds.) *Gender, Embodiment, and the History of the Scholarly Persona* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
- 5 Jo Guldi & David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014); Fernand Braudel, 'Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée', *Annales* 13/4 (1958).
- 6 Deborah Cohen & Peter Mandler, 'The History Manifesto: A Critique', *American Historical Review* 120/2 (2015).

- 7 Carlo Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It', *Critical Inquiry* 20/1 (1993), 21.
- 8 Ginzburg, 'Microhistory', 21.
- 9 Moretti, *Distant Reading*. For the use of distant reading in historical scholarship, see Hannu Salmi, *What Is Digital History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), 29–56.
- 10 Stephen Gaukroger, 'Undercontextualization and Overcontextualization in the History of Science', *Isis* 107/2 (2016).
- 11 *Ibid.* 340.
- 12 Sten Lindroth, *Kungl. Svenska vetenskapsakademiens historia 1739–1818* (Enskede: TBP, 1967), 28; 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).
- 13 For a counter-example of how statistical methods can be a valuable aid for actor-centric studies, see Melanie Conroy & Kimmo Elo, 'Picturing the Politics of Resistance: Using Image Metadata and Historical Network Analysis to Map the East German Opposition Movement, 1975–1990', in Mats Fridlund, Mila Oiva & Patri Paju (eds.), *Digital Histories: Emergent Approaches Within the New Digital History* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2020).
- 14 Guldi & Armitage, *History Manifesto*, 121.
- 15 For metadata and the friction incurred in the effort of creating it, see Paul N. Edwards, Matthew S. Mayernik, Archer L. Batcheller, Geoffrey C. Bowker & Christine L. Borgman, 'Science Friction: Data, Metadata, and Collaboration', *Social Studies of Science* 41/5 (2011).
- 16 Johan Jarlbrink, 'All the Work That Makes It Work: Digital Methods and Manual Labour', in Mats Fridlund et al., *Digital Histories*, 113.
- 17 See, for example, Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Kapil Raj, 'Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators', in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *A Companion to the History of Science* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2016). For scales and scale-making in global studies, see Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: PUP, 2005).
- 18 Stuart Dunn, *A History of Place in the Digital Age* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 4.
- 19 *Ibid.* 5.
- 20 David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan & Trevor M. Harris, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).
- 21 Hjalmar Fors, *The Limits of Matter: Chemistry, Mining, and Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Jacob Orrje, *Mechanicus: Performing an Early Modern Persona* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2015), ch. 3 *et passim*.
- 22 Hjalmar Fors & Jacob Orrje, 'Describing the World and Shaping the Self: Knowledge-Gathering, Mobility and Spatial Control at the Swedish Bureau of Mines', in Lothar Schilling & Jakob Vogel (eds.), *Transnational Cultures of Expertise: Circulating State-Related Knowledge in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019).
- 23 For a discussion of Transkribus, see Guenter Muehlberger et al., 'Transforming Scholarship in the Archives Through Handwritten Text Recognition: Transkribus as a Case Study', *Journal of Documentation* 75/5 (2019). For our approach to HTR (handwritten text recognition), see Jacob Orrje, *From Folios to Files: Evaluating*



*the Use of Handwritten Text Recognition to Transcribe the Protocols of the Swedish Bureau of Mines 1700–1840* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2020).

24 Guldi & Armitage, *History Manifesto*, 113.

25 Many digital methods fall somewhere in between these two extremes, of course. For example, collocation analysis (analysing texts using the frequency of co-occurring words) is a distant-reading method easily used for more qualitative readings. Likewise, quantitative GIS (geographic information system) analyses require manual annotation, but also promise highly automated analyses of large amounts of spatial data.

# Organizing knowledge circulation

## Using conference design to engineer the exchange of knowledge

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In 1910, the French engineer Charles-Marie Gariel issued a report on a method of organizing international conferences for the Congrès Mondial des Associations Internationales (CMAI). Back then, international conferences—or congresses as they were called in the late nineteenth century—already gathered assemblies by the thousands and had grown into a staple of international life after only three decades.<sup>1</sup> Mobilized by geologists, meteorologists, hypnotists, and even bakers, the international conference was by the turn of the twentieth century the preferred means to meet, debate, and exchange knowledge for all sorts of specialized groups.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, Gariel, who had organized hundreds of them for the Paris Expositions Universelles of 1889 and 1900, warned his audience about the mounting procedural challenges impeding effective conferencing, before sharing several guidelines he considered essential to ensuring international conferences remained a powerful arena of knowledge exchange.<sup>3</sup>

With hundreds of international conferences under his belt and armed with his 26-page report, Gariel did not just speak at CMAI as a mere state-employed conference administrator. He acted as a powerful knowledge actor as well. On this occasion, Gariel shared his practical expertise on the practice of conferencing, and discoursed

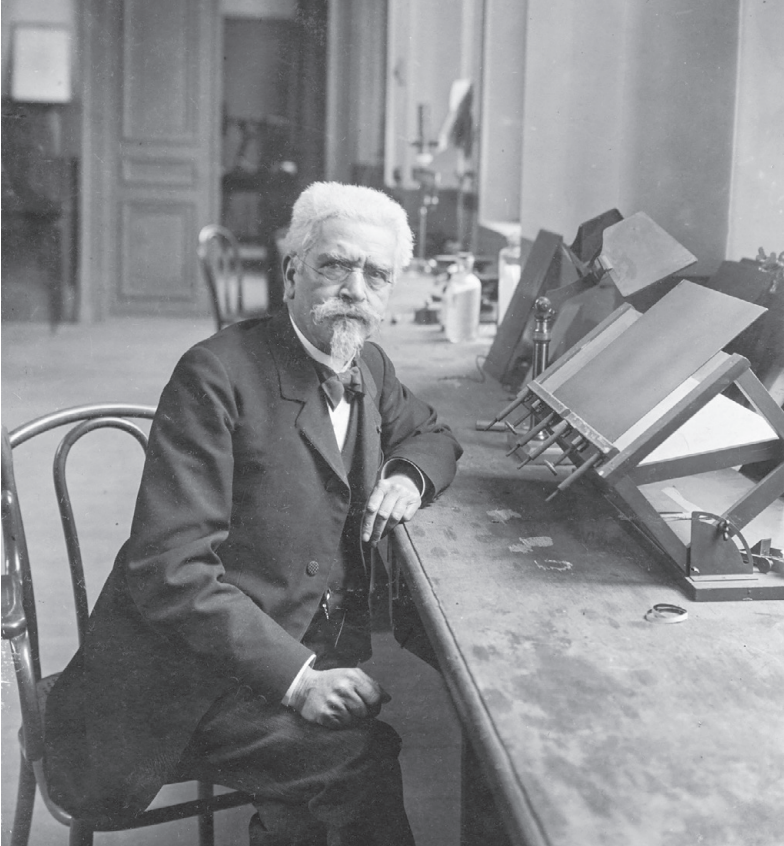


Figure 12.1. Portrait of Charles-Marie Gariel in his laboratory (1908). Source: Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de Santé Paris Cité, Paris, CIPBo293.

at length on the way this burgeoning arena of knowledge uniquely fostered the circulation of knowledge beyond national borders and social spheres. Yet, people like Gariel and the things they did to organize and enlarge the international movement of knowledge have generally been ignored in the history of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

How knowledge moves and who participates in its motion have been much-debated questions. Shifting away from presumed centres, tracing the movement of knowledge through social classes, cultures, and material objects, and conceiving encounters and reception as

productive mediations of knowledge, historians of science and historians of knowledge have profoundly revised our understanding of the ways knowledge moves.<sup>5</sup> Speaking of circulation rather than diffusion, recent historiography has depicted knowledge movement as a locally situated, mediated process which does not just transform the forms and functions of knowledge, but also reconfigures the means of its production and validation as it moves to and fro.<sup>6</sup> With concepts such as ‘go-between’, ‘knowledge brokers’, and ‘active readership’, circulation studies have also shown how the movement of knowledge—or lack thereof—depended mostly on a range of overlooked intermediary and receiving actors rather than its assumed originators.<sup>7</sup> Yet, these studies have hailed as knowledge actors only those acting or interacting with knowledge in a productive capacity, leaving out actors like Gariel who neither produced nor used the knowledge they nonetheless set in motion.

In this essay, I examine Gariel, his actions as a conference organizer, and his discourse of knowledge movement to see what new insights the history of knowledge can draw about knowledge circulation by considering actors like Gariel as a particular type of knowledge broker—the organizer of knowledge circulation.<sup>8</sup> To understand what he did by organizing and reforming conferences and why it matters for the movement of knowledge requires a shift of attention, however. Rather than emphasizing knowledge per se and scrutinizing the way its movement reshuffles form, content, and validity as it is usually done by circulation studies, studying Gariel’s role requires us to explore the question of the conditions to circulation and their organization. Here, I do not scrutinize the nature of knowledge exchange at the conferences Gariel organized; instead, I analyse his vision of conference organization and its problems, his understanding of conferences’ role in knowledge exchange, and the politics of knowledge circulation underpinning his conception of effective conference-based exchange. How did Gariel organize conferences and what model of knowledge exchange did he develop for and after the world fairs? What was their role in the international circulation of knowledge? What problems did he foresee threatening conferences, and how did they affect knowledge

circulation in his eyes? What solutions did he offer? What vision of conferencing did he defend and what function did he attribute to conference-based knowledge circulation?

### The perils of multiplicity

In his lengthy report, prosaically titled *Rapport sur l'Organisation des Congrès Internationaux*, Gariel meticulously laid out the complex procedures behind the running of a conference. He went into an array of practical and organizational issues ranging from how to assemble an effective organizing committee to discussing the right method for drawing up a workable conference schedule. His thorough description of conference infrastructure served as a critical analysis of the booming practice of international conferencing and the challenges that threatened the form of knowledge circulation it enabled.<sup>9</sup>

For Gariel, international conferences proved to be valuable machinery in moving international understanding and intellectual progress forward. If, as he observed, more conferences failed at fulfilling their agenda, it was the consequence of three main practical challenges—‘the multiplicity of languages, the multiplicity of sections, and the multiplicity of members’. These three problems, he added further on, ‘manifested themselves ever so strongly as these congresses multiplied’.<sup>10</sup>

The first problem, Gariel claimed, was the dramatic increase of the number of official working languages at international conferences. Reflecting the diversification of conference membership, he explained, the multiplication of languages had the perverse effect of straining exchanges. As few conference attendees could speak more than two languages well enough, Gariel wondered how ‘many could not follow (the discussions) in their entirety’, or at best ‘managed to keep up with the session if only approximately’.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, he criticized the tendency of organizers to split conferences into more sections. Aimed at accommodating the bigger and increasingly diverse population of attendees, these measures challenged in his view the cohesion that conference work demanded. Dispersed in different sections and

sometimes scattered in different locations, attendees were ‘forced to make a choice’ according to Gariel and give up the other questions simultaneously treated ‘without the certainty that this choice may be the most satisfying’.<sup>12</sup> He concluded his diagnosis by adding that the plethora of sections and the resulting dispersion of conference work reduced the chances for attendees to meet and get to know one another. The odds were made even worse by the third problem, that of a soaring number of conference-goers with multiple conferences gathering up to 60,000 attendees on a regular basis since the early 1890s.

For Gariel, the unchecked growth of attendees, the chaotic splitting of conference programmes into countless sections, and the cacophony of languages found in sessions obstructed the direct contacts and exchanges that international conferences originally enabled. These challenges were in his eyes merely the symptoms of a deeper problem, that of the unreasoned organization of international conferences, or of the inadequate means by which knowledge exchange became organized in its midst. As we will see, solving these problems and, in so doing, reinforcing knowledge exchange required to Gariel’s mind a profound revision and standardization of the way conferences were planned and run.

Here, Gariel’s diagnosis already offers to the historian of knowledge several interesting insights regarding the process of knowledge circulation. Unlike the mere conference attendee—that is, the knowledge actor the historian usually interrogates—who might evoke from personal experience the problem of size or language as circumstantial, these problems, seen from the overarching perspective of a conference administrator such as Gariel, appeared here elevated and conceptualized as structural obstacles to effective conference exchange. Seen from Gariel’s position, these problems bring to light the otherwise invisible question of the infrastructure of exchange. Gariel’s diagnosis underscores the challenge of providing the right conditions and organizational regime to maintain an effective knowledge exchange over time and across social and national differences. His report illustrates how easily the machinery of something like

international conferences can derail in the face of challenges inherent to international contact (for example, diversity of language) and contingent on the practice itself (for example, its structure in sessions and its unchecked growth).

### Proven experts at international exchange

Criticizing unreasoned organization and chaotic procedures and pointing out its detrimental effects on international exchanges landed well at the CMAI. The many conference organizers, directors of international associations, and promoters of international unification projects present in the audience were also grappling with the challenges of booming international, intellectual, and knowledge exchanges.<sup>13</sup> The promoters of this particular conference, the Belgian pacifist Paul Otlet, a well-known bibliographer, and his friend the international lawyer Henri La Fontaine, had brought these specialists of international cooperation together to bring order to the surge of international exchange they had observed in the previous two decades.

Coined as the ‘first era of globalization’, the period 1880–1914 saw the international flow of goods, people, and knowledge grow exponentially.<sup>14</sup> With the rapid development of new means of transportation and communication, the belle époque was a period of tremendous cultural, artistic, and scientific development. The appearance of new publication methods and the emergence of new arenas such as international conferences and international associations enabled not only intense, regular face-to-face intellectual exchanges, but the resulting contacts and flows of knowledge and people also contributed to transform and specialize intellectual work.<sup>15</sup>

Through the Office Central des Institutions Internationales set up in 1907 and the publication of the *Annuaire de la Vie Internationale* (1908–1909), the Belgian duo had been scrutinizing the thriving yet chaotic development of the period’s intense international life. The surveys by the Office eventually paved the way to the CMAI. As Otlet explained in his introductory report, the aim of this conference was to provide ‘a rational international organization’ for these

organizations, 'to coordinate, unify, and complete them', and hence strengthen 'an international entente regarding all aspects where such an understanding is possible and recognized as desirable'.<sup>16</sup>

For Otlet, international conferences were not just a driving force of internationalization, they were a crucial mode of knowledge exchange, and as such a valuable instrument he effectively mobilized throughout the 1910s and 1920s through the CMAI to undertake the collective ordering and rationalization of international life. Yet, to regulate international exchanges by means of conferencing first required in his view—and in line with Gariel's own assessment—regulation of the chaotic growth of international conferencing and its inadequate infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> A task he handed over to Gariel.

By 1910, Gariel was recognized as an experienced conference organizer and a dedicated observer of international conferencing. Between 1889 and 1900, he directed the French Ministry of Commerce's *Service des Congrès*, and through it administered 196 international conferences for the Parisian Expositions Universelles of 1889 and 1900 and planned France's participation in the series of conferences held at the world fairs in Chicago (1893) and Brussels (1897). Building upon this experience, he and his *Service des Congrès* authored several reports in the 1890s, which critically examined conference procedure and evaluated the growth and outcome of international conferences.<sup>18</sup> Gariel got involved with other modes of international knowledge circulation as well. Like Otlet, he scrutinized the growing pool of international associations, and, thanks to his work on the standardization of conference documentation, joined Otlet's *Institut International de Bibliographie* and participated in 1908 in his *Congrès Mondial de Bibliographie et Documentation* (CMBD).

Placing Gariel's problematization of turn-of-the-century conferencing in context illuminates the fact that a peculiar regime of knowledge and expertise governed the organization of knowledge exchange. At the CMAI, Gariel spoke as one expert among a burgeoning community of experts on the period's international life and its organization. His assessment of international conferences, their actual and future function in international knowledge exchange, and their organizational



structure and necessary reform rested upon a recognized procedural expertise, which combined two decades of theoretical, practical, and experiential knowledge of late nineteenth-century conferencing. I will thus chart some of the ways Gariel altered conference rules, space, and infrastructure and indicate how these logistical changes transformed the nature of the knowledge exchange as predicated by conferences.

### Conference logistics

For Gariel, a well-functioning and successful international conference ought to produce a flawless, seamless experience of contact and exchange between its attendees. For him, the ideal conference had to foster unhindered accessibility, maximal engagement, and relevant interpersonal contacts. As he explained, the ideal exchange model should make it possible for every participating member to listen to every talk at the conference and to participate in every ensuing discussion. Attendees should also be able to understand everything being said and to interact meaningfully with every delegate they have an interest in getting to know.

Gariel's vision of effective knowledge circulation drew heavily on his experience as a conference organizer. It reflected the kind of conference practice he sought to generalize at the Parisian world's fairs. At the 196 conferences he and his Service des Congrès organized, Gariel tried to implement three conference functions. First, mimicking the exposition's encyclopaedic goals, he enforced specialization by welcoming as many international conferences as possible while avoiding duplication, preventing overlaps between conferences and creating new ones in fields where none existed.<sup>19</sup> Seeking to encompass all knowledge fields, Gariel used conferences to enforce emerging disciplinary boundaries and to enact specialized epistemic communities. A second important function of conferences was to bring these burgeoning international communities to life by facilitating socialization and face-to-face contact. Finally, conferences put each specialized community to work by pooling existing knowledge, by enabling comparisons between nations and, ultimately, by helping

settle key questions, which at the time revolved primarily around the adoption of international standards.

To fulfil these functions and overcome the multiplicity of problems obstructing conference-based exchange, Gariel proposed to rationalize conference organization and procedure.<sup>20</sup> At the world's fairs, he got a first-hand view of how infrastructural shortcomings such as the lack of adequate space, loose session programmes, and unclearly defined or even missing rules of procedures plagued all the conferences. For Gariel, the neglect of conference infrastructure hindered knowledge circulation. Building on this knowledge, he arrived at the diagnosis and prognosis he presented in Brussels.

The first set of problems impeding knowledge exchange at conferences concerned the loose structure and regulation of conference work. Gariel explained that back in the 1890s, conferences merely relied on their titles to frame the content of their programmes, which, he claimed, had a dreadful effect on the quality of the exchanges. With sessions consisting of a succession of vaguely connected paper presentations, Gariel observed that the ensuing discussions rarely mattered as the audience's attention was spread thin and rarely prepared well enough to interject meaningfully. Back then, rules and traditions were not yet the norm for all conferences, and even when some were enforced the outcome was rarely satisfactory.<sup>21</sup>

Gariel sought to improve the quality of in-session exchanges by introducing detailed rules and regulations to empower conference staff, focus the audience, and discipline speakers. Besides delineating a focused agenda, he proposed to precirculate a preliminary report on the state of the art for each agenda question. Prepared by a qualified, authoritative figure and used as introduction to each session, these reports were designed to make it possible to treat a topic in depth and increase the quality and duration of general discussions. While providing the audience with relevant background knowledge, these reports also enabled speakers to use their time to convey novel knowledge claims for discussion.

If these measures were essential to focus exchanges on relevant points, the overall quality of exchanges also depended on the quality

of the collective enacted by the conferences. For Gariel, the degree of specialization and intellectual unity of the conference cohort was also key. Yet, gathering the right crowd was still a major challenge. Despite advances in transport networks, many foreign attendees were still discouraged by the journey, which remained costly and often took longer than the conference itself. The lack of a defined programme and adequate promotion resulted in a degree of eclecticism among attendees that proved detrimental to conference business.

Bringing in the right people called for meticulous preparations, which according to Gariel should preferably start years before the actual meeting. Helping with travel and accommodation by offering preferential rates was crucial to attracting foreign attendees to a meeting and reinforcing its international character. Targeted promotion of a conference, Gariel argued, was also indispensable to reinforcing unity and specialization in the conference's future work. What he meant here was that, by picking clear identity markers and publicizing a precise agenda in relevant specialized publications or via a patronage committee featuring every eminent man in the field, the organizing committee would likely ward off non-specialists and attract relevant figures.

Last but not least for Gariel, the quality of conference exchange depended on the ability of the conference to emulate a sense of togetherness and common understanding among its attendees. Yet, as we have seen, Gariel pointed out to his readers that conferencing tended rather towards dispersion. With inflated numbers of conference-goers and sections to accommodate everyone, he noted that it was as 'if there were not a single congress anymore but a range of simultaneous congresses'.<sup>22</sup> These overpopulated multisection conferences posed significant logistical challenges and, more problematically, disrupted conferences' ability to generate togetherness and familiarity among attendees. While too many sections meant that attendees were scattered across various session halls in different buildings, too many attendees overburdened the secretary-general and his staff and hampered their ability to hold the conference together.

As with the rest, creating cohesion and togetherness primarily boiled down to strict rules and procedures. Believing that the single-section conference was the best format to produce the most useful results, he suggested multiplying the number of conferences rather than the number of sections and attendees. He claimed that greater specialization would mechanically reduce the number of attendees and, in turn, enabled organizers like himself to introduce other logistical measures conducive of greater exchanges. In that regard, he insisted on the importance of conference facilities. Having not provided adequate facilities in 1889, Gariel designed and built a Palais des Congrès in 1900 to centralize conference life at a single site. By providing for every of the attendees' needs, this kind of specialized venue made it possible to keep everyone under the same roof and emulate the sense of togetherness he believed to be so important for formal and informal exchanges.

### Conference procedures

With his battery of logistical and procedural measures, Gariel did not aim to improve conference-based knowledge exchange for its own sake. Taken together, his measures were a complete overhaul of this arena of knowledge exchange as his procedural reform served to consolidate conferences as arenas of disciplinary and professional specialization. It favoured the production of international resolutions and standards over open-ended discussions; the exchange of specialized and monodisciplinary knowledge over multidisciplinary confrontation; and finally, it welcomed and encouraged institutionalized specialists to interact and excluded amateurs.

Gariel's conference model shows that not all knowledge was considered worthy of circulating and that none moved for the sake of moving. Seeing his proposed reforms in the wider context of Otlet's CMAI further clarifies the politics of knowledge exchange. Gariel pursued a particular agenda through his conference reforms and his attempt at regimenting the kind of knowledge exchange it performed. By establishing conferences as the normative arena for

the international circulation of specialist knowledge, Gariel, Otlet, and the CMAI strived to enforce the rational, highly specialized international knowledge order they deemed necessary for orderly, peaceful international exchanges.<sup>23</sup>

After the CMAI, Gariel reframed his 1910 report as a procedural, organizational conference method. Encouraged by Otlet, he prepared a universal *règlement*-type, or model regulations, which he presented at the second session of the CMAI in Ghent in 1913. The *règlement*-type synthesized his vision of conferencing and how standardized procedures and infrastructure could enhance the international exchange of specialized knowledge at conferences. More importantly, Gariel and Otlet foresaw in such a universal *règlement*-type an instrument to structure the practice of conferencing and provide a rational basis for an orderly international life.

With the *règlement*-type, Otlet and Gariel together established specialization and standardization as the key mechanisms for effective international organization and knowledge exchange. At the micro level, applying the *règlement*-type was to steady specialist knowledge exchange and help with consensus-building by each specialized epistemic community which a conference gathered and enacted—a promise that Otlet actually put into practice as he enforced Gariel's *règlement*-type to organize the work of the ensuing sessions of the CMIA and the CMBD. At a macro level, the *règlement*-type offered them an instrument to enforce a rational reorganization of the conference movement as a whole. They expected the universal adoption of their model regulations to prevent duplication and overlaps and to provide a specific international arena for every specialized knowledge community. The standardization of conference procedures fed into Otlet's vision of the rationalization of international life by specialization. However, Otlet and Gariel were denied the opportunity to pursue their plans. The outbreak of the First World War did not just strain international cooperation, it brought their collaboration to a sudden and definitive end.



Figure 12.2. An example of Gariel's conference ideal, the International Geological Congress in its 12th session, Toronto (1913). Source: University of British Columbia Library, o.14288/1.0214799.

### Concluding remarks

By examining how Gariel strived to reconfigure and routinize conferences as a mode of knowledge circulation, this essay sheds light on a particular category of knowledge broker: the organizer of knowledge circulation. Reconstructing Gariel's engagement with the practice of conferencing, we have seen him ponder its role in international knowledge exchange, identify various logistical and procedural problems and their impeding effect on conference-based knowledge exchange, and elaborate practical guidelines to remodel such conferences and improve the process of circulation they enabled. At no point, however, do we see Gariel engage in the act of exchanging knowledge or showing an interest in the content of the knowledge and ideas being exchanged at the conferences he studied, administered, and tried to reform. He nonetheless had a hand in the process of knowledge circulation, not by engaging in the act of exchange, but by engineering the conditions

enabling it. Decentring the analysis of circulation away from knowledge producers and users onto organizers such as Gariel provides new insights into how, why, and in what forms knowledge circulates.

Although, as Fa-ti Fan points out, circulation studies and their emphasis on the fluidity of knowledge tend to depict knowledge as flowing almost seamlessly, many barriers and frictions stand in the way of exchange.<sup>24</sup> And, as this essay shows, communicating knowledge and making it move even at the most basic, direct level of face-to-face exchange is a complex operation. Interestingly, looking at how actors like Gariel identified and tried to overcome barriers to exchange showed that it implied setting up new ones. Gariel facilitated exchange by promoting certain ways of exchanging and certain actors of exchange and by excluding others. By structuring sessions with a rigorous distribution of papers, by specializing the attendance through strict membership selection, he relegated lengthy lecture-like forms of knowledge communication and amateur and lay attendees to outside the new perimeter of knowledge exchange endorsed by his conference model. Scrutinizing the making of Gariel's conference model hence reveals its infrastructure to be less an external context than a set of purposefully produced conditions of circulation, which mould the knowledge being circulated as much as the actors involved.

By dint of the barriers he overcame and those he enforced, Gariel acted as an organizer or regulator of knowledge by shaping, directly and indirectly, the production and circulation of knowledge in several ways. First, the guidelines he enforced directly affected conference actors and the way agency was distributed in the exchange process. His external procedures designated which knowledge actors were legitimate to exchange and governed what a speaker and his audience could or could not do. Second, scrutinizing the making of these regimes of exchange highlighted the key role of a number of different, often dismissed facilitators. Gariel did not just make visible the role of the organizing committee, the session chairmen, and secretaries in mediating exchange, he also pointed to their importance as he sought to reinforce their role in the circulation process. Third, despite what circulation studies assume, knowledge is not just transformed by,

but also for movement. This is evident in Gariel's initiatives, which sought to calibrate the knowledge to be conveyed in session by, for example, limited speech time, specific communication formats, and precirculated papers. Interestingly, this calibration was not just about overcoming barriers to exchange (for example, mental fatigue), but was also designed to enforce a specific function of conference work, that of knowledge specialization.

Finally, looking into Gariel's work on conferences in context shows that circulation organizers and the arenas they create are neither disinterested nor politically neutral. Although circulation studies demonstrate that the free, unregulated circulation of knowledge is a chimera, the production of conferences shows that such dreams nonetheless had an effect. As we have seen, Gariel pursued a particular agenda by making and deploying his *règlement*-type. With it, he devised a conference model that would support specialization as the norm of international knowledge exchange and the basis for an orderly organization of international life. The normative character of this and similar endeavours can be seen in the vision of effective and acceptable international exchange. And, as the recent post-COVID-19 pandemic digital models of conferencing showed, it can have unexpected repercussions.

In 2020, digital conference formats were widely used to circumvent the travelling restrictions imposed by COVID-19 and maintain continuity of exchange. They were also presented as a promising way to tackle the more fundamental issues of the excessive carbon footprint and limited inclusivity of physical international conferences. While these formats did produce substantial environmental benefits and saw the participation of otherwise marginalized actors from the Global South, the premise of these designs backfired. Driven by a vision of conference exchange limited to session proceedings, most digital conference promoters and designers ignored conference informality and so disrupted the casual contacts and spontaneous exchanges—the very things that turned out to be the heart of today's conference experience and an essential factor in the success and quality of in-session exchanges.



## Notes

- \* Acknowledgement: Research for this chapter was conducted as part of the collaborative project 'The Scientific Conference: A Social, Cultural and Political History' ([www.sciconf.nu](http://www.sciconf.nu)), funded by HERA Joint Research Programme 'Public Spaces' ([www.heranet.info](http://www.heranet.info)), grant 2.037/ANR-19-HER2-0001-01 and the collaborative project 'Medical Internationalism in Practice: Infrastructures, Origins and Networks' funded by a Wellcome Trust Small Grant.
- 1 Claude Tapia & Jacques Taieb, 'Conférences et Congrès Internationaux de 1815 à 1913', *Relations Internationales* 5 (1976), 12.
  - 2 Anne Rasmussen, 'Jalons pour une Histoire des Congrès Internationaux au 19ème Siècle: Régulation Scientifique et Propagande Intellectuelle', *Relations Internationales* 62 (1990).
  - 3 Charles Gariel, *Rapport sur l'Organisation des Congrès Internationaux* (Report 17; Brussels: Office Central des Institutions Internationales, 1910).
  - 4 For history of science studies about how actors organized knowledge symbolically, spatially, visually, and materially, particularly in the period 1870–1914 when intellectual production and exchange intensified dramatically, see Pierre Chabard, 'Architects of Knowledge', in Simon Schaffer, John Tresch & Pasquale Gagliardi, *Aesthetics of Universal Knowledge* (Cham: Springer International, 2017); W. Boyd Rayward, *Information Beyond Borders: International Cultural and Intellectual Exchange in the Belle Epoque* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Alex Wright, *Cataloguing the World: Paul Otlet and the Birth of the Information Age* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).
  - 5 James Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit', *Isis* 95 (2004); Kapil Raj, 'Beyond Post-colonialism ... and Postpositivism: Circulation and the Global History of Science', *Isis* 104 (2013); Johan Östling, 'Circulation, Arenas and the Quest for Public Knowledge: Historiographical Currents and Analytical Frameworks', *History & Theory* 59 (2020); Simone Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016).
  - 6 These processes are detailed in the case studies 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); see also Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 2010).
  - 7 Kapil Raj, 'Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators', in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *A Companion to the History of Science* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2016); James Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj & James Delbourgo, *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach: Science History, 2009).
  - 8 The knowledge broker concept has been extensively used in science and technology studies, public policy studies, and the history of knowledge, but mostly to depict actors at an interface between knowledge actors, trying to translate between them. The concept covers a specific type of mediation, where actors enable exchange by

directly engaging in knowledge-transforming activities. However, actors such as Gariel challenge existing conceptualizations of knowledge brokering—we should rank the organizer of an exchange as a broker. Morgan Meyer, ‘The Rise of the Knowledge Broker’, *Science Communication* 32 (2010); Esther Turnhout, Marian Stuijver, Judith Klostermann, Bette Harms & Cees Leeuwis, ‘New Roles of Science in Society: Different Repertoires of Knowledge Brokering’, *Science & Public Policy* 40 (2013); Schaffer et al., *Brokered World*.

- 9 Gariel, *Rapport*, 1.
- 10 Ibid. 20.
- 11 Ibid. 21–2.
- 12 Ibid. 23.
- 13 Daniel Laqua, ‘Alfred H. Fried and the Challenges for “Scientific Pacifism” in the Belle Epoque’, in Rayward, *Information Beyond Borders*, 190.
- 14 Suzanne Berger, *Notre Première Mondialisation: Leçons d’un Echec Oublié* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003).
- 15 Rayward, *Information Beyond Borders*, 2–4; Robert Fox, *Science Without Frontiers: Cosmopolitanism and National Interests in the World of Learning, 1870–1940* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2016), 2–6; Nir Shafir, ‘The International Congress as Scientific and Diplomatic Technology: Global Intellectual Exchange in the International Prison Congress, 1860–1890’, *Journal of Global History* 9 (2014).
- 16 Paul Otlet, *L’Organisation Internationale et les Associations Internationales* (Report 1; Brussels: Office Central des Institutions Internationales, 1910), 131.
- 17 Otlet, *Organisation Internationale*, 85.
- 18 See, for example, Archives Nationales de France (National Archives of France), Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (ANF), F/12/4457, Charles-Marie Gariel, *Rapport sur les Congrès Internationaux de l’Exposition de Chicago*, 29 Jan. 1893; ANF, F/12/5055, Louis de Chasseloup-Laubat, *Rapport: Congrès de Bruxelles, 1897*, 17 Jan. 1898.
- 19 Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus & Anne Rasmussen, *Les Fastes du Progrès: Le Guide des Expositions Universelles, 1851–1992* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 21–38.
- 20 The solution to linguistic multiplicity eluded Gariel, *Rapport*, 21–2 who admitted that neither existing interpretation methods nor the use of universal languages like Esperanto were satisfactory solutions.
- 21 For a critique of the rules enforced at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair congresses, see Louis de Chasseloup-Laubat, *Exposition internationale de Chicago en 1893: Rapports: Congrès tenus à Chicago en 1893* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1894).
- 22 Gariel, *Rapport*, 23.
- 23 This builds on existing work on the politics of scientific neutrality and internationalism, see Rebecka Lettevall, Geert Somsen & Sven Widmalm (eds.), *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe: Intersections of Science, Culture and Politics after the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–15.
- 24 Fa-ti Fan, ‘The Global Turn in the History of Science’, *East Asian Science, Technology & Society* 6 (2012).



# Scholars as knowledge actors

## Taking the knowledge paradigm personally

*Christa Wirth*

This essay is a suggestion that we should take the knowledge paradigm personally—or at least professionally.<sup>1</sup> What if historians of knowledge employed the insight gained from studying knowledge in the past to recreate themselves as knowledge actors in the present and future? How can the historiography of the history of knowledge inspire us to reimagine ourselves, the knowledge we create, and the institutions we work in? For example, if we have learned from our research that knowledge circulates in interactions between different actors, why is single authorship celebrated as the gold standard of publishing in history? This does not suppose naively applying what we learned from the past to the present, as contingency will make our selfhood and practices drift in unexpected ways. Instead, self-reflective knowledge actors put themselves inside history.

With this mindset, we, as scholars, can tweak our identity as knowledge actors and gauge our research interests, objects, and methods accordingly. Lorraine Daston employs the *mise en abyme* when describing the practice of historians of science who historicize their own discipline in the hall of mirrors.<sup>2</sup> Building on this metaphor, I contemplate what (self)reflected subject of the historian (and their discipline) emerges in this hall of mirrors. Do we like what we see? And if not, how do we change it?

In the following, I will ask what insights and perspectives we acquire from the history of knowledge could circulate back on us as

historians and establish knowledge actors that develop epistemologies, a praxis, and institutions that contribute to open, democratic, collaborative, and pluralistic societies. Which knowledge actors can exist and counteract the current contexts of the humanities as they face legitimacy pressure, precarious working conditions at universities, and on a larger scale global warming and the rise of (post)fascism? What kind of scholarly personae do we then adopt?<sup>3</sup> What kind of epistemologies do these personae create? How does a scholarly persona work, affect, and impact the academy and the public?

Since this is a programmatic essay, I rely on literature that has been programmatic in the history of knowledge. In addition, I will lean on my experience as a former associate member of the Zentrum Geschichte des Wissens of the ETH and University of Zurich (ZGW). The literature I rely on is neither to be understood as a representative canon, nor as an exhaustive list, but as the lay of the land that historians of knowledge have described to make sense of what doing the history of knowledge could entail. Taking seriously the shortcomings of the history of knowledge, I make suggestions for how a knowledge actor can develop the 'critical agency' which can represent and contribute to knowledge-making in and outside an academy committed to open, democratic societies.<sup>4</sup> Crucial for this normative project is not only the literature coming out of the history of knowledge, but also the writings of the female and feminist scholars in the philosophy of science, history of science, and in science, technology, and society (STS). In the canon-building of the history of knowledge they have been continuously written out of the script.<sup>5</sup> As Banu Subramaniam has pointed out, 'feminists have begun to re-theorize a science and technology that seriously engages with subjectivity, to create new subjectivities'.<sup>6</sup> We thus need more feminist history of science, as Monika Dommann declares.<sup>7</sup> Just as historians and STS scholars have proven that science and technology are formed by values, our own studies of histories of knowledge are no less imbued by (implicit) values, a fact that feminist scholars are aware of and can name.<sup>8</sup> The feminist intervention in the history of science and STS is value driven. To veil one's own values is a luxury only scholars have who

are continuously reproducing the values of the mainstream. These feminist values, nevertheless, are contingent upon time and space and ‘do not represent timeless truths’, as Sandra Harding notes.<sup>9</sup>

I have gleaned the resurfacing definitions and characteristics of the arguments about the history of knowledge from many programmatic texts published in the last twenty years. (I date the starting point of a self-conscious, institutionalized *Wissensgeschichte* to 2005 when the ZGW was launched—although this might be the result of personal bias as a former associate member of the ZGW.<sup>10</sup>) Other institutions, people, or starting points might be relevant. I have traced the following saturated discursive nodes within the programmatic texts of the history of knowledge. They are incomplete but not arbitrary: (i) definition(s) of knowledge; (ii) the circulation of knowledge; (iii) the role of power and how it impacts which knowledge gains currency; (iv) failures of knowledge; and (v) knowledge actors. I will consider what implications these five aspects have for the making of a new subjectivity of knowledge actor, which we as scholars can perform.

### Definition(s) of knowledge

A great deal of ink has been spilled over the question of what is and what is not knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Yet a concise definition continues to elude us. If all aspects of human life, behaviour, societies, and objects can be tagged with ‘knowledge’, the term loses its analytical sharpness.<sup>12</sup> Although the what is not clear, a consensus has emerged on the how, that is how to study knowledge. Concretely, historians historicize and analyse the following: in what contexts did knowledge discourses emerge and change, and how were they ‘situated’?<sup>13</sup> How did they become relevant and eventually vanish? Who were the actors or carriers of this knowledge?<sup>14</sup> And how do power and societal asymmetries shape knowledge systems?<sup>15</sup>

Intrinsic to historians grappling with the proper definition of knowledge is another question: is rational knowledge, such as ‘wissenschaftliches Wissen’, distinct from other forms of knowledge, such as belief systems?<sup>16</sup> And should historians who analyse all forms of knowledge

(including rational science) remain agnostic about the ‘truth’ aspect of the knowledge they study? The COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of fake news have given this and the question of ‘truth’ in knowledge greater urgency, as anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists took to the streets, torpedoed the containment of the virus, and sabotaged public health.<sup>17</sup> Given these global circumstances, Sandra Bärnreuther et al. interpret the ‘Corona-Krise als Wissens-Krise’.<sup>18</sup> For historians of knowledge to take merely an agnostic position in their research whether a mRNA vaccine or the deworming drug ivermectin is better at preventing people from getting very sick from the COVID-19 virus seems irresponsible. Especially since taking a stance and responsibility for it does not even mean we must quit our constructivist perspective. We can confidently and pragmatically declare that some forms of knowledge have been more helpful in specific historical contexts than others. I would argue that a postmodern constructivism with pragmatic, feminist, democratic values eclipses relativism, orthodox agnosticism, and also positivist–rational science.

The idea that historians of knowledge merely report on the ebbs and flows of epistemic regimes without having a stake in them is epistemologically naïve.<sup>19</sup> A ‘fundamentalist’ agnostic position invites alleged objectivity and neutrality through the back door. Notions of socially disconnected objectivity as a view from nowhere have been relegated to the dustbin of history, and rightfully so. (Granted, too much morality can stand in the way of understanding.) A close rereading of Donna Haraway’s seminal essay on situated knowledges, which does more than mention ‘situated knowledges’ in passing as one of the founding texts of the history of knowledge not written by a man, brings to the fore the recent unease about the dichotomies of rational, positivist science versus postmodern constructivism. Haraway criticizes scientific positivism which she refers to as ‘the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere’.<sup>20</sup> As a remedy for the god complex, she offers a feminist ‘vision’; a way of seeing that is always partial and based on the scholar’s embodied situatedness in society that considers the social and historical ‘webs of knowledge and power’.<sup>21</sup> She clarifies her concept of situatedness: ‘Such a preferred

positioning is as hostile to various forms of relativism as to the most explicitly totalizing versions of claims to scientific authority'.<sup>22</sup> Taking our cue from Haraway, knowledge actors with critical agency can declare their situatedness and positionality in a society which they are studying. With this embodied position, we can propose how some science and knowledge may be more applicable in specific contexts to solve specific problems than other forms of knowledge.

### The circulation of knowledge

That knowledge circulates is arguably *the* leading paradigm in the history of knowledge, as gleaned from the programmatic texts.<sup>23</sup> Knowledge takes on different forms as it circulates across borders from one societal arena to another.<sup>24</sup> For knowledge to circulate, it requires constant translation practices.<sup>25</sup> As historians of knowledge, we study these translation practices empirically, but what does the importance of the concepts of circulation and translation mean when applied to critical knowledge actors? How does this impact our self-understanding and our actions in institutions? First, knowledge actors should be able to translate their research for various contexts and several audiences, contributing to the societal circulation of 'wissenschaftliches Wissen'. Awareness of the translational character of knowledge enables university-based knowledge actors to work with other knowledge actors from varying societal arenas, be it activists, journalists, librarians, and beyond. Second, it is in these translational spaces that new knowledge emerges, as we know from the history of knowledge: Peter Burke, by referring to Anton Blok, has pointed out that 'innovation in knowledge' stems from displaced people working in groups.<sup>26</sup> Not all forms of knowledge share the same (scientific) quality, yet translations can be seen as displacements of knowledge and provide an intriguing space for creativity.<sup>27</sup> And this means, third, that universities, aware of the translational character of knowledge, should value the experience of scholars who have gained insight into other knowledge institutions—for example, public bodies—when applying for academic positions. Scholars who can translate their



knowledge and practices from one societal knowledge institution to another should be valued academically in higher education. Critical knowledge actors should communicate the circulation of knowledge between institutions as a historical reality within societies, and challenge the misconception that scholars need to be lured out of their ivory tower or that scholarly knowledge does not translate into professional proficiencies outside the academy.<sup>28</sup>

A public acknowledgement of the circulatory character of knowledge should help undermine the ivory-towerism which permeates public conceptions of the university, which in this narrative finds itself outside society and history. As Vincent Brown stated,

Too many people imagine the university as an ivory tower, which suggests that is detached from the world or perched above it. But shouldn't the thought of an ivory tower make you wonder how many elephants you would have to kill to make one? There is no place outside of history.<sup>29</sup>

Critical knowledge actors communicate the circulation of knowledge between institutions as a historical reality within larger society, challenging misconceptions about ivory towers.

### The importance of power

I look at failures of knowledge alongside the role of power and its impact on which knowledge gains currency for the simple reason that they are connected. As historians of knowledge unsentimentally substitute the master narrative of *progress*, which was more prevalent in the history of science, with *power* as the master narrative in the history of knowledge, the questions of which orders of knowledge have pushed other forms of knowledge out to liminal spaces (and against what historical backdrop) are pertinent.<sup>30</sup> Failures of knowledge, not knowing, and marginalized knowledge are thus equally relevant as objects of study.<sup>31</sup> Historians of knowledge have studied knowledge-making in all its messiness. How can we use these insights

when forming a scholarly persona as a critical knowledge actor? I would suggest that critical knowledge actors are well placed to share the character of the messiness they study and experience in their own research in and beyond the academy.

The stakes for the universities communicating science and knowledge against the background of the global health crisis set off by COVID-19, could not be higher. Fake news, decades of discriminatory medical practice, intellectually lazy relativism: there has been much to rattle the public's trust in science in the last 30 years.<sup>32</sup> It seems doubtful that relapsing into megaphoning to the public that science is a purely rational process will guide us out of the debris. Instead, critical knowledge actors could convey science and knowledge as an imperfect process shaped by historical contingencies and power that nevertheless can come to a scientific consensus advantageous to public health.

Regarding the history of discriminatory science practices—these can potentially be curtailed if scholars working together are diverse, as Naomi Oreskes argues.<sup>33</sup> And that would make science better, although there is 'no guarantee that scientists are correct in any given case'.<sup>34</sup> Oreskes continues:

Moreover, outsiders may judge scientific claims in part by considering how diverse and open to critique the community involved is. If there is evidence that a community is not open, or is dominated by a small clique or even a few aggressive individuals (...) this may be grounds for warranted skepticism.<sup>35</sup>

For example, if a critical number of black scientists had been allowed to join white scientists in the US Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee in which black men were denied much-needed treatment for syphilis, the black scientists could have recognized that this was bad science.<sup>36</sup>

Communicating research failures and the messiness of academic research provides scholars with critical agency as knowledge actors. Our expertise as historians in tracing the trials and tribulations of

knowledge-making in the past sets us up for verbalizing our own shortcomings and obstacles in the archives, in libraries, at conferences, in lecture halls, and at our desks. Yet too often these failures are merely shared in hallway conversations. As Paul Rabinow stated back in 1986 when confronted with the crisis of representation in anthropology, ‘For many years, anthropologists informally discussed fieldwork experiences among themselves. ... But such matters were not, until recently, written about “seriously”’.<sup>37</sup> Can we draw parallels between the crisis in anthropology in the 1980s and what Bärnreuther et al. have declared to be the ‘Corona-Krise als Wissens-Krise’?

Rabinow contextualizes the inconvenient truth of the messiness of (field) research—in the past only shared unofficially—within the framework of power and hierarchies in the academy. This lets us focus on the question of power as the leading paradigm in the history of knowledge. Without a doubt, power permeates all relationships and epistemologies. When it comes to us as academic researchers, teachers, and supervisors, Michel Foucault’s *oeuvre* hands us—and especially those of us on permanent contracts—the tools to understand our position in the political power structure of the university and how it treats us favourably compared to our non-tenure colleagues and students. Under the hashtags #IchbinHanna and #IchbinReyhan, junior scholars have exposed the feudal working conditions in the German academy.<sup>38</sup> The Swiss academy prides itself in having slightly better working conditions than Germany, but the grotesque disparities in income and job security reveal a similar pattern.

These asymmetries are not a side product of epistemologies made at universities—they are constitutive of them. The #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements have reached academia, bringing to light abuses of power by members of the academy. Moving this knowledge about power abuse from hallway conversations and ‘whisper networks’ among students, women, and minorities in the academy into a public space is an important step. Critical knowledge actors could tie these asymmetries to questions of epistemology. As Rabinow explains, when talking about struggles in the field,

But what cannot be publicly discussed cannot be analyzed or rebutted. Those domains that cannot be analyzed or refuted, and yet are directly central to hierarchy, should not be regarded as innocent or irrelevant. We know that one of the most common tactics of an elite group is to refuse to discuss—to label as vulgar or uninteresting—issues that are uncomfortable for them. When corridor talk about fieldwork becomes discourse, we learn a good deal.<sup>39</sup>

Since historians of knowledge are keenly aware of the power asymmetries that shaped epistemologies in the past, why do they fall short in their own time? How does power in academia shape epistemologies? It behoves critical knowledge actors to look at the conditions in which they produce their knowledge.

### Knowledge actors

Like other areas of history, the discussion about knowledge actors unfolds along the lines of agency versus discourse (structure), albeit strongly weighted towards discourse. It is well established that individuals should no longer be seen as the ‘founders’ or ‘discoverers’ of an idea but mere focal points of knowledge systems.<sup>40</sup> Actors’ relevance—and power—in the orders of discourse depends on their ability to be identified with knowledge considered true and relevant.<sup>41</sup> It is again this Foucauldian combination of knowledge and power that knowledge actors owe their existence to. The allure for scholars to define people by how much they know and how powerful they are is easy to explain, as Suzanne Marchand states. However, and as Marchand convincingly continues, “There are many more things that make up our humanity, and our histories, than what we know and how we know it”.<sup>42</sup> She invokes the ‘P-word’ when she invites us to see knowledge actors as ‘people’.<sup>43</sup> Östling and Larsson Heidenblad have suggested the history of knowledge should concern how knowledge impacted the life of everyday people.<sup>44</sup> And this has been one of its big promises: the history of knowledge will bring more knowledge actors into view, which the history of science had relegated to the

outskirts of knowledge production systems.<sup>45</sup> If we want to bring the *human* back into the humanities, which the history of knowledge is part of, how would this shift impact us as critical knowledge actors? Before I try to answer these questions, I would like to first set out the main discrepancies between the theoretical assumptions described here and the daily academic praxis, epistemologies, and habitus at the university.

As a PhD student in the late 2000s at the University of Zurich, I knew very well that the author was dead, yet Foucault had risen in Zurich. His celebrity, together with that of the other founding fathers (*sic*) often mentioned in the same breath as the advent of the history of knowledge—Ludwig Fleck, Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend—ran counter to the promised ‘pluralization’ of the study of knowledge in society which the history of knowledge embodied.<sup>46</sup> Fleck and the others were more than mere nodes or subjects in the discourse. Bärnreuther et al. conclude that the promise of a ‘pluralization was not generally fulfilled because the “orders of domination” simply (were) reproduced on a different level’.<sup>47</sup> What Newton and others were to the history of science, so Foucault, Fleck, Kuhn et al. now were to the history of knowledge.<sup>48</sup> Under the guise of the discourse, the individual male ‘genius’ yet again took the chair at the head of the table.

Although the German *Romantik* myth of an individual, male ‘genius’, working in lofty solitude as he awaits divine inspiration for his next discovery, has been thoroughly debunked, its spectre obviously haunts the hallways of many a university. It manifests itself not only in the celebration of the few founding fathers in the history of knowledge, but also in other areas. The single-author monograph as the gold standard among historians of knowledge is another manifestation of this myth. As critical knowledge actors we could emphasize the discursive–collective effort of doing *Wissenschaft* by publishing a single text or texts with others which goes beyond editing an anthology together.<sup>49</sup>

The concept of critical knowledge actors must then find its equivalent at the structural level of the university. Collective research efforts are impeded by the *Lehrstuhl* system in German-speaking academia,

which creates (financially) extreme asymmetries and undermines the possibility of collaboration on more equal terms.

Another insight from the history of knowledge should give us pause, if only because of the current status quo of traditional discipline and hiring practices. New, creative knowledge emerges where displaced people meet. That displacement can be social or geographic, but also, as we have seen, disciplinary.<sup>50</sup> It is in interdisciplinary settings and not just in traditional disciplinary contexts that creative shifts in knowledge occur. Displacement, which holds the promise of innovation, is another argument for critical knowledge actors with diverse backgrounds to come together—in addition to guaranteeing the quality of the science by identifying discriminatory practices, with for example the lessons of the Tuskegee Study in mind. And since calls for the history of knowledge have implied a democratization of knowledge production, and by extension a wider cast of actors, this could be represented at the level of critical knowledge actors who come from varying (dis)placements in society. One of the biggest strengths of the ZGW was its interdisciplinary composition, encompassing historians, philosophers, literary scholars, art historians, and ethnologists among others.

In the Claimed Pasts (CliP) research group, based at the University of Agder in Norway, we try to follow these principles in our studies of critical knowledge and heritage production. We come from different levels of the academy (and while well aware of the existing hierarchies we strive for a flatter hierarchy than in other national academic contexts). Our critical knowledge actors are the University of Agder's PhD and MA students, full professors, postdocs, lecturers, and associate professors, but are also drawn from other (academic and archival) institutions beyond. An array of disciplines—history, art history, psychology, archaeology, and heritage studies, geography, religious studies, and linguistics—are represented in Claimed Pasts. The participants come from various regions in Norway and the world and different social locations within society, which is the precondition for 'displaced'—or what I also like to call it—'diasporic' knowledge production. The group is an experiment in embodying critical knowledge actors within the university.

## The curtain and the vessel

I started this essay with the general question of what insight can be gained from the programmatic texts in the history of knowledge to (re)invent ourselves as (critical) knowledge actors, to think about the underlying epistemologies we create, and to form the institutions in and for an open, solidary, and pluralistic society. To that end, I asked what lessons from the history of knowledge can be used—and possibly tweaked first—to envision a knowledge actor. I set feminist arguments from the history of science and STS alongside insights about the history of knowledge. Subramaniam wrote that in order to recreate technology and science, one must also reimagine subjects, and this was my aim with this essay: to reimagine the historian as a subject–knowledge actor. The main discussion points in the history of knowledge, as I have shown, entail definitions of knowledge, circulations of knowledge, power, and knowledge, failures of knowledge, and, ultimately, knowledge actors.

Recent conversations about the definition of knowledge turn on whether historians should maintain a purely agnostic position vis-à-vis various forms of the epistemic regimes they study. To my mind, the answer is no. Historians should eschew agnosticism and relativism on the one hand and positivist science on the other. Orthodox agnosticism implies the historian who studies knowledge is not positioned within society and has no stake in *Wissenschaft*, which allows the supposed neutrality or socially disconnected objectivity of the historian make an uncalled-for comeback. Relativism stands for a fallible concept applied by those who misunderstand postmodernity; rational, positivist science, a ‘god trick of seeing everything from nowhere’, as Haraway puts it. Instead, I would suggest the reimaged knowledge actor pursues postmodern constructivism undergirded by pragmatic, feminist, and democratic values. Adopt this intellectual position and historians of knowledge can run the gamut from *Wissenschaft* to belief systems, as long as they are aware—and communicate—that not all forms of knowledge are created equal. Specific historical contexts and specific functions matter.

The Claimed Pasts research group tries to abide by the values that underwrite the critical knowledge actor. Since knowledge circulates and ‘translates’ between different societal spaces, as historians of knowledge have argued, Claimed Pasts makes it a principle to bring people from various spaces together and create new—by which we mean translated—knowledge. We take to heart Blok’s assertion that displaced people create new knowledge. Displacement manifests in manifold ways, and contributing to Claimed Pasts’ knowledge production are local Kristiansandere, Norwegians from elsewhere, and people who have migrated to Kristiansand from other parts of the world and are thus culturally and linguistically displaced, while its LGBTQ+ members, people of colour, and those from different class backgrounds have experienced social displacement. Further, Claimed Pasts’ knowledge actors translate knowledge from other institutions where they work—libraries, museums, the media, while collaborating with other institutions such as archives and LGBTQ+ organizations in Kristiansand. As an interdisciplinary research group they bring together disciplines—history, art history, psychology, archaeology and heritage studies, geography, and linguistics—and ‘displace’ or conjoin them in creative ideas that can disrupt the scholarly status quo. A similar effect comes from integrating scholars from most levels of the academic hierarchy: MA students, postdocs, faculty, and PhD students all add to the possibility of knowledge creation that is not ‘disciplined’. All these expressions of displacement, however, only realize their creative potential if they coincide with other knowledge actor values, such as a self-critical awareness of one’s positionality in the Claimed Pasts group or society. This includes an awareness of power relations, not least within the group.

Armed with these insights, we treat Claimed Pasts’ seminars and research as a process where, in addition to our successes, we share the failures, messiness, and challenges we encounter. Publishing not only edited volumes together, but also articles, is an expression of the worth and empirical knowledge of texts from a (small) milieu rather than an isolated individual. With these values and—as we hope—corresponding behaviours, Claimed Pasts produces an academic



identity along the lines of a knowledge actor, contributing to an open, collaborative, and pluralistic society. For the same reason, members are also politically active in the academic institutions at the University of Agder, fully aware that knowledge emerges from a specific institutional context.

In this essay, I have asked where my proposed critical knowledge actor should be placed on the spectrum between agency and discourse. What lies beyond the genius on the one hand and the all-consuming discourse on the other? The critical knowledge actor may be framed by structures and discourses, but also has something more to offer than—and here I am exaggerating—being an empty vessel through which the spirit of the discourse flows. At the other end of the spectrum, the critical knowledge actor has jettisoned the myth of the individual (male) ‘genius’, and what remains is one who contributes to knowledge as a place of creativity and possibility, but nevertheless is acutely aware of how power (in discourses) shapes societies—and the academy. Marchand asks of historians, ‘do we really believe that we too simply are part of a discourse whose rules dictate, more or less, what we say, and in which curiosity, creativity, and compassion are mere illusion, while only power is real?’<sup>51</sup> Curiosity and creativity, the driving forces of the scholarly persona embodied by the critical knowledge actor, align with Haraway’s ‘feminist embodiment (that) resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the webs of differential positioning’.<sup>52</sup> Curiosity about our own and other’s positionality comes with responsibilities, as Haraway writes.<sup>53</sup> Instead of hiding responsibility for our claims and praxis behind the vast curtain of the discourse from which most likely the individual male ‘genius’ is peeking out, we can own our responsibility by our own positionality and situatedness as we study knowledge as critical knowledge actors.

## Notes

- 1 I wish to thank Josephine Munch Rasmussen, participants at the digital workshop *Actors of Knowledge*, 23–24 Mar. 2022, and Anna Nilsson Hammar, David Larsson Heidenblad, and Johan Östling for commenting on earlier drafts of this essay. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

- 2 Lorraine Daston, 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', *Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1/1 (2017), 131.
- 3 Lorraine Daston & H. Otto Sibum, 'Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories', *Science in Context* 16 (2003); Peter Galison, 'Ten Problems in History and Philosophy of Science', *Isis* 99 (2008).
- 4 Judith Butler & Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political: Conversations with Athena Athanasiou* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 193.
- 5 Sandra Bärnreuther, Maria Böhmer & Sophie Witt (eds.), *Feierabend? (Rück-)blicke auf 'Wissen'* (Nach Feierabend; Zurich: Diaphanes, 2020), 13; Monika Dommann, 'Donna, Isabelle, Vinciane etc. Warum wir in der Zukunft mehr feministische Wissenschafts- und Technikforschung brauchen werden', in Bärnreuther et al., *Feierabend?*, 68–70.
- 6 Banu Subramaniam interview in Wenda K. Bauchspies & María Puig de la Bellacasa, 'Feminist science and technology studies: A patchwork of moving subjectivities: An interview with Geoffrey Bowker, Sandra Harding, Anne Marie Mol, Susan Leigh Star and Banu Subramaniam', *Subjectivity* 28/1 (2009), 340.
- 7 Dommann, 'Donna, Isabelle', 63.
- 8 Sandra Harding, 'Introduction: Beyond Postcolonial Theory: Two Undertheorized Perspectives on Science and Technology', in ead. (ed.), *The Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 21.
- 9 Sandra Harding, interviewed by Bauchspies & Puig de la Bellacasa, 'Feminist science', 337.
- 10 Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar & Kari H. Nordberg, 'The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge: An Introduction', in eid. (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018), 12.
- 11 See, for example, Bärnreuther et al., *Feierabend?*, the final issue of *Nach Feierabend*.
- 12 For criticism of such an all-encompassing term, see Suzanne Marchand, 'How Much Knowledge is Worth Knowing? An American Intellectual Historian's Thoughts on the Geschichte des Wissens', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Special Issue: History of Science or History of Knowledge?* 42/2–3 (2019).
- 13 Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies* 14/3 (1988).
- 14 Jakob Tanner, 'History of Knowledge, Economic Analysis, and Power Struggles', in Bärnreuther et al., *Feierabend?*, 155; Philipp Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?' *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur (IASL)* 36/1 (2011), 165.
- 15 Tanner, 'History of Knowledge', 155.
- 16 See, for example, Daston, 'History of Science'; Philipp Sarasin & Andreas Kilcher, 'Editorial', in *Nach Feierabend: Zürcher Jahrbuch für Wissensgeschichte*, vii: *Zirkulationen* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2011), 166.
- 17 See also Caspar Hirschi, 'Wissensgeschichte: Das geisteswissenschaftliche Beiboot des Neoliberalismus', in Bärnreuther et al., *Feierabend?*
- 18 Bärnreuther et al., *Feierabend?*, 8.
- 19 University-employed historians have a professional stake in giving preference to rational knowledge over belief systems. Philipp Sarasin, 'More Than Just Another Specialty', *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1/1 (2020), 4 writes of historians

- of knowledge being committed to distinguishing between rationality and belief systems.
- 20 Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', 581.
- 21 Ibid. 588.
- 22 Ibid. 584.
- 23 Simone Lässig, 'The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016), 43.
- 24 For the concept of arena in history of knowledge, 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 (2020).
- 25 Lässig, 'History of Knowledge'; Tanner, 'History of Knowledge'; Bärnreuther et al., *Feierabend?*, 146.
- 26 Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 20 referring to Anton Blok speaks of 'displacement'.
- 27 For the relevance of the quality of knowledge, see Marchand, 'How Much Knowledge', 139.
- 28 Steven Shapin, 'The Ivory Tower: The History of a Figure of Speech and its Cultural Uses', *British Journal for the History of Science* 45/1 (2012), 26 points to the negative connotations of 'ivory tower'.
- 29 Ivelisse Estrada, 'Brown, Vincent: Beyond the History Book', Harvard Radcliffe Institute interview (22 Nov. 2021). [www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/news-and-ideas/vincent-brown-beyond-the-history-book](http://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/news-and-ideas/vincent-brown-beyond-the-history-book)
- 30 Daston, 'History of Science', 145; Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?', 167.
- 31 Burke, *What is the History*, 4; Lässig, 'History of Knowledge', 45; Sven Dupré & Geert Somsen, 'The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 42/2–3 (2019), 192.
- 32 See, for example, Stephen Bates, 'Sweden Pays for Grim Past', *The Guardian* (6 Mar. 1999) on compulsory sterilization in Sweden for eugenic purposes, which continued until the late 1970s.
- 33 Naomi Oreskes, *Why Trust Science? With a New Preface by the Author* (Princeton: PUP, 2019), 55–64.
- 34 Ibid. 59.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 For the history of the Tuskegee experiment see James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment: New and Expanded Edition* (New York: Free Press, 1993).
- 37 Paul Rabinow, 'Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology', in James Clifford & George E. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography with a New Foreword by Kim Fortun* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 253.
- 38 Amrei Bahr, Kristin Eichhorn & Sebastian Kubon, *#IchBinHanna: Prekäre Wissenschaft in Deutschland* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022).
- 39 Rabinow, 'Representations', 253.
- 40 Sarasin & Kilcher, 'Editorial', 9–10.
- 41 Sarasin, 'Was ist Wissensgeschichte?', 169–70.
- 42 Marchand, 'How Much Knowledge', 132.
- 43 Ibid. 143.

- 44 However, I am skeptical of the claim by Östling & Larsson Heidenblad, 'Fulfilling the Promise', 2 that 'Historical events and phenomena that only affect a few individuals or small groups of people cannot be a point of departure for such a study.' Who are these supposedly irrelevant small groups?
- 45 See Christa Wirth, 'The History of Knowledge and the Cold War: An Essay', in Bärnreuther et al., *Feierabend?*, 159–166 for the inclusion of more actors in the history of knowledge.
- 46 Bärnreuther et al., *Feierabend?*, 13, translated.
- 47 Ibid, translated.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 For example, Christa Wirth & Josephine Munch Rasmussen, 'The Value of Forgeries for Historical Research', in Neil Brodie, Morag Kersel & Josephine Munch Rasmussen (eds.), *Variant Scholarship: Ancient Texts in Modern Contexts* (Leiden, NL: Sidestonepress, 2023), 169–187.
- 50 Burke, *What is the History*, 20.
- 51 Marchand, 'How Much Knowledge', 143.
- 52 Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', 590.
- 53 Ibid. 587.



## EPILOGUE

# Knowledge

## The return of the actor

*Peter Burke*

You have been reading a collection of thought-provoking specialized studies that focus on a variety of knowledge actors, mainly in the twentieth century. At the beginning of the collection, Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, and Anna Nilsson Hammar introduced both the topic and the contributors. Here, at the other end, I should like to attempt to integrate these studies into a bigger picture, noting the long history of both the concern with and the rejection of human agency to ask where we might go from here.

### The past

This topic is both old and new; ‘new iterations of old problems’ as Joel Barnes puts it. The relative importance of what we call agency and structure have been discussed, under different names, for a long time. In Renaissance Italy, for instance, the names were *virtù*, in the sense of the personal qualities that underlie individual success, and *fortuna*, in other words circumstances or destiny.

In the nineteenth century, agency dominated, and was attributed mainly to ‘great men’. Responding to this challenge, Auguste Comte presented his dynamic sociology as a ‘history without names’. Karl Marx argued that although ‘men make their own history’, they ‘do not make it just as they please’. Students of folktales and folksongs

often took them to be expressions of the traditions of ‘the people’ rather than the work of individuals.

The twentieth century, as the introduction to this volume points out, was dominated by scholars who emphasized structure. From Fernand Braudel, who claimed that events were unimportant, to Roland Barthes, who proclaimed ‘the death of the author’ (in an essay that, paradoxically, made him famous).<sup>1</sup> Sociologists and anthropologists concerned themselves with social structures and cultural rules, viewing the individuals whom they observed or interviewed as mouthpieces for ‘culture’ or ‘society’.

Linguists emphasized the structures of languages (Claude Lévi-Strauss, the most famous of the French ‘structuralists’, admitted his debt to the linguists Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy). Arthur Lovejoy argued that a history of philosophy should focus on ‘unit-ideas’ such as Nature rather than on individual thinkers, while Heinrich Wölfflin called for an art history ‘without names’, which focused on the history of styles such as classicism or baroque.<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say, the picture presented in the previous paragraphs needs nuances. It is necessary to distinguish the situation in different regions of the world of learning. Reaction against the emphasis on structures came at different moments in different disciplines in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. For example, Ernst Gombrich’s famous *Story of Art* (1950) opened with the provocative statement that ‘There really is no such thing as art. There are only artists’, implicitly contradicting both Wölfflin (whose lectures the young Gombrich had attended) and Marxist historians of art such as Arnold Hauser (whom Gombrich would criticize explicitly three years later).<sup>3</sup>

Some anthropologists became increasingly aware that their informants, or at least some of them, were not mere embodiments of their culture but individuals with ideas of their own, among them Muchona ‘the Hornet’, an unusual member of the Ndembu people in today’s Zambia studied by Victor Turner. Indeed, a new approach, sometimes described as ‘the anthropology of subjectivity’, presents culture as a result of a multitude of encounters between individuals.

In similar fashion, in the 1980s, Bruno Latour's actor-network theory had presented society as the sum of individual interactions.<sup>4</sup>

Folklorists, who had begun by accepting what has been called the 'myth of anonymity' according to which 'the people create' (*das Volk dichtet*), moved towards an interest in individual 'bearers of tradition' (as they used to be described by scholars). A well-known case is that of the oral poet Avdo Međedović (c.1875–1955) from Novi Pazar in what is now Montenegro, who impressed two American researchers for the creative way in which he produced variations on traditional epics, adapting them to the different audiences before whom he performed.<sup>5</sup> As this example suggests, the term 'bearers' of tradition is something of a misnomer, since it implies (like the word 'tradition' itself, which originally meant 'handing down') that what is transmitted in each generation is unchanged, rather than reinterpreted or adapted to new circumstances.

After a long period of emphasis on structures, some linguists presented the use of language as a series of actions, including 'acts of identity' in which individuals in a multilingual society express their allegiance, for example by speaking Catalan rather than Castilian or Ukrainian rather than Russian. The historian Lynn Hunt made a similar point in a study of the French Revolution when she wrote that 'Revolutionary language did not simply reflect the realities of revolutionary changes and conflicts, but rather was itself transformed into an instrument of political and social change.'<sup>6</sup> Just as acts of deference helped maintain the old hierarchical regime, so the regular use of egalitarian terms of address such as *citoyen* helped turn people into republicans. Small acts such as these, repeated many times, have the capacity to change a culture over the long term.<sup>7</sup>

In the study of politics, an interest in agency was revived by the events of 1968 in Paris and Prague and once again in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, when old structures appeared to collapse. For example, James Scott's study of the ways in which ordinary people resist domination, not so much by open revolt as by 'poaching, foot-dragging, pilfering, dissimulation, flight' restored to them a



degree of agency or as the author puts it, 'autonomy'.<sup>8</sup> According to Scott, the resisters made a difference, at least in a small way.

In history, the movement for 'microhistory', visible from the late 1970s onwards, was, among other things, a recognition of the autonomy of ordinary people, notably in the case of Carlo Ginzburg's famous study of the knowledge and beliefs of Menocchio the miller.<sup>9</sup> In the 1990s, Bernard Lepetit, a gifted member of the fourth generation of the Annales School of French historians, offered a critique of Fernand Braudel's and Ernest Labrousse's structural approach and argued that what he called 'the eclipse of the actor' was (and ought to be) drawing to a close.<sup>10</sup>

Still more recently, in the domain of art, concern with artists has been supplemented by attention to the agency of objects, or more exactly the agency attributed to objects and the effects of images on the viewers. The British anthropologist Alfred Gell, who notes that idols make things happen, describes himself playfully as an 'idolater' of some paintings. For his part, in his theory of the pictorial act (*Bildakt*), the German art historian Horst Bredekamp argues that images have 'a life of their own' (*Eigenleben*), and their own power (*Eigenkraft*), acting on the world around them rather than passively 'reflecting' it, as social historians of art used to say.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of knowledge, remembering Latour's inclusion of non-human elements in his networks of actors, it may be illuminating to consider the ways in which objects are actually nudging or guiding us while we think that we are using them. Examples range from traditional maps to the search engines on which we have come to depend.

## The future

Where do we stand now? It seems that the world of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences has shifted emphasis, in different decades in different disciplines, from structure to agency. The 'death' of the author (actor, agent) has been followed by a kind of 'resurrection'. It is therefore no surprise to see the contributors to this book moving

away from the idea of 'systems' or 'orders' of knowledge and focusing on 'actors' instead.

Where do we go from here? The contributors have identified a variety of agents and as a preliminary step to future studies it might be useful to produce a typology. Such a typology would include inventors and discoverers; analysts and synthesizers; 'secret' agents, operating behind the scenes, as well as open ones; 'coerced' agents as well as independent ones; individual or collective; dominant or subordinate; central or (as Maria Bach suggests) 'marginalized'; direct or indirect (this last category might include facilitators or mobilizers such as laboratory assistants, publishers, and the television producers studied by Strandgaard Jensen).

Another type of agent is the organizer of knowledge. One obvious example is the planner of encyclopaedias, as in the case of Diderot and d'Alembert. Another is the organizer of the conferences discussed by Thomas Mougey, including the international congresses that became a prominent part of the academic world from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, ushering in the age of what I would call (thanks to railways and steamships) the steam republic of letters, replacing the horse-drawn one.<sup>12</sup> Keepers of knowledge such as librarians, archivists, and curators are also organizers, cataloguing their holdings and so making different items or classes of item more or less prominent. Not so much a type as an extraordinary individual was the Belgian polymath Paul Otlet, the man who tried to catalogue or classify images as well as texts in the hope that his work would assist the movement for world peace.<sup>13</sup>

Yet another type might be described as the 'influencers' (a new term for an old phenomenon) including charismatic teachers, preachers, and journalists who inspire as well as inform. Influence resists precise study but an important attempt was made by the sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld in the case of the American presidential election of 1940. On the basis of his research, Lazarsfeld presented a model of communication that he called (mixing his metaphors) 'two-step flow', arguing that most voters are influenced by local 'opinion leaders' who in turn acquire their opinions from the media.<sup>14</sup> Following the recent rise of social

media, the Lazarsfeld model of communication might be modified to include three steps rather than two, offering a new role for individuals such as the couple studied by David Larsson Heidenblad and Charlotte Nilsson in this book, an example that also shows the central idea to be fruitful in studies of the economic as well as the political domain.

A major theme of this volume, as of an earlier one in the series, is another type of agent, one that might be described as the ‘circulator’ of knowledge—remembering a book by the physicist–historian John Ziman, arguing that ‘ideas move around inside people’.<sup>15</sup> This movement is particularly apparent in the case of exiles and expatriates such as the Danish academics discussed by Ning de Coninck-Smith (we might ask what intellectual baggage did they take and what they brought back). Some exiles, the teachers, present knowledge that is traditional in their homeland but new in their ‘hostland’. Others offer a critique of the conventional wisdom of the hostland almost without knowing it because their own assumptions clash with those of their hosts, as in the case of German theorists in the empiricist cultures of the UK and the US.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, exiles act as intellectual go-betweens. The concept of the go-between is prominent in this volume as in much recent research on the history of knowledge, and for this very reason it deserves a closer look. I once attended a conference organized by the gifted French historian Michel Vovelle on ‘intermédiaires culturels’.<sup>17</sup> In the course of the presentations, which covered a remarkable variety of individuals and groups, it became increasingly difficult (at least for me) to think of anyone who was not a cultural go-between. I am not suggesting we should abandon the concept, which has proved its value in drawing attention to the work of individuals, groups, and organizations. I would prefer to say we are all knowledge actors, but that some of us, Johannes Westberg’s teachers among them, are more active or in a position to act more effectively than others are.

What we surely need to do at this point is to distinguish between different types of go-between: the early modern clergy, who communicated government decrees from their pulpits; the gatekeepers, who might sometimes be described as negative go-betweens, excluding

certain people from entering and certain information from leaving; the professional scribes, who drafted petitions for clients of the kind studied by Anna Nilsson Hammar and Svante Norrhem, and, not least, the translators.

Translation is particularly worth study in the context of the circulation of knowledge because it reveals what we often suspect but can only rarely demonstrate: the gap between the message sent and the message received. Although many translations are reliable and some brilliant, there are also cases that reveal what Lisa Hellman calls 'friction', when knowledge is 'concealed, distorted or falsified'.

Continuing to look ahead, I would like to express agreement with Christa Wirth's suggestion that the history of collective agents of knowledge remains a relatively neglected topic. It includes a variety of forms of collaboration, from the team working on a long-term project to a group that comes together to write an article or to produce a collective volume such as this one. In the latter case, editorial direction may be tight or loose, each with its costs and benefits.

Collaboration between two or more individuals on a book also varies a great deal, as I know from experience. At one end is the division of labour between essays. In the social history of the media I wrote with Asa Briggs, I wrote the introduction and the essays on early modern Europe while Asa wrote the rest. We read one another's essays and made a few comments, but each of us was autonomous. On the other hand, when I wrote two books in collaboration with my wife, Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, we wrote everything jointly. The process of writing and rewriting took much longer, but the result seemed worth the effort.<sup>18</sup>

Teams of knowledge workers are usually associated with the natural sciences, especially in the last century or so—in 1902, the German chemist Emil Fischer was already complaining that the 'mass production methods which dominate modern economic life have also penetrated experimental science'.<sup>19</sup> However, the role of collective research in the humanities and social sciences should not be forgotten. Teams of historians, recommended by Theodor Mommsen and Lucien Febvre, were actually at work much earlier:

the ‘Centuriators’ of Magdeburg in the sixteenth century, for example, and the Bollandists and the Maurists in the seventeenth.<sup>20</sup> Some teams have been relatively hierarchical, others more egalitarian. Leading them is a difficult task, as I am sure Johan Östling will agree: finding a balance between giving members autonomy (at the risk of an incoherent volume or project) and laying down firm guidelines (at the risk of inhibiting individual creativity). The history of teams of scholars and scientists might make a good topic for a future collective study in the history of knowledge.

This epilogue has suggested a swing of the pendulum, or a series of swings, between an emphasis on agents of knowledge and one on orders of knowledge, offering more or less space for individual and group initiatives. The metaphor of the pendulum is not altogether a happy one, since each movement does not take scholars back to where they were before. History does not repeat itself exactly, and it may be more illuminating to think of a zigzag movement in which concepts that have been invented and approaches developed to solve problems turn out to have unexpected side effects, generating problems of their own.

Zigzagging is unlikely to come to a stop in the place where we stand now. Some recent studies have offered cogent critiques of an exaggerated emphasis on agency, referring in one case to the ‘agency trap’, and underestimating constraints on both thought and action.<sup>21</sup> To correct such an overemphasis, Hellman’s notion of ‘friction’ might be developed into a history of obstacles to knowledge, ranging from censorship to difficulties in communication, sometimes described as the ‘tyranny of distance’.<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, tr. Stephen Heath, *Aspen Magazine* 5/6 (1967).
- 2 Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of An Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936); Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1915), preface.

- 3 Ernst Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1950), 1; Ernst Gombrich, 'The Social History of Art', *Art Bulletin* 35 (1953).
- 4 Victor Turner, 'Muchona the Hornet, Interpreter of Religion' (1959), reprinted as *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 131–50; João Biel, Byron Good & Arthur Kleinman (eds.), *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 1–17; Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987).
- 5 Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).
- 6 Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 24.
- 7 Robert Le Page & Andrée Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity: Creole-Based Approaches to Language and Ethnicity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985).
- 8 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xiii, which opens with a quotation from Václav Havel.
- 9 Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi: Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1976).
- 10 Bernard Lepetit, 'L'histoire prend-elle les acteurs en sérieux?' *Espaces Temps* 59–61 (1995).
- 11 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Horst Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts: Über das Lebensrecht des Bildes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010).
- 12 Peter Burke, 'The Republic of Letters as a Communication System', *Media History* 18/3–4 (2012); Wolf Feuerhahn & Pascale Rabault-F Feuerhahn (eds.), 'La fabrique internationale de la science: Les congrès scientifiques de 1865 à 1945', *Revue Germanique Internationale* 12 (2010).
- 13 Françoise Levie, *L'Homme qui voulait classer le monde: Paul Otlet et le Mundaneum* (Brussels: Les Impressions nouvelles, 2006); Alex Wright, *Cataloging the World: Paul Otlet and the Birth of the Information Age* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).
- 14 Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson & Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in A Presidential Campaign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Elihu Katz, 'The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-To-Date Report on An Hypothesis', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 21/1 (1957).
- 15 John Ziman, *Ideas Move Around Inside People* (London: Birkbeck College, 1974).
- 16 Peter Burke, *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017).
- 17 *Les intermédiaires culturels: Actes du colloque du Centre Meridional d'Histoire Sociale des Mentalités et des Cultures* (Paris: Champion, 1981).
- 18 Asa Briggs & Peter Burke, *The Social History of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Peter Burke & Maria Lúcia G. Pallares-Burke, *Gilberto Freyre: Social Theory in the Tropics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008); Peter Burke & Maria Lúcia G. Pallares-Burke, *Os Ingleses* (São Paulo: Contexto, 2016).
- 19 Jeffrey Allan Johnson, *The Kaiser's Chemists: Science and Modernization in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 34.

- 20 David Knowles, 'Great Historical Enterprises: The Bollandists', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8 (1958); id., 'Great Historical Enterprises: The Maurists', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (1959).
- 21 Mona Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap', *History of Education* 45/4 (2016); cf. John Robb, 'Beyond Agency', *World Archaeology* 42/4 (2010).
- 22 Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (Melbourne: Sun, 1966).

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